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**IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES TO
IMPROVE STUDENT WRITING ACHIEVEMENT**

By

Dori Laine Alvich

A Dissertation

Submitted to the

Graduate School of Rowan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

DOCTOR IN EDUCATION

April 28, 2011

Glassboro, NJ

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Dori Laine Alvich

Dedication

“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss it, you will land among the stars”

(Les Brown)

To My Family, Jason and Dannika Alvich

I dedicate this dissertation to my family for their support and encouragement throughout this process. During missed games and activities, it is their patience and understanding throughout the three years that helped me to attain this degree. My hope is that the entire process shows my daughter that anything is possible if you want it.

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Second, I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Kathie Foster and Dr. Mark Raivetz. I truly appreciate your support and time. I have learned so much from each of you through your mentorship and teaching.

I would also like to thank the educators at Brookside School. They were the focus of this study because of the true professionals that they are. The students are very fortunate to have such knowledgeable, caring, and dedicated teachers guiding them. Thank you all for your support and assistance.

I want to thank my friends for their encouragement and understanding.

Abstract

Demands are made for schools to improve student learning. In answer to that demand, school leaders are searching for ways to implement new approaches to enhance student learning and teacher professional development. Professional learning communities (PLCs) implemented in a school setting can increase collaboration and improve instruction and learning if focused on three essential characteristics: student learning, teacher collaboration, and results (Dufour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Darling-Hammond (1996) recommends that “schools be structured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching, and teach for understanding” (p. 198).

Writing is required for all subject areas and is a life skill that is necessary for all students to be proficient. The ability to write well is essential for communication and productivity. In many professions, communication is of primary importance and much of the communication is in written form. By teaching our students to write well, we are giving them tools for success in school and life. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported in the 2002 Writing Assessment that the average scale score for fourth graders in the United States was 153 on a range of 0 to 300, which is considered partially proficient. By the year 2007, eighth grade students averaged a scale score of 154 on the Writing Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to examine teacher perceptions and student writing achievement through the implementation of PLCs focused on student writing achievement. It sought to answer the following research questions: What effects will a Professional Learning Community (PLC) have on the

implementation of writer's workshop as measured by student writing achievement, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions? How does teacher participation in a PLC affect their perceptions of their ability to deliver writer's workshop? Specifically, what benefits did teachers receive as a result of their participation in the PLC? And, how well did the principal facilitate the formation and sustainability of the PLC? The study also provided information for leaders about how to implement a training model for the development of PLCs focused on student learning.

The research methods used in this action research study included interviews and focus group discussions with all teachers involved as well as follow-up observations during writer's workshop lessons. Data collection also included analyzing student writing achievement gathered from a pre-assessment and post-assessment in writing. A survey was administered to evaluate teacher readiness in the development of PLCs. A training protocol was designed for the implementation of PLCs focused on student writing achievement.

Study findings revealed that with adequate environmental support, collaboration among the members of the PLC is facilitated which leads to enhanced instruction and improved learning. Specific findings were incorporated into the PLC model followed in this study and used as the basis for the development of a training model for implementation of new curricular programs at Brookside Elementary School.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Across the headlines are demands for reform in schools to improve student performance. With the legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passed in 2002, the government aimed to reform education by increasing testing requirements. In an answer to the demand of school reform, school leaders are constantly searching for innovative ways to improve instruction and student learning while creating a positive culture in their schools.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) implemented in a school setting can increase collaboration and improve instruction and learning if focused on three essential characteristics: student learning, teacher collaboration, and results (Dufour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Research has shown that high performing schools set high expectations and monitor performance against those expectations, intervening whenever necessary (Dufour et al., 2008; Reeves, 2006). PLCs that are working effectively create common goals, common assessments, and plans for interventions and extensions. Teachers who collaborate on student learning with a focus on results change their school into learning organizations. Darling-Hammond (1996) recommends that “schools be structured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching, and teach for understanding” (p. 198). Louis and Marks (1998) found that when a school is organized into a PLC, the teachers set higher expectations for student achievement and students can count on their teachers and peers to achieve higher learning goals. Throughout the literature, examples of increased student achievement through the collaboration of PLCs have been documented (Vescio, Ross,

&Adams 2006; 2008). In a study conducted by Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, and Towner (2004), students whose teachers participated in PLCs demonstrated significantly higher achievement results than comparable students in the district whose teachers were not participating in PLCs.

Language arts literacy, mathematics, and science are areas assessed by the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK). Writing is required for all subject areas and is a life skill that is necessary for all students to be proficient. The ability to write well is essential for communication and productivity. The NAEP committee describes the context of writing as “a complex, multifaceted and purposeful act of communication that is accomplished in a variety of environments, under various constraints of time, and with a variety of language resources and technological tools” (Committee, 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress Writing Framework Development, 2007, p. 10). In many professions, communication is of primary importance and much of the communication is in written form. By teaching our students to write well, we are giving them tools for success in school and life.

NAEP reported in the 2002 Writing Assessment that the average scale score for fourth graders in the United States was 153 on a range of 0 to 300, which is considered partially proficient. By the year 2007, eighth grade students averaged a scale score of 154 on the Writing Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Partial proficiency in writing will not ensure that students are well prepared for their future, nor will it satisfy assessment requirements.

NJASK is the state assessment given to all third through eighth and eleventh grade students in New Jersey each May. The results released by the state to the school

districts give limited information about achievement, but provide overall scores with limited breakdown. The latest report indicates that the scale scores for all grade four students in New Jersey who tested in May 2009 was 206.5, with proficient scores beginning at 200. Out of these students, 37% scored *partially proficient*, 56.3% scored *proficient*, and 6.7% scored *advanced proficient* (New Jersey Statewide Testing System, 2006). These large-scale assessments evaluate the standards set forth by the nation and the state and are important in order to create accountability.

Context

Brookside Elementary School is located in Monroe Township, New Jersey and houses almost 700 students in grades three through six. For the past two years, Brookside Elementary School students have not achieved their school goal in writing, which stated that 73% of all students will increase at least one point on the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment. Also, Brookside Elementary School has not achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the NJASK in Language Arts Literacy in the subsection of special education students in grades three to five. In an effort to improve the student learning at Brookside Elementary School, specifically aimed at language arts literacy and writing, this study will create PLCs focused on the implementation of writer's workshop.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study is to examine teacher perceptions and student writing achievement through the implementation of PLCs focused on student writing achievement. It also looks at the support and skills that teachers gain as a result of

their participation in the PLC. In order to gauge the success of the PLC, student writing achievement is examined through pre-assessments and post-assessments.

This study seeks to establish guidelines for the implementation of PLCs. The results of this study will be used to develop a model for implementing new curricular programs at Brookside Elementary School. The PLC format will be used as the basis for creating the professional development model. It is anticipated that the study will help reveal the types of resources necessary to build collaboration among the members of a PLC in order to enhance instruction and improve learning.

Data collected will be both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The role of the researcher will be as an observer and facilitator. As the facilitator, I will develop PLCs of teachers and guide them in developing group norms and setting goals. A pre-survey will be conducted with teachers to identify their readiness to work in a PLC. As an observer, I will observe lessons, focus group meetings, and conduct interviews. Student achievement data will be gathered and analyzed for determining achievement gains from pre-assessment to post-assessment. Triangulation of data will help to answer the research questions below.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What effects will a Professional Learning Community (PLC) have on the implementation of writer's workshop as measured by student writing achievement, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions?

- How does teacher participation in a PLC affect teachers' perceptions of their ability to deliver writer's workshop? Specifically what benefits did teachers receive as a result of their participation in the PLC?
 - Did teachers learn specific skills from their participation in the PLC that they were able to use in their classrooms to inform writing instruction?
 - Did the PLC offer teachers support and provide useful teaching strategies as needed?
 - Did the supportive environment of the PLC increase each teacher's ability to teach writing?
- How well did the principal facilitate the formation and sustainability of the PLC? What changes in school organization, schedule, structure, or resources made it possible for the PLC to succeed? How did my theory of leadership change throughout this study?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it is likely to generate rich, detailed information on how to successfully implement learning communities including benefits and practical implementation strategies. Much of the literature on PLCs offers reasons for implementing PLCs and the benefits of PLCs. The literature rarely details specific strategies for developing and sustaining PLCs. This study may offer evidence that PLCs improve instruction through teacher professional development and collaboration. In previous research, teacher collaboration and support were identified as positive results from the implementation of PLCs (Dufour et al., 2008; Louis & Marks, 1998).

Definition of Terms

Pertaining to this study, these essential terms have been defined to provide clarity for the reader:

Action Research. Action research is “a reflective, systematic inquiry that focuses on a relevant problem in teaching or learning for the purpose of enacting meaningful change to address that problem”(Brighton, 2009, p. 40). There are seven basic steps to the action research process. The researcher begins by identifying a focus and developing a plan of action. Through the plan, data is collected, organized, and analyzed to draw conclusions. Once the researcher has examined the data to draw conclusions, it is important for the researcher to disseminate the findings. Once the findings are revealed, a new plan of action should be developed and the cycle continued (Brighton, 2009).

Professional Learning Communities. A PLC is a collegial group of educators who work together to improve student learning through the development of shared beliefs, values, and vision; shared and supportive leadership; collective learning and its applications; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) state that “a PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable” (p. 11).

Limitations

Limitations of this study include sample size and lack of randomized assignment and control. Only six classes were chosen for the study, one at grade five, one at grade four, and four at grade three, limiting the generalizability of the study. Besides the

implementation of writer's workshop and the PLC model, other factors may influence student writing achievement, such as teacher quality and student maturity level.

Another limitation identified is the range of variables that can affect student writing achievement. This study attempts to look at the mode of delivery and teacher preparation and support through PLCs. Other variables, such as student maturity and readiness levels, are not measured here. The type of data and analysis of this study does not permit a direct causal relationship between PLCs and student writing achievement to be determined. The focus of this study is on the teacher's perceptions of their ability to deliver a writing program.

In the next chapter, a review of relevant literature is focused on PLCs and writing achievement. In Chapter 3, the methodology of this action research study is detailed. Study findings are presented in Chapter 4. The final chapter shares recommendations based on the findings of this study and explores the importance of leadership throughout the process.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Research Questions

The review of literature was guided by the following research questions:

1. What effects will a Professional Learning Community (PLC) have on the implementation of writer's workshop as measured by student writing achievement, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions?
2. How does teacher participation in a PLC affect their perceptions of their ability to deliver writer's workshop?
3. How did the principal facilitate the formation and sustainability of the PLC?

Review of Literature

The purpose of professional development is to build teacher knowledge and improve classroom practice in order to increase student learning. A review of relevant literature shows that students learn when teachers are involved in meaningful professional development that supports the building of knowledge but also requires them to use this new knowledge in their classrooms (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006). Research also supports professional development that provides opportunities for teachers to learn, work together to plan for student learning, apply this learning to their practice in their classroom, and assess the effects of their learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). PLCs meet these criteria for effective professional development for teachers and consist of three main ideas: ensuring that students learn, creating a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results (DuFour, 2004).

This chapter will begin with a review of the literature on PLCs and the effect that they have on student achievement. This discussion will be organized around the three essential characteristics necessary to develop effective PLCs: learning, collaboration, and results (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Because this dissertation focuses on the development of PLCs to improve student writing achievement, the review of literature will integrate student writing achievement as the focus of the three core elements. The chapter will conclude with a description of the role the principal plays in the development and implementation of PLCs.

What is a Professional Learning Community? A PLC is a collegial group of educators who work together to improve student learning through the development of shared beliefs, values, and vision; shared and supportive leadership; collective learning and its applications; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008). If all students are to learn at high levels, PLCs assume that this learning is accomplished through collective inquiry and collaboration.

The keystone of a PLC is a focus on student learning; all other characteristics emerge from this basis. The first characteristic of a learning community is that the community develops shared values and vision. Learning is the fundamental purpose of school and must be the focus of all visions and values. To develop these shared values, the PLC members must answer these questions: What is it we expect all students to learn? How will we know if they have learned it? How will we respond when they do not learn? How will we respond when they already know it? (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010) The focus of the PLC developed for this research study is student writing

achievement. Therefore, the shared values will focus around the skills and strategies of student writing and the teachers' practice of writing instruction.

After developing a shared vision and community values, the second characteristic a PLC must acquire is collective learning and its applications. Marzano (2003) maintains that one of the most significant factors that impacts student achievement is that teachers commit to implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum. This commitment ensures that no matter who teaches a given class, the curriculum will address certain essential content. An effective writing curriculum will include common strategies, skills, and assessments that all members of the PLC follow within their classrooms.

Supportive conditions that enable the PLC to work and flourish is the third characteristic. As the leader of the school, the principal must provide the resources necessary for the PLC to function and for the curriculum to be implemented. One priority is scheduling meeting times when all teachers can focus on the goals of the PLC. A second priority is making the curriculum and resources available for all involved.

The last characteristic of a PLC is shared personal practice. All members of the PLCs involved in this study, for example, were committed to improving student writing achievement and to honing the process of collective learning within the PLC. This personal investment will create ownership of the curriculum and teaching practices.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010) identify six steps to building effective PLCs. The first step emphasizes the value of timely identification of students with specific skills deficiencies (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010). Students enter school with diverse backgrounds and as they move through the grade levels, their ability levels remain diverse. The teacher's responsibility is to use pre-assessments to

identify students with learning gaps. In the area of writing achievement, teachers can assess student responses to writing prompts and reference state and district assessment results to begin to identify those students who are in need of more remedial assistance and those students who require enrichment. Once the students and the skills are identified, the team of teachers can move to the next steps.

Steps two and three advocate that teachers work together in developing pacing guides and curriculum maps prior to developing formative assessments. Curriculum mapping requires teachers to review the current curriculum and identify specific results that they want students to learn by the end of the unit. Working backwards from the end result, a pacing guide can be created that includes an action plan of what objectives and skills will be taught and in what order. Once those objectives and skills are determined, the PLC must develop common formative assessments to benchmark student learning throughout the unit of study. The common assessments should focus on the skills taught to ascertain if more teaching is needed or if students have indeed achieved mastery (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The fourth step is getting the PLC participants to agree upon the level of proficiency demonstrated by the students. This proficiency, particularly in writing, should be measured by rubrics created by the members of the PLC. The rubrics should be guided by the skills and steps identified in the pacing guide for the unit (Spandel & Stiggins, 1981). Once these preliminary steps are in place, the teachers can begin to teach the unit and assess students prior, during, and after the unit instruction.

Once the assessments are administered they must be analyzed. In step five, teachers identify the students who learned the skills, those who need more teaching and

practice, and those students who need enrichment. At the conclusion of the unit, the team celebrates its successes and implements improvement strategies (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010).

In this research study, a PLC is specifically defined as a group of teachers working together to implement writer's workshop in their language arts classes in an attempt to increase student writing achievement. Based on the research of DuFour, et al. (2010), it is proposed that this group of teachers work together to plan and implement lessons on the unit of study titled personal narratives. Teachers will create the lessons based on the backwards design model which organizes the lessons with the end in mind (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Lessons will be created to teach the identified skills and knowledge necessary for students to master narrative writing. Common assessments will be developed and administered to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and a plan will be created to include options for students who need more remediation and for students who need enrichment. Teachers will meet during each professional development in-service day and at planned meetings throughout the unit.

Evidence of the Effectiveness of PLCs. The effectiveness of teachers working in PLCs has been researched by many authors. Louis and Marks (1998) found that when a school is organized into a PLC, the teachers set higher expectations for student achievement and students can count on their teachers and peers to achieve higher learning goals. When teachers are focused on student learning, their classroom pedagogy improves which positively affects achievement levels (Louis & Marks, 1998). When teachers work together toward the focus of student learning, student achievement is the result. Throughout research, examples of increased achievement through teacher

collaboration in PLCs have been documented. Vescio et al. (2006; 2008) examined 11 studies and found that student learning improved through the formation of PLCs. Their examination revealed specific improvements on statewide standardized assessments and grade level testing where student scores “rose from 50% proficiency to more than 75%” (p. 86). In a study conducted by Hollins et al. (2004), students whose teachers participated in PLCs demonstrated significantly higher achievement results than comparable students in the district whose teachers were not participating in PLCs. These researchers reported:

In 1998, 45% of second graders [at the target school] scored above 25th percentile as compared with 64% in 1999, and 73% in 2000. This is a 28% overall gain.

District-wide, 48% of second graders scored above the 25th percentile in 1998, 61% in 1999, and 56% in 2000, an overall gain of 12%. (p. 259)

A study conducted by Strahan (2003) investigated the effectiveness of PLCs in three elementary schools where the majority of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Strahan found that each school demonstrated steady increases of student achievement in both math and reading as a result of teachers creating collaborative professional cultures.

In extensive research conducted by DuFour et al. (2008), PLCs have been shown to improve student performance in schools. Throughout their book, *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools*, the authors share many examples of student improvement. One such example is that from Snow Creek Elementary School in Virginia. In 2004 only 40% of the third graders were proficient on the state assessment in reading. The principal implemented PLCs to create interventions for students who were struggling. Students who had the most difficulty

were assigned to the teachers who had the best results on the common reading assessment. In less than two years, that same group of students scored 96% proficient in fifth grade. All of the research presented by DuFour et al. (2008) has shown that the most effective professional development for educators is that which is embedded in their jobs and daily practice, and is ongoing and sustained. These concepts have also been described by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) as the “new paradigm” for professional development (p. 49).

Vescio et al. (2006; 2008) reviewed the literature on PLCs and found six studies that examined the effects of teacher participation in PLCs on student learning. In all six studies, they found that student achievement improved when teachers were focused on student learning and change in practice based on relevant data. Additionally, teachers working in groups reported higher levels of collaboration and engagement than teachers not in groups. Teachers involved in these collaborations reported higher expectations for student learning.

Parise and Spillane (2010) researched teacher learning through on-the-job opportunities and found that “collaborative discussion between teachers was the strongest predictor of teacher change in math and ELA [English language arts] classroom practice” (p.339). On-the-job learning refers to those interactions that teachers have with colleagues about student learning and instructional practices. Furthermore, they discovered that changes in teacher behavior happened when teachers chose to engage with colleagues over subject matter that was directly related to their current practice (Parise & Spillane, 2010).

Another outcome of PLCs cited in the literature included reduced isolation of teachers and better informed and committed teachers. Wood (2007) described teacher learning communities as a way “to provide settings for teachers to learn and build knowledge together. Teachers are not simply constructed as learners; they also become knowers” (p. 284). Vescio et al. (2008) explained how educators’ visions are “limited by [their] lifetimes spent within education” and suggested that PLCs can “broaden the scope of their inquiry to problematize any and all aspects of the learning environment as appropriate” (p. 89). In studies that examined teacher collaboration and behavioral changes as evidenced in the classroom pedagogy, researchers found that teachers self-reported changes in collaboration and expectations, as well as implemented different types of teacher strategies (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Dunne & Honts, 1998). Specifically, Andrews and Lewis (2002) reported that the shared knowledge that teachers created through PLCs impacted action in the classroom and led to the creation of new images of teacher and student. Andrews and Lewis concluded that teachers focused on the future and 21st century skills and established the shared vision of the teachers involved in the PLC.

The above studies help to demonstrate that PLCs can improve student learning and increase teacher collaboration. Thus, their use in implementing successful writing communities holds promise for an increase in student writing achievement. The next sections will focus on learning, collaboration, and results, the three core characteristics of PLCs as described by DuFour, et al. (2010). Each of these characteristics and their interrelationships with a PLC focused on writing will be discussed.

Building Professional Learning Communities: A Focus on Learning. The main focus of schools must be on student achievement. Student achievement can be improved when a PLC identifies the desired student outcomes and then develops and implements collaborative strategies to obtain the outcomes. In this section, this process of identification and implementation is illustrated through discussing the literature and describing the PLC task that is the focus of this dissertation research: Writer's workshop.

The action research project represented in this dissertation focuses on the implementation of writer's workshop as a plan of action to address a lack of student writing achievement. Writing is as critical as ever in part because "as technology continues to alter societies and cultures, it has fostered and supported an unprecedented expansion of human communication" (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2007, p. 1). NAEP reported in the 2002 Writing Assessment that the average scale score for fourth graders in the United States was 153 on a range of 0 to 300, which is considered partially proficient. By the year 2007, eighth grade students averaged a scale score of 154 on the Writing Assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). If writing is essential to the economic success of the nation and to personal and social advancement, it is imperative that students write well in order for them to succeed in the 21st century.

Roberts and Wibbens (2010) found limited discussion in the literature supporting research-based writing instruction for younger students. The research that they reported included measures that capture quality of writing as opposed to the amount of writing and conventions of writing. These authors shared three practices that they defined as proven practices for teaching writing at the primary grades. These include collaborative writing,

strategy instruction, and instruction in process writing (Roberts & Wibbens, 2010). Collaborative writing involves any writing where students are working with other students or teachers. In their description of three studies, Roberts and Wibbens (2010) found that the studies supported an effectiveness of cooperative partnerships in the primary grades and that paired writing demonstrated a measureable success over students who were not involved in paired writing. This finding makes sense since learning occurs in a social context and writing is a form of communication. Strategy instruction includes any instructional practice that is designed to teach students how to plan, write, or revise text. Students should be taught how to plan their writing and how to organize the writing into a finished piece. Strategy instruction can be taught in isolation but is more effective when taught in context (Roberts & Wibbens, 2010). Process writing involves the practice of cycling through the writing process, which includes brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Writers should not be held to this order and can flow through each step as needs arise. Roberts and Wibbens (2010) found that students who were instructed in writing as a process were more successful not only in conveying meaning in their writing but also in the mechanics of writing.

The writer's workshop approach offers the three researched-based practices of writing instruction as discussed by Roberts and Wibbens (2010): Students are engaged in writing and sharing with others; throughout the workshop, lessons are developed and shared on the mechanics, skills, and strategies of writing throughout the writing process; the workshop allows students the opportunity to move through the writing process at their own pace.

Pressley, Mohan, Fingeret, Reffitt, and Raphael-Bogaert (2007) reported that an effective school commits to teaching students to plan, draft, and revise when teaching writing. Their research also suggests that children's writing improves through instruction and practice, where writing occurs daily throughout the year. As the schools meet the demands for increasing improvement in writing, there is more demand on other curriculum areas and writing is integrated in other areas. In order to meet these higher demands, teachers must develop a strong understanding in students that writing is important and they must offer choices about writing and interesting writing tasks. During the writing instruction, teachers must provide consistent feedback and praise for improvement as students become purposeful authors. Pressley et al. (2007) did not find that any one specific, scripted writing program was the answer to student writing improvement, but found that students who were highly engaged in thoughtful activities became better writers. Writer's workshop offers students the opportunity to engage in the writing process as they draft, write, revise, and publish authentic writing pieces.

In this study, writer's workshop will be implemented by a PLC using programmatic guidelines developed by Lucy Calkins (2006) in collaboration with Columbia Teachers' College. Her work, *Units of Study*, is based on the premises of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. The year-long curriculum includes the foundations for the writing workshop. The first foundation states that every child learns to write and to write authentic pieces just as published authors write. They should be involved in writing fiction stories, narratives, essays, poems, and non-fiction pieces. Writers must write what is meaningful to them, not just words or conventions. Focusing on grammar and sentence structure will not allow children to fully develop their own

voice. Children need to be taught the skills and strategies of writing and the qualities of good writing and be given the opportunity to develop their pieces through the writing process from drafting to publishing. To become effective writers, students should use mentor texts as guides for their own writing (Calkins, 2006). According to Calkins, components of writer's workshop include the writer's notebook, mini-lessons, mentor texts, writing time, writing conferences, and sharing time.

The writer's notebook is a way for students to connect with their writing (Calkins & Martinelli, 2006). The teacher also creates her own writer's notebook and shares this with the students. The writer's notebook is where students generate ideas, try new writing strategies taught in the mini-lessons, and draft their writing pieces (Calkins, 2006).

Conferences focus the teaching points on individual learners, but mini-lessons bring the students together to learn a new technique or listen to the teacher share a strategy. Mini-lessons usually occur at the beginning of writer's workshop and are tailored to the specific needs of the class. The topics of mini-lessons include procedural, writer's process, qualities of good writing, and editing skills (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Using literature during the mini-lesson can be a powerful tool for students. These books are called mentor texts. The teacher can share a book with students and ask the students to focus on the writer's craft. It is important to use a book that is familiar to the students, so that students can focus their attention on the writing rather than on comprehending the story (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Writing time must be provided for students to engage in the writing process each day. Calkins (2006) describes the stages of the writing process as rehearsal, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. Writer's workshop gives students the opportunity to

cycle through the writing process, but students are not limited to moving forward. They can return to any phase as they work toward publishing their writing.

“Conferring is at the heart of the writing workshop” (Calkins, 1994, p. 223) and it is during this time that the student and teacher have a dialogue about writing. It is a time for teachers to teach students, but also a time for teachers to learn about their students. Although finding and committing the time to conferencing can be difficult, there is no substitute for this one-on-one time with students (Calkins, 1994; Calkins & Martinelli, 2006). A writing conference should include certain fundamentals such as listening, being present as a reader, understanding the writer, following the student’s energy, building on the student’s strengths, and remembering to teach only one thing (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

Sharing time occurs during the last 15 minutes of writer’s workshop. “The share gives them a real audience for their work and ... it’s a time to affirm the work of the writers” (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, p. 41). During a share, students read their pieces aloud. The teacher may have chosen the student to share or the student may volunteer to share. Other students should listen carefully and may respond with questions or comments about the writing piece. The share must be kept positive (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001).

The goal of the writer’s workshop model is to build strong writers. PLCs focus on student writing achievement is an important first step toward building better writers. The next foundation of an effective PLC is to create a culture of collaboration.

Creating a Culture of Collaboration to Support PLCs. The second core foundation of PLCs is creating a collaborative culture where teachers can work and learn

together to clarify student learning goals and procedures for measuring outcomes (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). To ensure success of PLCs, this culture of collaboration and support should be established by creating a cultural shift in the school, creating an understanding of the process, addressing the skills needed for self-directed learning, getting the right facilitators, providing facilitators with adequate support, and ensuring the active support of school leaders (Chappuis, Chappuis, & Stiggins, 2009). A focus on student writing achievement should begin with identifying how individual students learn to write. Teachers can begin to examine student writing artifacts and compare them to a common rubric to define good writing. This conversation will begin to establish the shared values of the PLC. To create the cultural shift, several issues should be addressed, such as identifying structural barriers, like incentives, and focusing on long-term professional development. Group norms should be developed and utilized throughout the learning process such as timeliness and focusing on the tasks during meetings. The process must be defined for the educators involved.

Teacher collaboration is a defining piece in this study. Teachers cannot continue to work in isolation and implement a writing program. Collective inquiry begins with identifying the current reality and then building shared knowledge through this collaboration of resources and knowledge from all members of the PLC (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). This research project focuses on the collective inquiry into best practices of teaching writing as defined by the perspectives of the teachers involved in the PLC. It also seeks to identify if their participation in the PLC affects their ability to deliver writer's workshop.

The most effective strategy to change a school's culture is "to identify, articulate, model, promote, and protect shared values" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 134). DuFour and Eaker (1998) explain, "Shared values provide personnel with guidelines for monitoring their day-to-day decisions and actions" (p. 134). The authors detail the approach to take to identify shared values. They suggest creating a task force and challenging the members with building a shared vision and shared values. Through the procedure of reviewing the school's vision statement, the task force should identify behaviors and attitudes that should be demonstrated by each member of the group to move the organization closer to the vision and develop a draft of these keystones. By sharing this draft with all stakeholders, the values and behaviors can be refined to a list that all members have a stake in and can endorse (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This is the process of creating group norms. Once group norms are established, the PLC can work more effectively on student learning.

Attention to Results. The final foundation for a collaborative school culture that promotes PLCs is defining goals that emanate from those shared values. Goals must be specific and measurable in order to be effective. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that "effective goals should specify exactly what is to be accomplished, the specific steps that will be taken to achieve the goal, the individual or group responsible for initiating and/or sustaining each step toward achieving the goal, the timeline for each phase of the activity, and the criteria to be used in evaluating progress toward the goal" (pp. 101-102). The school and its PLCs will then have common goals by which to focus learning activities and measure student achievement.

In this research study, the common goals used to focus learning activities will be units of study for teaching students how to write personal narratives and realistic fiction. The teachers will use, as a guide, the *Units of Study* program designed by Lucy Calkins and the Columbia Teachers College. Teachers will design and implement the realistic fiction unit within their classrooms and assess student learning using a common rubric.

Schools that have a results orientation define their purposes by what students learn not by what actions teachers use to teach. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010) state, “In PLCs, members are committed to achieving desired results and are hungry for evidence that their efforts are producing the intended outcomes” (p. 185). The challenge of this focus on results is to ensure timely and relevant data is made available to staff in order for that information to impact professional practice and student performance. Through the use of the common assessment, teachers can determine if the learning goals were met by the students.

A review of the literature has shown that PLCs are more effective if they focus on learning, collaboration, and results. Research has also demonstrated that PLCs are more effective if they are supported by the school leader. The next section will outline the role of the administrator in PLCs.

Role of Administrator in Professional Learning Communities. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) identify seven key attributes that education leaders possess in order to complete a second order change:

- 1.) Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
- 2.) Inspiring others and being the driving force for implementation of change;
- 3.) Providing intellectual stimulation;
- 4.) Being a change agent;
- 5.) Monitoring and evaluating the change;

6.) Being flexible; and 7.) Maintaining and communication ideas and strong educational beliefs.” (p. 70)

School leadership is the main predictor of success when developing a PLC (DuFour, DuFour et al., 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Mullen & Huting, 2008). The leadership must be on board and recognize the teachers’ efforts at improvement. A leader must have a vision of student achievement and teacher collaboration. The principal plays a crucial role in the success of the PLC. She must “prioritize the professional growth of teachers, ensuring that they receive professional opportunities that expand their practitioner knowledge and instructional repertoire” (Mullen & Huting, 2008, p. 280). In terms of writer’s workshop, the principal must be involved in the professional development offered to teachers and must do her own research about the implementation in order to offer advice and support. Not only do principals play an important managerial position, but principals are urged to become part of the PLCs within their schools, discussing and analyzing data and becoming trained. As a facilitator of the PLC, the principal must learn to delegate leadership responsibilities, which, in turn, will create positive interactions among all members of the group (Mullen & Huting, 2008). Mullen and Huting (2008) refer to this delegation of responsibility as distributed learning. Teachers are the leaders in their classrooms and must be given the authority to be the leader. DuFour and Eaker (1998) further clarify the task of the principal as “demanding less command and control and more learning and leading, less dictating and more orchestrating” (p. 184).

Hord and Hirsch (2009) describe several approaches that support strong leadership teams. They suggest that principals emphasize to teachers that they know they

can succeed – together, expect teachers to keep knowledge fresh, guide communities toward self governance, make data available, teach discussion and decision-making skills, show teachers the research, and take time to build trust. In short, as Mullen and Hutinger (2008) state, principals must become members of the PLC and work with their staff.

Principals can develop teacher leaders by promoting shared-decision making and a collaborative culture. By providing the information necessary for decision-making, principals can encourage shared leadership. It is important for principals to lead through shared vision and collective commitments rather than rules and authority (DuFour, 1999). This is done through transformational leadership and the development of shared vision. Transformational leadership “consistently predicted the willingness of teachers to exert extra effort and to change their classroom practices and/or attitudes” (Ross & Gray, 2006).

Principals should possess certain characteristics in order to help create and sustain successful PLCs. Through creating shared vision and values rather than through rules and procedures, principals can build leadership within the PLCs. They must involve faculty in the development of the vision and values as well as in the school’s decision-making processes and empower individuals to act. Principals provide staff with the information, training, and parameters they need to make good decisions and establish credibility by modeling behavior that is congruent with the vision and values of their school (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) discuss the paradox that principals of PLCs face. Principals “must have a sense of urgency about improving their schools that is balanced

by the patience that will sustain them over the long haul” (p. 195). Principals and teachers must decide how to organize the core task of the PLC. Depending on the readiness level of the staff and the principal, the initial starting point (i.e., learning or collaborating) will vary. Identifying this starting place and moving forward depends on team goals with attention paid to results, the third foundation of PLCs. To build a culture of collaboration, the second foundation of PLCs, the principal must develop and communicate a shared mission, vision, values, and goals and create collaborative structures in support of the PLC.

Conclusion

Research of PLCs has shown an improvement in student achievement. Through the development of PLCs, building a culture of collaboration, and paying careful attention to results, teachers and administrators can increase student writing achievement. The prospect of success for a PLC depends on the presence of the three core characteristics: learning, collaboration, and results. A supportive culture fostered by the principal, one that provides time and support for professional learning, is also necessary.

This review of the literature reveals a lack of research on the effectiveness of PLCs in general and in raising writing performance specifically. However, the research that is available lends support to the potential use of PLCs for writing program implementation and illustrates the need for studies such as this. In the next chapter I will describe the methods used to study PLCs and the effects PLCs have on student writing achievement.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study seeks to discover the effects of implementing a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to support elementary teachers' implementation of writer's workshop in their classrooms. This study, an action research project led by the principal, came about as a result of gathering student data at Brookside Elementary School in Monroe Township, New Jersey. The students at the school have not reached Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the area of language arts literacy according to the state standard assessment, New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK). To address the lack of writing skills identified by this assessment and district assessments, the researcher worked to find a way to implement writer's workshop through the development of PLCs within the school. The main focus of this study is the development and implementation of PLCs and teacher perceptions of the effects of working in a PLC with respect to skills acquired and support offered and received. This study was conducted through an action research project led by the principal as an observer in the project.

Kurt Lewin first coined the term action research in 1946 in a paper titled, "Action Research and Minority Problems," where he studied organizations and the leaders' efforts at improvement (Lewin, 1946). Lewin described his study as research about the effects of social action through a series of cycles where the researcher plans an action, implements that action, and gathers information about the effects of that action. Current action research grew out of the work of Lewin and evolved as a way to improve teachers' instructional practice (Glesne, 2006). Action research involves the researcher not as an outside observer, but rather as a member of the event or organization who looks to

understand and explain some area in need which often leads to improvement (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hinchey, 2008). Teachers are natural action researchers. Their everyday practice includes identifying a weakness, such as multiplication skills, then planning an intervention, such as a new instructional strategy. Once the new intervention is implemented, the teacher reviews the data to determine if the intervention was successful or if a new strategy is needed.

John Dewey (1997) argued that researchers must be reflective and adjust their actions based on the findings. Action research is, by necessity, formative and involves recurring actions of reflection, action, and evaluation in an effort toward continual improvement (Hinchey, 2008). Throughout the action research process, research evolves based on findings. During each cycle, the researcher, in collaboration with the teachers at the school, may identify an area needing improvement and offer a solution. The solution is implemented and the researchers collect and systematically analyze data to determine the effects of the action. Based on the researcher's interpretation of the data, another solution may be implemented. This cyclical process can recur as many times as necessary until the research questions are answered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hinchey, 2008).

The school setting offers many opportunities for action research conducted by either administrators or classroom teachers. The many types and sources of data used to assess the actions of the students and teachers help determine whether or not the school is performing proficiently. Over the past several years, Brookside School has not performed well in the area of language arts literacy, specifically in writing, as measured by the NJASK. Through this action research, a process for implementing PLCs to help teachers more effectively adopt writer's workshop was developed. This chapter will describe the

methodology used for this study. It begins with a description of the chosen methodology and context of the study. Each cycle of the research process will be described, including the action plan, data collection, and analysis of themes. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the generalizability and limitations of the study.

A mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative data was chosen for this action research study. Because a mixed methods approach “employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data simultaneously...to best understand research problems” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18), it minimizes the limitations of each method (Creswell, 2003). Through interviews and observations, the researcher collects data through a recording and transcription process. This process involves the researcher participating in conversations with the participants. Conversations may follow a protocol, but the researcher is free to use prompts emanating from the discussion. Data are organized into categories through a coding process. Coding is used to identify and name emerging themes in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Hypotheses are then suggested from the identified themes. The coding system used in each cycle of this project will be described later in the chapter. Qualitative methods in this study included individual teacher interviews regarding perceptions of participation in a PLC, writer’s workshop, and writing instruction. A focus group meeting was also conducted with all teachers as they began the PLC. Observations of classroom lessons were conducted throughout the unit of study of realistic fiction.

I focused my inquiry on teacher’s perceptions of their participation in the PLC as they implemented a new writing program, Lucy Calkins’s Writer’s Workshop. As a participant observer, I maintained a reflective journal as a means to apply leadership

theories and identify how my leadership helped to facilitate the formation and sustainability of the PLC. A quantitative approach was also used to collect data on teacher perceptions and student writing achievement. Quantitative data employ “close-ended questions, predetermined approaches, and numeric data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 19). In this study, quantitative methods included surveys (Appendix A) of teachers about their understanding and feelings of involvement in PLCs. Student pre-writing and post-writing samples were collected and analyzed for achievement gain during the 2009-2010 school year, as well as New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) language arts literacy scores. The collection of data from each of these sources will be detailed in each cycle.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What effects will a Professional Learning Community (PLC) have on the implementation of writer’s workshop as measured by student writing achievement, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions? Specifically what benefits did teachers receive as a result of their participation in the PLC?
- How does teacher participation in a PLC affect their perceptions of their ability to deliver writer’s workshop?
 - Did teachers learn specific skills from their participation in the PLC that they were able to use in their classrooms to inform writing instruction?
 - Did the PLC offer teachers support and provide useful teaching strategies as needed?

- Did the supportive environment of the PLC increase each teacher's ability to teach writing?
- How well did the principal facilitate the formation and sustainability of the PLC?
What changes in school organization, schedule, structure, or resources made it possible for the PLC to succeed?

Context of Study

The setting of the action research project is Brookside Elementary School in Monroe Township, New Jersey. The school houses 689 students in grades three through six. Monroe Township is a suburban school district in Middlesex County consisting of five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The school is comprised of mostly middle to upper class Caucasian families. About 5% of the school population is African American, 7% Asian/Indian, and less than 1% Pacific Islander, but the diversity of the student population is increasing. Thirty percent of the students at the school are classified as special education students ranging from mildly impaired to autistic and multiply disabled.

The sample for this study includes four third grade classes, one fourth grade class, and one fifth grade class chosen purposively because writer's workshop is being implemented in their classrooms for the first time during the 2009-2010 school year. The classes are heterogeneously grouped with some special education in-class resource (ICR) students included in two of the classes. The population of the classes is as follows:

- Four third grade classrooms
 - Class 3A: ICR Classroom, 8 girls, 9 boys
 - Class 3B: Regular Education Classroom, 11 girls, 11 boys

- Class 3C: Regular Education Classroom, 12 girls, 10 boys
 - Class 3D: Regular Education Classroom, 10 girls, 11 boys
- Fourth grade classroom
 - ICR classroom, 10 girls, 13 boys
- Fifth grade classroom
 - Regular Education Classroom, 11 girls, 11 boys

The eight teachers' experience ranged from a second year teacher to a veteran 30-year teacher. Teachers were approached and asked to be a part of the study based on their willingness to participate. Prior to beginning researcher observations, pre-writing assessment scores from writing samples completed by the students in September 2009 were analyzed to determine the writing levels of the students involved.

Cycle I

Cycle I included purposively choosing the sample of teachers to be involved in the study and analyzing a sample of student writing based on the district writing prompts (Appendix B). The first cycle of research occurred from September 2009 through November 2009. Cycle I included choosing teachers to build a PLC and obtaining an understanding of teachers' beliefs about developing a PLC. At a faculty meeting, I described the project to the staff, discussed expectations, outlined the criteria for membership in a PLC, and presented steps for and implementing the Writer's Workshop's Units of Study (Calkins, 2006). In order to choose the members of the PLC, I invited any staff members interested in participating in my project to submit a letter of interest. Eight classroom teachers out of 28 responded. Cycle I also included a brief conversation as a pre-assessment of teachers' understanding of the pedagogy for

implementing writer's workshop and their willingness to implement the approach. This conversation included two questions asking teachers to define writer's workshop and to describe how they would like to implement it in their classrooms. I explained to each teacher the plan to create a PLC and asked them if they were comfortable with this format. Each teacher indicated a willingness to implement writer's workshop and work as a PLC. These preliminary meetings were essential to building a supportive PLC.

Teachers then completed a survey about PLCs, which was created by Oliver, Huffman, and Hipp (2008) (Appendix A). I received permission to use the survey from Olivier, Huffman, and Hipp in April 2009 (Appendix G). The survey asked the teachers to record their agreement with statements related to PLCs on the topics of shared and supportive leadership, shared values and visions, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions – relationships, and supportive conditions – structures. Teachers were able to write comments about each topic as desired. I chose to use this survey rather than create my own because it is a formal diagnostic tool to help me determine the readiness levels of the staff and to offer a starting point for implementing PLCs (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Because the survey has been used and revised, the authors of the survey confirmed internal consistency results for reliability of the survey; reliability “resulted in the following Cronback Alpha reliability coefficients for factored subscales (n=1209): Shared and Supportive Leadership (.94); Share Values and Vision (.92); Collective Learning and Application (.91); Shared Personal Practice (.87); Supportive Conditions – Relationships (.82); Supportive Conditions – Structures (.88); and a one-factor solution (.97)” (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 30). Subsequent studies by the developers have provided validation of the tool as a formal diagnostic tool (Hipp

& Huffman, 2010). The survey provides perceptions of the staff relating to each area using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). All surveys, once returned, were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 Student Version computer software to calculate descriptive statistics (Creswell, 2003) about teachers' perceptions of the culture for change in the PLC members and their understanding of PLC membership. Because the survey is a diagnostic tool, I decided not to post-survey the teachers who were already involved in the PLCs. These statistics and written comments were used to develop the questions for the focus group meeting used in Cycle III (Hinchey, 2008).

The second type of data in Cycle I included student writing samples in each of the eight classrooms. The assessment tool used in this study is the New Jersey Registered Holistic Writing Rubric, used to score and compare student writing samples. The New Jersey Registered Holistic Writing Rubric is organized on a scale from one through five for students in kindergarten through fifth grade and on a scale from one through six for students in grades 6 through 12 (See Appendix C for the NJ Registered Holistic Writing Rubric used on state assessments for grades kindergarten through five).

To measure student writing the teachers administered a pre-writing assessment in September 2009. Each third grade student was given a picture writing prompt showing a boy and a girl with a soccer ball. Fourth grade students were shown a picture of a family of skaters and fifth grade students were shown a picture of several boys playing football (Appendix B). Students were given 80 minutes, to complete the assessment. Each student received a blank page for brainstorming, lined paper for writing, and the picture prompt. Teachers were directed to only give specific instructions and to remain as neutral as possible during administration. Teachers could give instructions such as "Use any

prewriting strategies you know,” “Do your best,” and “Sound it out.” Students were not to use dictionaries or workbooks and word walls in the classroom were to be covered. At the end of the testing period, the teacher collected all papers from the students and met with the PLC to score the papers.

Students’ writing samples were assessed through a double blind scoring by two grade level teachers utilizing the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric. Double blind scoring requires two teachers to read each child’s paper. The name of the child is replaced by a number so that the child remains anonymous to the readers. If the two readers’ scores did not exactly agree, then a third reader was asked to assess the paper until an agreement could be reached. This process was used to establish reliability in the individual student scores (Spandel & Stiggins, 1981). The scores for each student were then recorded and the original papers returned to the classroom teacher.

The rubric used to assess student writing for grade kindergarten through five includes a five point scale, with five being the highest possible score. When scoring writing pieces, the rubric focuses on four sections: content and organization, usage, sentence construction, and mechanics, with the main focus being on content and organization. Students receive one holistic score based on their performances in all areas. The scores range from one, *inadequate control*, to five, *strong command*. NJASK language arts literacy scores were collected and organized for each teacher’s class from the previous year as well as for each student included in the teacher’s class this year. These scores do not offer the teacher much insight into the individual student’s challenges and success in writing, but do give an overall score and can be used to look at the whole class (Worthen & Spandel, 1991).

The teachers met together for the first time as a PLC in October 2009 and began to analyze the student writing data. Teachers identified weaknesses in student writing using the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric and information presented from the State of New Jersey on the results of the NJASK language arts literacy assessment. Teachers also referred to specific writing samples from the students. I observed the first meeting and noted my observations in the reflective journal kept throughout the study. This reflective journal was coded and analyzed to discover recurrent themes. Each datum was coded to make analysis for common themes more possible. To code the data, I began by reading through all of the documents and creating a list of recurring words or phrases, such as *training*, *support*, *time*, and *planning*. Then, I reread the documents and highlighted with different colors anything that related to the original list. If a piece of evidence could be in more than one code category, I made a photocopy of the piece and colored it for each code. Some categories could be collapsed into each other. For example, I was able to incorporate principal roles into leadership. I then sorted the documents based on their color code and began to analyze the information for emerging themes based on the research questions, specifically teacher assumptions about writing and PLCs, administrator assumptions and leadership, and student writing achievement.

The results from the Cycle I analysis of student writing led to the PLC developing a unit lesson plan to implement a writer's workshop unit. The first genre that the students completed prior to the PLC meeting in Cycle I was a personal narrative. A personal narrative is a story written in the first person where the author shares a personal experience with the reader. The goal of the author is to put the reader vicariously in the story so he can experience all of the feelings and action of the event. Building on the

personal narrative, the next unit suggested by Calkins (2006) in the *Units of Study for Writer's Workshop* was realistic fiction. Realistic fiction, as the name implies, is a form of fiction that seems believable. The story happens to human beings with human being powers. It may be set in real places but not based on history or science fiction. During this unit of writing, students will be asked to create a fictional story that could actually happen. As a PLC, the teachers decided that this was the next logical step in the progression of student writing since realistic fiction could still be about the students, similar to the personal narrative, the unit previously completed. Instructional time is spent on developing real-life characters with real lives. Stories include a rising action, climax, and conclusion. The teachers of the PLC created a unit to address this genre with a focus on the areas of need identified in the pre-assessments and from the personal narrative unit.

Cycle II

Cycle II focused on the teacher's role in planning and implementing the unit of study, realistic fiction. The second meeting of the PLC was held in October 2009. During this meeting the teachers created group norms and planned objectives for the unit. Group norms are identified as commitments held by each member of the PLC (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). DuFour et al. (2010) stress that "teams increase their likelihood of performing at high levels when they clarify their expectations of one another regarding procedures, responsibilities, and relationship" (p. 133). The main objective identified by the members of the PLC was to create a writing unit focused on realistic fiction. The PLC met four times during October, each for a length of about one hour, to create a unit of

study to be implemented in their classrooms. After the teachers planned the unit, they collaboratively prepared lesson plans and implemented them in their classrooms.

Unit implementation occurred from November 2009 through December 2009. Teachers chose to follow the same unit plan at each grade level. The unit plan called for two lessons on generating ideas, two lessons on developing a believable character, two lessons on creating small moment scenes based on character struggles and motivation, one lesson on creating a story mountain, two lessons on setting the scene and creating a timeline, two lessons on creating interesting leads and endings, two lessons on strategies to show the action through clear descriptions instead of telling about the action, one lesson on similes and metaphors to enhance the writing, and one lesson on using sensory details. This unit was expected to be completed over the course of five to six weeks depending on the writer's workshop schedule that each teacher developed. Some classes wrote every day and others only wrote three times per week. Documentation collected by the researcher included teachers' lesson plans and unit plans as well as minutes from the PLC meetings. The lesson plans and unit plans were used as a guide during lesson observations. For example, during the observations, references were made to the unit plans to determine the progression of the unit and the placement of a particular lesson in the unit. Lesson plans and mini-lessons in writer's workshop were based on the pre-assessment of student writing. Comparisons could be made to ensure that the identified weaknesses of student writing were addressed in the lessons.

During the unit lessons, I observed each classroom three times, once at the beginning, middle, and end of the unit. During these lessons, I was an observer and did not interact with the students or teacher during the lesson. Field notes from the

observations included detailed descriptions of the teacher and student actions in the classroom as well as my reflections on the classroom practices and the development of the project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The field notes, formatted into two columns (Figure 1), include descriptive field notes on the left and reflective field notes on the right (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The descriptive field notes included a description of the events of the lesson. Teacher and student comments and actions were included in this section. The reflective notes included my thoughts during the lesson such as questions that arose in my mind about the lesson. After each observation, I reviewed the notes, added more description if needed, and checked for assumptions by making sure the data was objective and descriptive and any subjective pieces were written in the reflective field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Individual interviews with teachers were conducted to determine the instructional strategies utilized in the classroom and discover each teacher's comprehension of writer's workshop (See interview guide in Appendix D). The interviews were conducted in the teacher's classroom and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Prior to the interviews, semi-structured questions were designed based on the objective of the interviews. The questions prepared before the interview included questions regarding resources used for planning the writer's workshop unit, forms of assessment for student writing, classroom environment, organization of lessons, student conferencing plans, and the teacher's writing notebook examples. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim soon after the completion of the interviews. My reflections of the interviews were recorded during the transcription procedure as marginal notes.

Multiple sources of data contribute to trustworthiness, the qualitative equivalent of reliability and validity (Glesne, 2006). The multiple sources of data included daily lesson plans that each teacher created individually, field notes from lesson observations, and the unit plan created by the PLC. I reviewed and compared all data many times to organize and code the data and identify emerging themes (Saldana, 2009). Each piece of datum was coded to make analysis for common themes more possible. To code the data, I followed the same procedure as in Cycle I. I began by reading through all of the documents and creating a list of recurring words or phrases, such as training, support, time, and planning. I compared this list to the list from Cycle I. Many of the same codes were apparent, but a few were added from these data. Then, I reread the documents and highlighted with different colors anything that related to the original list in Cycle I. If a piece of evidence could be included in more than one code, I made a photocopy of it and colored it for each code. I then sorted the documents based on their color code and began to analyze the information for emerging themes based on the research questions, specifically teacher assumptions about writing and PLCs, administrator assumptions and leadership, and student writing achievement. I compared the lesson plans collected from each teacher during the unit of study to the observation field notes to reveal themes in the data. Findings are detailed in Chapter 4.

Data from Cycle II were used to plan the focus group meeting of Cycle III. From the data, I realized that there was a major focus on implementing writer's workshop and less focus on teachers' involvement in the PLC. I prepared the focus group protocol to identify teacher perceptions of their participation in the PLC and the advantages or disadvantages of working with others when implementing a new program.

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<p>Teacher read student paper. To student: oh, I see you fixed your homophone</p> <p>You did a really good job peer editing with each other. See the comments.</p> <p>Did you add that metaphor? Did K tell you to add?</p> <p>I came up with it and then K helped me find where to put it.</p> <p>Well done. This is one of your best pieces of writing. Look how you wrote your paragraphs perfectly. She pointed to something on the paper and the student wrote something down.</p> <p>I saw your metaphor, where is your simile?</p> <p>K's story is all about being the oldest and how he feels that he never gets anything because of his little brother and I said that I am the oldest and I feel the same way.</p>	<p>All students were engaged in their writing. There was some quiet chatter among students, but it was focused on the work.</p> <p>Students went to the teachers if they had a question and the teachers talked with them.</p> <p>Teacher observed the objective of the lesson in the student's writing piece.</p> <p>Positive rapport between student and teacher. Safe environment.</p> <p>Teacher notes improvement in writing.</p>

Figure 1. Excerpt taken from field notes of a classroom observation.

Cycle III

Cycle III was conducted as a follow up of the data analysis on teacher perceptions of PLCs in Cycle I. This cycle occurred after the unit of study was presented in the classrooms and students completed a post-assessment on realistic fiction writing. Cycle III occurred from January 2010 through April 2010. Cycle III included a focus group interview with all teachers involved in the study. The focus group questions centered on the teachers' perceptions of the writer's workshop process and the training they received, including their participation in the PLC (Appendix E).

I prepared for the focus group meeting by scheduling a time that was convenient for all teachers to attend and outlined the topics that I wanted to cover, including writer's workshop process, lesson planning and preparing, and teacher training. I also included the teacher's perception of participation in a PLC as a topic. The focus group occurred on April 13, 2010 after school. All but one teacher from the study attended. I began the focus group by asking all teachers to state their agreement to being recorded. The session was recorded and transcribed soon after the meeting.

I opened the discussion by asking teachers to share their perceptions of writer's workshop and what they believed to be the positive elements of implementing it in their classrooms. The discussion also included the training teachers received, e.g., the formal training and the opportunities offered for teachers to observe other teachers' lessons. The meeting concluded with a discussion of what the teachers felt they needed from the principal and the district to ensure successful implementation. The meeting lasted for one hour and all teachers shared during the discussion. I kept my comments and questions to a minimum so that the teachers could lead the discussion. The findings from this meeting

made it possible for me to create a protocol for teacher training to be used in Cycle IV. The focus group discussion on teacher training and its impact on implementing a new program guided me in developing a training protocol for other groups to use when implementing the program. This protocol involved PLC meetings, creating norms and objectives, scheduling adequate meetings and meeting agendas for the PLC, and training opportunities for teachers.

The second part of Cycle III included analysis of student writing scores. Teachers compared each student's pre-assessment writing to post-assessment writing and identified weaknesses in student writing using the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric. The same protocol for assessment was followed as in Cycle I, with double blind scoring, where two teachers scored each student's paper and compared scores. If scores were not exactly the same, a third teacher scored the paper until the PLC could come to a consensus. Student names were not on their papers. Students were identified by numbers. The student assessments were reviewed by the other teachers in the PLC to check for inter-rater reliability. The post-assessment scores were compared to the pre-assessment scores for each student and gains were measured. For any student that did not see a growth, the teacher reviewed the student's writing to determine areas of weakness and noted if the areas were covered during lessons or conferencing with the student. The data collected through this process assisted each teacher in creating lesson plans for upcoming lessons and ensure that all students received instruction on their areas of weakness.

Cycle IV

As a result of the focus group meeting and teacher interviews in Cycles II and III, a training protocol was designed for the implementation of writer's workshop in all

fourth grade classrooms. This protocol included creating PLCs of teachers, creating a schedule of meeting times, guiding the PLC in creating group norms and setting objectives, and observing the PLC meetings. The PLC was directed to create unit lesson plans for the first unit of study in writer's workshop, the personal narrative. This genre was chosen because it is the first unit of study in Calkins' (2006) program to begin in September. Cycle IV involved the implementation of the protocol for the first unit of study from September 2010 through November 2010. The sample of teachers for this cycle included the fourth grade team at Brookside Elementary School. This group of teachers was purposively chosen for this cycle because they are implementing writer's workshop for the first time in their classrooms. Two of the teachers were involved with this dissertation project from the inception. This sample included eight teachers and six classes of students. Two classes included special education students and two teachers were assigned to each of these classes. The teachers formed a PLC and began meeting in September 2010 to create group norms, identify objectives for the unit, prepare unit plans, and administer pre-assessments and analyze student writing. Data collected included unit and lesson plans from each teacher and student pre-writing and post-writing assessments. Observations of each classroom by the researcher were also conducted during this time to validate that lesson plans were being followed.

Interviews were conducted with each teacher at the conclusion of the unit to determine perceptions of how effectively writer's workshop was implemented and the extent that their participation in a PLC helped with the effectiveness of the implementation. The interview protocol (Appendix F) consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to elicit as much information as possible to answer the research

question about how their participation in a PLC affects their perceptions of their ability to deliver the writer's workshop. Specifically, teachers were asked about the skills and support that they received from the PLC and how that support helped during times when the work in the classroom did not go as planned. Because the teachers have already been in a grade level team for the past year, there was some level of comfort with each other. Questions addressed this level of comfort and how it may have contributed to their ability to teach writer's workshop more effectively. The interviews were 30 minutes in length and were recorded and transcribed. All transcribed notes were coded for themes and I developed a system for classifying the information similar to the process used in Cycles I and II. I began by reading through all of the documents and adding any new code words or phrases not identified earlier. Many of the same codes were apparent, but a few were added from this data. Then, I reread the documents and highlighted with different colors anything that related to the original list. If some piece of evidence could be in more than one code, I made a photocopy of the piece and colored it for each code. I then sorted the documents based on their color code and began to analyze the information for emerging themes based on the research questions, specifically teacher assumptions about writing and PLCs, administrator assumptions and leadership, and student writing achievement. Some categories were combined because they fit into the same theme. For example, all data about principal roles and structures for implementation of PLCs were collapsed into principal responsibilities. The findings from this cycle are described in detail in Chapter 4 and the conclusions in Chapter 5.

Transferability

The results of this study may not be transferable to other schools due to the homogenous aspect of the sample (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, the goal of the research is to implement PLCs to provide support for teachers thereby increasing their ability or perception of their ability to implement new programs and practices. A secondary goal is to use the PLC model identified through the study as a way of implementing writer's workshop and other new programs across the school. The rich detail provided in each cycle of the research as well as the inclusion of various examples and documents helps other researchers to transfer the conclusions of this study to other inquiries, or to replicate, as closely as possible, the procedures of this research.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include sample size and lack of randomized assignment and control. Only six classes were chosen for the study, one at grade five, one at grade four, and four at grade three, limiting transferability of the study. Besides the implementation of writer's workshop and the PLC model, other factors may influence student writing achievement, such as teacher quality and student maturity level.

Another limitation identified is the range of variables that can affect student writing achievement. This study attempts to look at the mode of delivery and teacher preparation and support through PLCs. Other variables, such as student maturity and readiness levels, are not measured here.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this mixed methods action research study included both quantitative and qualitative data sources. The surveys, interviews, focus group, and

observations conducted offered valuable data to help answer the research questions posed in this study. The information gathered also enabled me to develop a protocol for teacher training and PLC development as a means for implementing a new curricular practice. In the following chapter, the study findings are outlined.

Chapter Four

Findings

A variety of data were collected and analyzed in this project in order to answer the research questions. Specifically, data were collected to identify teacher perceptions of their ability to deliver writer's workshop as a result of working in a PLC. Secondly, data were collected to determine if teacher participation in a PLC focused on implementation of writer's workshop affected student writing achievement. Finally, data were collected to assess administrator behavior and leadership in facilitating the formation and sustainability of the PLC. In this chapter, findings from each cycle are presented. Each cycle built on the information gathered from the previous cycle.

Cycle I

Building a PLC (Part 1). Cycle I included building a PLC of teachers interested in implementing the writer's workshop program and working with other teachers to do so. In order to choose the members of the PLC, all third, fourth and fifth grade teachers were invited to participate. Eight teachers replied that they wanted to participate in the group and implement writer's workshop in their classrooms. I asked the teachers to define writer's workshop and to describe how they would like to implement it in their classrooms. I also noted their interest in working with a group of teachers in a PLC. The teachers who were interested in joining the PLC mirrored my excitement of the program. One teacher who was interested in working with teachers from other grade levels and implementing writer's workshop stated, "I think this is a great idea and will give us all a chance to work together when we wouldn't normally get the chance." From these brief conversations, I realized that not all of the eight teachers were familiar with writer's

workshop. Each fourth and fifth grade teacher seemed to hold a different view or interpretation of writer's workshop and was missing some critically important piece of the program. The third grade teachers received, as part of the study, a week of training in August 2009 on implementing *Units of Study* by Calkins (2006), but were still unsure of how to prepare for the lessons and units. The fourth and fifth grade teachers had not received any training but wanted to participate in writer's workshop because they felt the need for some kind of structured writing program for their students. One teacher stated, "I know that our students are weak in writing because we see the scores [on NJASK and Learnia] but the curriculum does not offer any help. Working with other teachers and implementing writer's workshop is an option that I am willing to try." From these initial conversations, a PLC was created that would focus on implementing writer's workshop to improve student writing achievement.

Identifying an understanding of PLCs. In order to assess the teachers' understanding of the definition of a PLC and how to implement it, each teacher completed a survey about PLCs, which was created by Olivier, Huffman and Hipp (2003) (Appendix A). The survey required that the teachers record their agreement with statements related to PLCs on the topics of shared and supportive leadership, shared values and visions, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions – relationships, and supportive conditions – structures. The survey served the purpose of identifying the readiness level of the teachers with respect to participating in a PLC. All eight teachers participating in the PLC completed the survey. Survey responses were analyzed to determine teacher perceptions of the culture for change and their understanding of and readiness for PLC membership. Survey responses

are summarized in Table 1 (Appendix H). Throughout the survey, teachers were asked to respond to questions about their involvement with decision making at the school and curriculum level. All but one of the teachers who completed the survey stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they are consistently involved in making decisions about most school issues and have the data necessary to make those decisions. One teacher disagreed with the question about having accessibility to key information. All teachers agreed that decision-making takes place through committees across grade levels and subjects.

One piece of a PLC that is essential for its success is the development and promotion of a shared vision and values. This was an area of the survey where there was more disagreement among the teachers. Two teachers out of the eight, or 25%, responded that a collaborative process does not exist for developing a shared sense of values and shared vision. Another statement, only 25% of the teachers strongly agreed that staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning. Three teachers responded that they disagreed with the statement that school goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.

The third section addressed in the survey related to collective learning and application. There was an inconsistency in the responses from the eight teachers in this section. Whereas four teachers responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with each statement in this section, the other four teachers noted disagreement with the statements that collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts and that a variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue. They also disagreed that school staff members and

stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems, a key component of PLCs, and that staff members work collaboratively to analyze multiple sources of data to assess effectiveness of instructional practice.

The last two sections of the survey focused on supportive conditions for PLCs, including relationships and structures. Two areas where teachers responded with disagreement were that time was provided to facilitate collaborative work and the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice. Five teachers responded that they disagreed with these two statements. Other statements that either one or two teachers disagreed with included: fiscal resources are available for professional development; resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning; communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members; and the proximity of the grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues. While teachers generally felt they shared in leadership decisions regarding school issues, there was less agreement that a shared sense of school values and vision exists. Further, mixed responses were obtained regarding whether teachers worked collaboratively to address problems and whether conditions exist to facilitate shared practice.

Assessing student writing. The second piece of data collection in Cycle I included collecting student writing samples in each of the classrooms involved in the study. To measure student writing, the teachers administered a pre-writing assessment to all students in their classes in September 2009. Students' writing samples were assessed through a double blind scoring by two grade level teachers utilizing the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric. Results of the students' writing pre-assessment are presented in Table 2. The majority of students' scores ranged from one to three indicating

inadequate to partial command of writing. Fourth and fifth grade student writing scores ranged in the middle of the rubric. Only four students scored a five, indicating a strong command of writing.

Table 2

Pre-assessment Writing Scores per Class

	Inadequate Command	Limited Command	Partial Command	Adequate Command	Strong Command
<i>Score</i>	1	2	3	4	5
Class 3A	4	8	3	2	1
Class 3B	2	12	6	2	0
Class 3C	4	12	5	1	0
Class 3D	8	5	3	3	2
Class 4	2	7	12	2	0
Class 5	2	2	11	7	1

The teachers met together for the first time as a PLC in October 2009 and began to analyze the student writing data. Teachers identified weaknesses in student writing using charts that one teacher created listing year end benchmarks for content and organization, usage, sentence structure, and mechanics (Appendix I). Charts were created for grades three/four and five/six. Teachers referred to the student writing samples and indicated writing weaknesses on the charts. One chart was used for each class to make it more efficient for the teacher to identify weaknesses of the class rather than individual students. The areas of need identified by the teachers varied by class, but the main weaknesses that emerged in all classes included writing an interesting lead and closing,

staying on topic, expanding the use of complex and compound sentences, correctly using figurative language, formatting paragraphs, and using commas. Teachers identified these weaknesses as areas of need for most students in their classes and utilized this information to plan the unit. Some individual weaknesses were noted and teachers planned to address these needs through conferences. The results from the Cycle I analysis of student writing led to the PLC developing a unit lesson plan to implement a unit on realistic fiction in writer's workshop (Appendix J).

I observed the first meeting of the PLC as they began to develop the writer's workshop unit and noted my observations in the reflective journal kept throughout the study. My reflections included a list of what I can do to help these teachers to implement their unit plans. One entry included providing each classroom with the appropriate mentor texts. Mentor texts are books that can be used as models for teaching writing skills in a lesson. Calkins (2006) identifies some books that can be used for each writing skill. The teachers made a list of the books that would fit well into their units. A second entry was regarding scheduling time for the teachers to meet during the unit. I offered several suggestions including meeting before school in place of their regularly scheduled grade level meetings, which was the choice that the teachers decided would work the best. A third entry that I reflected on was my input into the unit plan. I questioned my leadership ability because I was not personally involved in its creation but allowed the teachers to take the lead in its development. I was an observer to this PLC meeting and did not feel the need to interrupt the flow of conversation among the teachers. This initial meeting led into Cycle II of the study. Cycle II was a continuation of the unit planning and observations conducted in each classroom during the implementation of the unit. It

also included interviews with each teacher about writer's workshop and how it is implemented in each of their classrooms.

Cycle II

Building a PLC (Part 2). Cycle II focused on the teacher's role in planning and implementing the writing unit of study. The second meeting of the PLC was held in October 2009. During this meeting the teachers created group norms and planned objectives for the unit. The main objective identified by the members of the PLC was to create a writing unit focused on realistic fiction (Appendix K). The PLC met four times during October, each for a length of about one hour, to create a unit of study to be implemented in their classrooms.

One of the first objectives of the PLC was to develop group norms. This was a strategy that I shared with the members from my research about PLCs. Group norms are identified as commitments held by each member of the PLC and can help clarify expectations, promote open dialogue, and serve as a powerful tool for holding members accountable (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Goleman, 2002; Lencioni, 2005). After this meeting, the PLC shared their list of norms with me. These included (a) Everyone will attend the meetings on time and prepared; (b) All teachers will contribute ideas and share in the work load; (c) If anyone has an issue or problem, they will share it with the group; and (d) All discussions will remain focused on student writing and writer's workshop. The teachers agreed to these norms and planned to review them at each meeting.

Observing writer's workshop. After the teachers planned the unit, they prepared lesson plans and implemented them in their classrooms. Unit implementation occurred

from November 2009 through December 2009. During the unit lessons, I observed each classroom three times. These observations were conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the unit of study. The third observation was during the writing celebration at the end of the unit. During the observations, except for the celebration, I was an observer and did not interact with the students or teachers during the lessons. Field notes from the observations included detailed descriptions of the teacher and student actions in the classroom as well as my reflections on the classroom practices and the development of the project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The observations revealed that all teachers were implementing writer's workshop according to the Calkins' (2006) Writer's Workshop model. All teachers began the lesson with a mini-lesson according to the unit plan. After the mini-lesson, the students returned to their desks or a quiet area of the room to write. Students were instructed to add to their writing based on the topic of the mini-lesson. As the students began to write, the teacher circulated around the room and ensured that the students were on task and answered any questions that individual students asked. During writing time, the teacher either worked on her piece of writing, conferenced with students or small groups, or continued to circulate to check in with individual students. All workshop sessions ended with the students coming together to review the objective of the mini-lesson and share writing.

My observation notes included descriptions of each lesson. To organize the notes, I looked for themes in the observations such as conferences, mini-lessons, writing strategies, and student-teacher interactions. Each lesson conducted during writer's workshop was organized the same way and began with a mini-lesson. The topics of the mini-lesson varied each day. During the lessons that I observed, the teachers introduced

strategies that writers use when writing realistic fiction. Some of the topics included: developing characters, creating story maps, writing good openings and closings, and adding details and figurative language. For all eight teachers, the mini-lessons took place in a corner of the classroom where students were seated on a carpet around an easel and the teacher's chair. During one lesson in a fifth grade classroom, the teacher led the mini-lesson and modeled how the students should use the strategy. The teacher followed the same model for all mini-lessons. In the other classrooms, the teachers followed similar methods for presenting the mini-lessons.

During my observations in the fifth grade classroom, I noted that the teacher repeated the learning point several times before sending the students to their writing. As the students wrote, the teacher briefly circulated and checked with students. She asked students questions about where they were in the process of writing and what they were adding to their writing. Once she was assured that all students were on task and writing, she began to conference with individual students. Conferencing will be detailed in the next section. In one third grade classroom, all students were engaged in the mini-lesson as witnessed by them raising their hands and participating in the discussion about figurative language. Each student wrote an example of a simile on a note card and posted it to the list on the chart paper. The teacher instructed the students to read the list and choose one that they could add to their piece of writing. The students were eager to return to their writing pieces to add the similes.

One goal of the writing workshop was to have students write for forty consecutive minutes per day. At the conclusion of writing time, each teacher would call the students together to review the lesson. Calling the students to the carpet allowed all students to be

close to the teacher. Children also sat next to their writing partners, which gave them the opportunity to share their writing with someone. The writing partners stayed the same throughout the writing unit. This gave each student a chance to learn from their own writing as well as their partner's writing.

Two components appeared to be key to the workshop model. The first component was one-on-one writing conferences. The second was the mini-lessons. The next sections will detail the findings about these two components.

Conferencing with students. Many hours of classroom observation were spent observing student-teacher writing conferences. It was during this time that I got an inside glimpse as to how teachers work with students on the writing process. For example, during my observations of a fifth grade teacher, I observed how she organized her conferences with students. During one mini-lesson, the teacher taught about the structure of a conference and shared examples of how a successful conference could be conducted. Each conference began with the teacher asking the student, "What are you working on as a writer?" The student was then encouraged to discuss that writing strategy. Some of the strategies discussed included adding details, making a picture for the reader, and adding figurative language to make the writing more clear and detailed. By looking at the writing and talking to the student, the teacher made a decision about what to teach the writer. Once the teacher decided on what to teach the student, she then worked with the student to model the teaching point. This included reviewing the story and asking questions about how the student can add more information to each section of the story. The teacher used questions that the student could ask himself about any written piece. Some examples of questions that the teacher asked students included: What is your solution going to be?

How are you going to help her? How do all of these things help the setting of your story? What are you saying in your story? What is the main point you want to make? These guiding questions helped the student to clarify the story.

The teacher in each classroom focused writing conferences on student needs. Sometimes, a student would decide to add more detail to their writing and the teacher would ask questions about areas that were unclear to direct the student to the areas where more detail could be added. Another conference involved a student who was having difficulty focusing in on a small moment. The story that she was sharing was about four different pieces of her vacation. The teacher led the student through a discussion about which activity was the most important and would offer the reader the best picture of the vacation. The student left the conference with a focus for her entire writing piece. Although the conferences followed a prescribed format, the focus varied widely according to the student writer's needs. It was imperative that the teacher maintained focus during the conference and listened to the student.

During my observations of a third grade classroom, the teacher always used positive body language, such as leaning forward and maintaining eye contact, to signal to the student her engagement in the conversation. The teacher and student were seated at a table next to each other looking at the piece of writing between them. The conference looked and sounded like a conversation about the writing and both the teacher and the student were engaged. Depending on the situation of the conference and the needs of each individual student, the teacher's response was individualized. Most of the time, the student was very clear about the area where he needed help. Other times, the student was

unsure of what would work best. It was during these conferences that the teacher would choose a focus on a specific need that the teacher identified in the student's writing.

Two teachers were present in one third grade classroom. Each teacher sat at a different table with a different student and responded to student writing. Again, each teacher was completely engaged in the conference and asked each student questions about the writing. During the conferences, the rest of the students in the classroom were working on their writing. At times, students would talk with each other quietly and then return to their task. The one remark that I noted in all of my observations was that at no time did students seem to be off task in the classrooms. Students were excited to be writing. Every so often, students might get stuck but would either speak with other students or look through their writing notebooks for ideas. Students were aware of the expectations during the workshop and many were dismayed when the teacher called them to the group for the lesson conclusion. In one classroom, the class groaned when a timer indicated writing time had ended.

A difficult piece of conferencing as indicated by all of the teachers involved was documenting each conference for progress and assessment. Each teacher came up with their own procedure for this. One teacher created stickers with four areas to record what the student is (a) trying to do, (b) doing well, (c) the teaching point, and (d) future points. During the conference, the teacher recorded information under each section. After the conference, she placed each individual student's sticker in a folder assigned to that student. At report card time and during parent – teacher conferences, the teacher could refer to the progression of student writing through these conference notes.

The third grade teachers all kept notes in a similar way. They used a clipboard with a list of the students in their class. When they conferenced with a student, they would note the date and topic of the conference. This also allowed them a way to ensure they met with each student during the writing process.

Teaching the mini-lesson. Conferences focus the teaching points of individual learners, but mini-lessons bring the students together to learn a new technique or listen to the teacher share a strategy. Mini-lessons usually occur at the beginning of writers' workshop and are tailored to the specific needs of the class. At the beginning of writers' workshop, one teacher described that she kept close to the teaching topics that were listed in *Units of Study*, but as she conferenced more with her students, she was able to tailor the lesson to students' specific needs. The topics of mini-lessons "typically fall into one of the following categories: procedural, writer's process, qualities of good writing, and editing skills" (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, pp. 10-11). Mini-lessons take on the form of discussions with the whole class. I observed several mini-lessons that focused on procedural issues, such as peer conferencing and student-teacher conferencing. The teacher shared information with the students about what each conference would cover and modeled a conference. Another focus of mini-lessons is the demonstration of writing strategies and process. These lessons ranged from choosing, organizing, or exploring a topic to using figurative language to add details to writing. During these lessons teachers shared their own writing or used literature to demonstrate specific writing strategies (Calkins, 1994; Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). As the writers progress toward publishing a piece, revision and editing skills become the focus of mini-lessons.

Each mini-lesson followed the same prescribed format, including connection, teaching, active engagement, and link. The teacher described the connection of why the instruction was important and how it related to what they were doing. During the mini-lesson, the teacher taught through demonstration and modeling. After students were taught a lesson, they were given a brief time for active engagement and practice. The final piece required the teacher to link the information in the lesson to what the students were writing at that time (Calkins, 2006).

During each lesson that I observed, the teachers began by saying to students, “Today, we are going to learn about...” The fourth grade teacher shared, “Even though you repeat it four times during the course of the lesson...as a teacher, I find that the days that I have not been as clear with the teaching objective are the days that, when the students get back to their seats, they really are kind of scrambling.”

Using literature during the mini-lesson can be a powerful tool for students. The teachers shared books with students and asked the students to focus on the writers’ craft. Some picture books that the teachers incorporated in lessons included *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen, which is a terrific example of the use of poetry in writing, and *The Witches* by Roald Dahl, which opens with an exciting lead that peaks the interest of the reader. Other mentor texts included *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco which illustrates a character’s struggle, and *Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds* by Cynthia Rylant to share examples of imagery. Calkins (2006) offers many examples of mentor texts throughout *Units of Study*, but the teachers also added their own selections to the list of mentor texts for their lessons.

The mini-lesson is the only piece of writer's workshop that resembles traditional teaching. That is true until the end of the mini-lesson. At this point "students [would] return to their ongoing writing projects, with the focus once again on the goals and intentions they've set forth for themselves" (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, p. 12).

The information and descriptions collected in Cycle II were reviewed and used to plan the interview questions for the focus group meeting of Cycle III. These descriptions of classroom observations and discussions with the teachers led to the development of a training protocol for writer's workshop implementation at Brookside School.

Cycle III

Cycle III was conducted as an extension of the analysis on teacher perceptions of PLCs in Cycle I. This cycle occurred after the unit of study was presented in the classrooms and students completed a realistic fiction writing post-assessment. Cycle III occurred from January 2010 through April 2010. Cycle III included a focus group interview with all teachers involved in the study. The focus group questions centered on the teachers' perceptions of the writer's workshop process and the training they received, including their participation in the PLC. Cycle III also included analysis of student writing achievement.

Interviewing the teachers as a focus group. I prepared for the focus group meeting by scheduling a time that was convenient for all teachers to attend. The focus group occurred on April 13, 2010 after school. All teachers involved in the study attended except one. I began the focus group by asking all teachers to state their agreement to being recorded. The meeting was recorded and transcribed soon after the meeting. I prepared for the meeting by outlining some topics that I wanted to cover including the

writer's workshop process, lesson planning and preparing, and teacher training. The discussion also included the teacher's perceptions of how their teaching has changed and their perceptions of participation in a PLC. The meeting lasted for one hour and all teachers shared during the discussion. I kept my comments and questions to a minimum so that the teachers could lead the discussion. I opened the discussion by asking teachers to share their perceptions of writer's workshop and what they believed to be the positive elements of implementing it in their classrooms. One teacher started the conversation describing writer's workshop in her classroom, "The kids love it, but I am not seeing the carryover to NJASK. Oh my gosh, when we do the timed prompts, I am still seeing 'Once upon a time...'" Another teacher responded, "I gave a prompt the other day and the student carried over what I just taught them the day before but nothing else." Another teacher responded,

As teachers, we beat ourselves up. I have to keep reminding myself that they are third graders. It's going to take a while to get it. There's only so much we can do.

At least they have something. We have to pat ourselves on the back.

One teacher expressed, "Their [students'] writing is definitely better since the fall. Their brainstorming is better. Another teacher added, "I see more skills, but they are sometimes not retaining them. They need a lot of reminders." The support that the teachers offered each other was evident in the candid discussion.

The discussion also included questions about the training teachers received, which included the formal training from a consultant from Columbia Teacher's College, and the informal training gained from observing other teachers' lessons. One teacher shared, "I think the best part of the training was the afternoons where we got to meet as a team and

create a plan. We would organize the first days of the unit together.” A second teacher explained, “The mini lessons were good to plan with each other. At least you had those to start with. I would have liked to see more student examples of each genre.” One teacher shared her frustration with how the district has trained in the past,

It is important to have an actual trainer who has years of experience. I went to Columbia but I don't feel comfortable training. In the district, it seems that if they train you once, they think you are an expert. There are no refreshers, no collaboration. Don't drop us now that we had the first year. We need refresher courses. We can't remember everything. I didn't learn everything the first time. I am enjoying going through it again.

Although the teachers received training, one teacher stated, “I didn't feel prepared this year. I think having time to work with peers is important and helpful. I wasn't alone. I've taken courses from people and I am worried that our training won't be the same.” This teacher was referring to the training that the third grade teachers received this year through a representative from Columbia Writing Program. As a fourth grade teacher, she wants to receive the same training for the fourth grade teachers next year. One option that teachers do have is to observe other classrooms. The teachers in this PLC took full advantage of this opportunity and observed at least one other writing lesson. The teachers were interested in observing how the other teachers used the time during writer's workshop to conference with students. Many of the teachers stated that it was difficult to keep track of the conferences. One teacher said, “I tried to keep track of conferences in a log. It was hard to keep up.” One teacher even stated, “During drafting time, I want them [the students] to write. I don't want to interrupt them.” The teachers again offered their

strategies for conferencing with students. They came to the conclusion that it may not look the same in each classroom.

One topic that the teachers discussed was the implementation of the program in grades three through five utilizing the same materials, *Units of Study* by Lucy Calkins and the mentor texts suggested through the program. One teacher asked the question, “Should mentor texts be assigned to a grade level?” Another teacher responded, “I used to think that. But if you are looking at it for how the author is using the first paragraph, it may be okay.” A third teacher suggested, “Mini lessons or small groups may bump the lesson up or down. *Those Shoes* from a fifth grade perspective may be rather different from a third grade perspective.” All teachers will be using the *Units of Study* as a guide, but the district curriculum has identified specific units to be taught at each grade level. One teacher responded to this discussion, “I don’t know how much everyone follows the *Units of Study*. The program is grades three to five so it may be repetitive.” Another teacher said, “I began the program by sticking very closely with the program, but now I am able to better come up with my own mini-lessons that better match my students.” The teacher continued,

Lucy [Calkins] regrets writing them [*Units of Study*]. She said there is so much detail in there and a teacher could use the mini-lessons and never come up with their own. I remember that she shared a story with us at the training. She talked about one teacher who used the lesson and began, “When my son came home...” and one student raised his hand and said, “You don’t have a son.” You could use the books verbatim, but now I don’t use them that way. It has to be personal.

The meeting ended with a discussion of what the teachers felt they needed from me, as the principal, and the district. Overwhelmingly, the teachers requested more time for collaboration. One teacher said, “I would love feedback from fourth grade next year.” The teachers shared that they find the resources helpful and would like to be able to get new resources as the need arises through the program. For example, they would like to get new mentor texts as they discover appropriate titles for teaching specific skills. The teachers shared positive feelings about the implementation of writer’s workshop as well as working with other teachers in the PLC model. They also offered some suggestions for the future. These suggestions were incorporated into the training protocol designed for use in Cycle IV including scheduling time, building teams of teachers who will benefit from each other, and providing the necessary data and resources so that the teachers can implement the program effectively. Providing training for the teachers and time to observe each other is another factor that must be considered in the training protocol. These two areas were described by the teachers as essential to proper implementation. The training protocol will be described in detail in Chapter 5 as a recommendation for implementing new programs.

Post-assessing student writing. The second part of Cycle III included analysis of student writing achievement. Teachers compared each student’s pre-assessment writing to post-assessment writing and identified weaknesses in student writing using the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric. The same protocol for assessment was followed as in Cycle I, with double blind scoring. Table 3 shows the writing achievement growth for students in each of the study’s classrooms. The number of students with adequate and strong command of writing increased from the pre to post writing

assessment. The number of students with a strong command of writing grew from four students to twenty-four students. Fewer students fell into the inadequate command column indicating that writing was improving.

Table 3
Post-assessment Writing Scores per Class

<i>Score</i>	Inadequate Command 1	Limited Command 2	Partial Command 3	Adequate Command 4	Strong Command 5
Class 3A	1	2	7	6	0
Class 3B	1	5	5	4	6
Class 3C	0	8	7	5	1
Class 3D	2	0	7	4	8
Class 4	0	4	11	6	2
Class 5	0	1	3	12	7

Note. For teacher 3A, two students moved during the course of the unit and are therefore not included in the post-assessment data. For teacher 3B, one student was not present for the post-assessment and is not included in the data. For teacher 3C, one student moved during the course of the unit and is not included in the post-assessment data.

Table 4 shows the percentage of students whose writing scores increased on the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric.

Table 4
Percentages of Student Writing Gains

	Percentages of students whose score increased one point	Percentages of students whose score increased two points	Percentages of students whose score increased three points
Class 3A	43.8%	12.5%	0%
Class 3B	42.9%	28.6%	4.8%
Class 3C	61.9%	9.5%	0%
Class 3D	23.8%	52.4%	9.5%
Class 4	56.5%	4.3%	0%
Class 5	52.1%	21.7%	0%

Note. The percentages indicate the percentage of students whose writing scores increased at least one point on the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric rounded to the nearest tenth.

Overall, the majority of students in these five classrooms improved their writing achievement. The teachers were presented with this chart and shared their perceptions of student progress. Teacher 3A was not as pleased with her percentages as the other teachers. When she compared her students' scores with the other classes, only 56.3% of her students improved from the pre-assessment to post-assessment. She stated,

I want to go back and look at the students who did not increase in their writing and see why. These are students that I would want to follow next year to see how

they improve. What did I not do with them that I was able to do for the other students?

Teacher 3D was pleased with her students' results especially the students who increased by three rubric points. She said,

The students whose scores increased by three points were students who came to me in September without being able to write a paragraph. I am so happy to see how much their writing has improved, but it took a lot of time and focus.

The other four teachers were satisfied with the results and felt compelled to explain their percentages. One teacher reminded me, "Writer's workshop asks students to spend days or weeks working on a piece. We are assessing student writing achievement through a timed writing prompt." This reflection is positive because the teachers can look back at their teaching and student learning and can improve on their results. They all stated that they want more students to improve in their scores next year.

Cycle IV

Developing a training protocol. As a result of Cycle III, a training protocol was designed for the implementation of writer's workshop in fourth grade classrooms. Cycle IV involved building a PLC of teachers to implement the protocol for the first unit of study of writer's workshop from September 2010 through November 2010. The sample of teachers for this cycle included the fourth grade team at Brookside Elementary School, purposively chosen because they were implementing Calkins' (2006) Writer's Workshop for the first time. This sample included eight teachers and six classes of students. Two classes included special education students and two teachers were assigned to each of these classes. One of the classrooms that has a regular education teacher and a special

education teacher had been involved in the original PLC of this study. The teachers formed a PLC and began meeting in September 2010 to create group norms, identify objectives for the unit, prepare unit plans, and analyze student writing. Data collection included unit and lesson plans from each teacher and student pre-assessment and post-assessments. Observations were also conducted during this time to validate that lesson plans were being followed. The training protocol is detailed in Chapter 5.

Interviewing the teachers about PLCs. Interviews were conducted with each teacher from the original sample and the fourth grade teacher sample from Cycle IV at the conclusion of this study to determine teacher perceptions of how effectively writer's workshop was implemented and the extent that their participation in a PLC helped with the effectiveness of the implementation. The interviews were thirty minutes in length and were recorded and transcribed (See Appendix F for Interview Protocol). The interview protocol consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions designed to elicit as much information as possible to answer the research question about how their participation in a PLC affected their ability to deliver writer's workshop. Specifically, teachers were asked about the skills and support that they received from the PLC and how that support helped during times when the work in the classroom did not go as planned. One third grade special education teacher responded,

The support and communication within the grade level was one of the most valuable aspects of the PLC. We always found time to discuss the progress of each unit, whether it was during grade level meetings, prior to school starting or after hours. Also, the demo lessons and the debriefing afterwards were useful to discuss the progress of the program. The debriefing allowed us time to reflect on

our teaching, and how we can implement the strategies taught by the instructor into our mini-lessons. It was a self-reflective tool we were all able to learn from.

A third grade teacher also shared,

I think the PLCs were extremely helpful in implementing writer's workshop. It is always helpful to discuss a new program with other educated professionals, in a setting where we can answer each other's questions. It is also very interesting to work with others to develop units of study and view different writing lessons from different perspectives. Each teacher has their own style of teaching, and developing lessons with those teachers allows us to see the unit through a different set of eyes.

Another third grade teacher shared, "I don't think the transition into teaching writer's workshop fulltime would have been as successful had we tried to do so individually."

Every teacher that I interviewed responded with a similar response. A fourth grade teacher said, "Writer's workshop is a very flexible and individualized way to teach writing. It is important to work as a community to implement it similarly on each grade level to ensure vertical alignment."

Because the fourth grade teachers had already worked together as a grade level team for the past year, they were at ease with each other. . Some questions addressed this level of comfort and how it may have contributed to their ability to teach writer's workshop more effectively. One teacher found the support that she needed during the PLC,

I never felt a lack of support from our grade level team. The opposite actually. I think we are all in the same boat, sailing along and learning from one another and

hoping we can raise our students to be better writers. For instance, when I was having difficulty matching mentor texts with the mini lessons, I met with [a teacher] and she let me borrow books from her collection.

A third grade teacher responded, “There was not a time when I felt threatened to discuss any concerns regarding the program. We were all learning this together and we all needed to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the program.” In response to a question about the comfort level that teachers felt in the PLC in regards to asking for help when something was not working as expected, a fourth grade teacher shared,

Definitely [I felt comfortable]. I had no problem discussing problems I was having with my colleagues, and to my relief, I was either able to get good ideas from what was working for them, or it turned out that we were all struggling with similar areas. In that case, we worked together to figure out new ways to ensure our students were understanding our objectives.

Other teachers shared this same experience with working in their PLCs.

One question asked the teachers if they learned any specific skills from their participation in the PLC that they were able to use in their classrooms to inform writing instruction. Several teachers responded that getting tips for running conferences during writer’s workshop was very beneficial, specifically conferencing questions to use with struggling writers. One fourth grade teacher said,

I learned that if a teacher doesn’t write with the students, the program will not work. Having a general outline was very helpful, but we all still needed to add our own individual touches to our writer’s notebooks so that we could show our students how we, too, were a part of the writing process.

Another teacher commented about the helpfulness of the unit outline and said, “It allowed me to feel confident in the instruction that I was giving, especially knowing others were on a similar schedule teaching the same or similar lessons.” All of the teachers commented on the ability to get ideas from each other to enhance their teaching in their classrooms.

Another skill that teachers felt they improved on through the PLC was learning how to manage the lesson time. This was supported with classroom observations of other teachers. One teacher responded,

It really helped me to organize my time when I saw [teacher A] conference with her students. She organized the time into five minute intervals and met with four students during the writing time. I don't think I watch the clock enough and end up spending the entire writing time with one student.

On the question about whether any changes in organization are necessary to help the PLC succeed, every teacher had the same answer: time. Teachers desired (or saw the need for) time to plan, time to meet with other teachers, time to deliver the writer's workshop lessons, and time to observe other classes. Teachers all agreed that they have the material resources they need, but not enough time in the day to plan writing conferences with individual students and create mini-lessons.

The final question that I asked the teachers was if they believe that their participation in the PLC had an effect on student writing achievement. Every single teacher said that they did think working in a PLC had an effect, but no teacher offered data to support that. Comments included:

I believe that my participation has aided my students because it has aided me.

Writing should be daily, consistent, and structured. All of which students need. It has helped me become organized and it has given me clear writing objectives and goals. They see their finished products and are proud. They aren't scared to write and they don't complain. They are excited to write!

One teacher did compare her students' samples from September to mid-year and stated,

I saw that my students not only wrote more, but they added much more detail, dialogue, and had much better organization! I think students succeed with this program because they love having the power to choose what they are writing about every day.

One fourth grade teacher responded that she did not know if her participation in the PLC directly affected student writing but it did affect her confidence in teaching, which had an impact on her students' writing achievement. I feel that this one teacher summed up the PLC participation with this comment:

I really believe that the students' writing achievement has improved because of the PLC. We have really been able to create strong writing units of study with pre and post assessments to gauge student improvement. We were also able to eliminate items and strategies that were not useful to us and come up with a strong timeline of useful activities to teach specific genres of writing. The timeline of activities, lists of mentor texts for each unit, and specific activities and lesson plans were very important and have really helped us to become more effective teachers. The time our PLC spends together has been very productive.

Utilizing the data obtained and analyzed from all cycles, discussion regarding the study's research questions and recommendations are provided in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Recommendations

This study sought to answer the question of how PLCs affect the implementation of writer's workshop as measured by student writing achievement, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions. Student writing achievement was measured to illustrate potential benefits of PLC involvement. The study also investigated the principal's role in the formation and sustainability of the PLC, including providing the necessary resources. This chapter will outline the benefits of PLCs as perceived by teachers and administrators. Student writing achievement scores will also be discussed as one possible benefit of engagement in a PLC while implementing writer's workshop. A training model for implementing new curricular programs at Brookside, designed as a result of this study, will be presented and discussed.

Benefits of a PLC and Writer's Workshop

When teachers work together, focused on what students are learning rather than what they are teaching, positive results are achieved. There were several benefits that were revealed through this study. Benefits identified by the teachers included: increased support from their colleagues which resulted in stronger teams, recognition of their leadership voice within the school, a checks and balances system of student results, and the attainment of new skills and strategies. Each and every teacher who participated in a PLC stated that they would continue to work with their colleagues in the same manner. As the principal, I became the guide of the PLC in that I encouraged the teachers to share ideas and strategies that would move the group forward in their thinking. It was very easy to retreat to the usual complaints about students not progressing in their writing. By

coaching and asking questions to create a culture of inquiry among the group, I was able to guide the group to move toward the discussions that would take student learning and teacher learning to a new level.

The primary benefit that the PLC teachers identified was the team atmosphere from which they gained support and decreased their sense of isolation. Based on the data collected, the PLC had a positive effect on the teachers and students as it related to writer's workshop implementation in their classrooms. Teachers were excited and eager to work with each other to plan the unit and implement the lessons in their classrooms and the reactions and writing improvement that they witnessed in the students helped to increase the enthusiasm for the program and the PLC. Findings revealed that participation in the PLC improved teachers' ability to deliver writer's workshop. Teachers felt that they could rely on each other to discuss any concerns they were having with instruction and student learning and were able to implement suggestions provided by the other members of the PLC. This was a change from how previous team meetings were conducted. Initially, the teachers wanted to return to business as usual and discuss field trips and class activities. Through guiding the development of group norms and returning the group to those norms at each of the PLC meetings, I was able to refocus the group to the task of the PLC, which was implementing writer's workshop and writing instruction. I began to realize the effect that my leadership had on the teachers. When I began this project, I identified myself as a teacher and now I am a leader. My leadership journey will be detailed later in this chapter.

When teachers worked together to assess student learning, a system was created to ensure that teachers were truly assessing students based on agreed upon benchmarks.

This is the second benefit that became apparent through this study. Teachers were given the opportunity to hone their assessment skills when they worked with a partner teacher to score student writing. Teachers conversed about the writing and worked toward consensus based on the New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric. To minimize subjectivity in scoring, the identities of the writers were masked and adherence to rubric criteria was emphasized. The conversations about student writing changed when teachers were comparing student writing to an agreed upon standard, the rubric. Teachers were no longer talking about giving students a grade; they were looking at assessing skills and discussing how they could help the students to improve. The student data provided to the teachers through this process guided their daily lesson plans.

A third benefit of the PLC was that all teachers gained an understanding of their role in the decision making process. This awareness created leadership within the school and is an essential piece of the success of PLCs. The collaboration of professionals is a key characteristic of PLCs. If teachers do not feel that they have control over and responsibility for shared decisions, then the PLC will not implement changes into instructional strategies or practices. By building leaders within the teaching staff, the school becomes stronger with regards to decision making and planning. Throughout the research, it has been shown that by building leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning, schools will become learning organizations and student achievement improves (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hollins, McIntyre et al., 2004). As the leader in the building, I must provide the resources necessary for this teacher leadership to develop. Throughout this study, I examined my leadership and how it evolved.

Every teacher noted the benefit of attaining new skills and strategies from working with other professionals. In this study, the teachers shared that they attained the skills necessary to implement the writer's workshop in their classroom, such as developing a unit plan and identifying areas of need in student writing. Conducting writing conferences and creating the unit plan were areas where teachers collaborated the most during the implementation of this program. The writing conference was the one area where teachers initially felt the least prepared. They utilized the PLC to come up with ideas for conferencing with their students. If a teacher was having difficulty with how to conference with a student, she could discuss it with her team and together the team would brainstorm solutions.

Creating the unit plan with other teachers helped teachers to grasp the skills and strategies important for the unit. Several teachers stated that without the PLC, they would have been unsure of where to start when writing a unit plan. By working together the teachers created a unit plan that was the basis for the realistic fiction unit. Teachers were free to adjust the unit plan to meet the specific needs of their classes, but all teachers followed the basic unit plan. A similar process was employed for all aspects of the writer's workshop.

The increase in student writing achievement observed during the study is also noteworthy. The primary goal of the PLC/writer's workshop was for students to become better writers. Teachers perceived that their efforts were working and that the students were becoming more proficient writers. This perception encouraged them to work closer with their PLC and to demonstrate increased enthusiasm for implementing writer's workshop. This enthusiasm increased as the unit progressed. Increases in student writing

proficiency and teachers' perception of the efficacy of their instructional efforts are very significant findings. These findings point to the need for future research that seeks to clarify the nature of the relationship between writer's workshop and writing proficiency.

Training Model for Program Implementation

Throughout this research I reflected on the information that I obtained from the surveys, interviews, and observations to design a training model to use when implementing new curricular programs at Brookside School and to articulate my role as the building leader in that model. The model includes plans for choosing participants, scheduling meetings, formatting meetings, and providing resources.

In this study, the teachers volunteered to become a PLC focused on writing instruction. Teachers had already identified an area of need and focus for their PLC. The group makeup of the PLC is extremely important to its success and is the first step in building an effective PLC. Teachers must have a willingness to work together on a project and should have similar learning objectives for their students. In this study, teachers volunteered to become a member of the PLC and the focus had already been identified. These teachers had an interest in improving their students' writing and were willing to work together to create a unit and implement it. In other PLCs, teachers may need to come together to decide on the focus of student learning. In order to build the rapport needed to create a true PLC, during the initial meeting the teachers must create group norms to be sure that everyone is on the same page with regards to teaching and learning and group participation. The leader's responsibility is to create the environment for PLCs to develop and encourage participation. Conversely, a leader should never force someone to become a part of a group because it could have negative effects on the group.

Bringing a change to the culture of the school requires emotional intelligence on the part of the leader. One of the most important tasks of a leader is building a team. Each member of the group must have the goal of the group as its priority. Personal gain and success should come behind the team's success. By building the best team with people who are willing to work toward the team's goal, the PLC will be successful and sustainable. In this study, the group was comprised of veteran teachers and first year teachers; however, every teacher was willing to become a part of the group. The mix of experience among the teachers of this PLC fostered a type of mentorship for the younger teachers, but the younger teachers brought a sense of excitement to the group.

The second step to building an effective PLC is creating time within the daily schedule. However, incentives for meeting before school or after school will also work. In this study, as the teachers worked together and realized the benefits of the PLC, they found time to meet. This study showed that teachers talked about student writing any time they were together, including during their lunch times. The reason for this was because the teachers were excited about the changes they were seeing in their students and because they built a community of learners among themselves and wanted to share their progress and seek answers to their questions. When the teachers would see me, they were eager to tell me the progress of the students. When I visited the classrooms during writer's workshop, the students were excited as well. They were eager to share their stories. This was especially true during writing celebrations. I attended each class' writing celebration where the students would share their finished products with each other, other classes of students, or with their parents. They were proud to share their hard work and they truly believed they were authors.

Developing group rules is the third step of building an effective PLC. The members agreed, for example, that the meeting time was to be spent on the unit of study and student learning and results. But just developing norms is not enough. The norms will prove valuable when someone goes against one and the group reacts. If the group just lets it go, the norms have no power. If the group responds and works with the person who committed the error, this will make the group stronger. Thus, building relationships is the key to a successful PLC. Teachers must feel safe to enforce norms of behavior and share successes and weaknesses within the group setting. The group, in turn, is responsible for providing support and strategies to help each team member. The teachers in this PLC were willing to develop the norms and were agreeable to the norms that they created. However, there was no need to enforce the norms during the time that this group of teachers worked together. They shared that each member of the group was valued and respected and therefore, the group worked well together. This was a relatively short period of time and the teachers had already built a relationship prior to this project, which may have played a part in the cohesiveness of the group. This appears to be an important step in team building because members were able to state what working in a group meant to them. If the group did not complete this task, members may have struggled with understanding the expectations of the other group members.

The group must focus teaching and learning on common objectives. This is the fourth step of effective PLCs. In the case of this study, the common objective for the PLC was creating a unit of writing on realistic fiction. As a group, the PLC created a unit of study focused on student learning toward that objective. An outline form of the unit of study was created during the meetings (Appendix J). Teachers focused on their student

writing as they organized the unit of study. Lessons were designed to include writing a good opening and closing and using details and figurative language in the piece because those deficiencies were identified in the pre-assessment. In order to assess whether the unit of study had a positive effect on student learning, the PLC developed common assessments. These assessments were designed at the beginning of the unit so the group knew the end point of the plan.

The fifth step is to provide the necessary resources, which include data, curricular resources, teaching and classroom supplies, and appropriate professional development. Without each of these pieces, the PLC may not have the information that it needs to be effective. Providing the PLC with the necessary data or with the strategies to obtain the data is essential. If teachers do not know their students' academic levels, then they cannot focus on results. Prior to the current superintendent who began his tenure in Monroe Township in 2009, data and student achievement was not a major focus of the school district. Currently data analysis and utilization is the number one focus of the district. All decisions made at the district level are focused on what is best for student learning. Teachers did not have access to student achievement data prior to this school year unless they requested it. During this school year, all teachers were presented with a data picture of the school which included all formative and summative assessment results for the students. Additionally, quarterly benchmark meetings are now held between school administration and each teacher. These meetings are used to determine the effectiveness of their instruction by analyzing that data. In particular, this PLC received data for each of their students including NJASK scores, previous writing pieces, report cards, and information provided from the previous teacher. The teachers pre-assessed each child to

identify the areas of strength and weakness for each child. All of this information came into play as teachers created the unit plan and organized conferences with individual students.

The principal must be a part of the PLC or the PLC may not succeed. The last two sections of the survey focused on supportive conditions for PLCs, including relationships and structures. These sections offered me feedback of my current level of supportiveness and how my leadership affects the development of a PLC. The survey showed that the teachers disagreed that there were resource people available to provide expertise and support for continuous learning. As a PLC, they developed the skills necessary to become those resource people. Teachers also shared that they did not believe the structures were in place to support PLCs, such as time, scheduling, fiscal resources, and data. As the leader, I made these conditions a priority of my work. I organized the schedule so that the teachers could work together on district mandated professional development days, of which there were three full days and two half days, and during grade level meetings. I also allotted funds for supplies and resources necessary for teacher learning as well as resources for the classroom. These areas are those that principals can concentrate on to support the teachers as they develop and sustain the PLC. If teachers believe that these areas are not addressed, it could lead to the unsuccessful implementation of the PLC.

Leadership

Throughout this action research project, I examined my growth as a leader. At the same time that I began the doctoral program, I acquired the position of elementary school principal at Brookside Elementary School. I used my coursework as an avenue to build relationships with staff and develop procedures and practices that moved the building to

my vision of shared leadership and collaboration. In the beginning of my tenure, I was a more transactional leader. I knew decisions had to be made, so I made them. As I have grown as a leader, I have become more transactional and more collaborative in my decision making. At the end of these three years, I have a staff that is committed to me, the shared vision, and the students. I will continue this journey with them as we strive to become a better, more effective, learning organization.

A major part of being a transformational leader is building a culture of collaboration to move the organization toward the vision and create a culture of change. In *Leading in a Culture of Change*, Fullan (2001) describes a framework for leadership and how principals

can become more effective – much more effective – by focusing on a small number of core aspects of leadership and by developing a new mind-set about the leader’s responsibility to himself or herself and to those with whom he or she works. (p. 2)

During this study, my focus was on supporting the teachers as professionals so that they could create a successful learning plan to improve student writing. This support came from information on building PLCs, time and scheduling, and providing resources. PLCs focus on implementing a change and focus on results. Leading by creating a culture of collaboration was my goal throughout the study. Teachers come to their positions with a wealth of knowledge and each of us has strengths and weaknesses. Through the team building process, these strengths and weaknesses can be identified and the group members can work together to fill the gaps of knowledge and skills. This collaboration is one of the major goals and benefits of PLCs.

I entered this study with a vision of a group of teachers working together to implement writer's workshop with a focus on improving student writing. I achieved that vision because it was clearly communicated to the stakeholders and the stakeholders held the same vision. A vision is "a clear sense of purpose [that] is vital to productivity and especially to innovation, that leaders invigorate performance and inspire commitment to change by engaging their people in the pursuit of shared goals" (Evans, 1996, pp. 17-18). Once the leader has developed the image, it must be expressed, explained, and extended to others (Wren, 1995). Through communication with teachers, students, and parents, the vision is shared with the community. In order to achieve the vision, the other stakeholders in the school must be aware and agree with the vision. Transformational leaders are leaders with a vision and a plan to meet the vision (Burns, 2003). My plan included creating a team of teachers to lead the way in implementing writer's workshop. The goal was successfully completed as the teachers created the unit plan and are now sharing that plan with other teachers not a part of the original PLC. As a result of this study, these teachers have become leaders within the school community and are promoting the PLC model and writer's workshop as a means to improve student writing.

Action research involves reflection in order to build on the successes of the action. Schön (1987) defines reflective practice as a dialogue of thinking and doing through which one becomes more skillful. Reflecting on past experiences, while keeping the vision in focus, should inform all decisions. Throughout this research project, I spent many hours reflecting on my leadership of the development of the PLCs. As the principal of the school, I began the change process of incorporating PLCs to implement writer's workshop. As a result of the project, I am a more confident leader and I am aware of the

strengths of my team. I became aware that I am not the sole giver of knowledge. Each teacher brought a body of knowledge about students, writing, and teaching. I learned that it was not always necessary for me to make the decision. As a PLC, the group could discuss alternative ways of implementing conferences in order to build upon each other's knowledge. This practice improved each teacher's ability to effectively teach the students. A leader must continue to develop ones' strengths, but also improve weaknesses. One way to improve is to continue to research and reflect on new ideas and strategies. Through professional development, I continue to hone my skills as a leader.

Change is an important issue in Monroe Township. During the past two years, the district retained a new superintendent and a new assistant superintendent and their vision is moving the district forward. With change come new initiatives. The implementation of writer's workshop came as a result of the initiative to increase student language arts literacy test scores. The teachers identified that student writing was weak and investigated programs to strengthen that weakness. Writer's workshop was the result of these discussions. A leader is responsible for guiding those change initiatives and for providing the necessary resources and support for those initiatives to occur and build.

The PLC created in this study is the guiding coalition that will bring about the necessary change of improved student writing achievement in Brookside School. Groups of teachers working together focused on student learning, collaboration, and results will move the school forward as a learning organization and ensure the success of the students. My role as the leader in the building is to provide the resources, guidance, and support for the teachers and staff to focus their attention to student learning and achievement.

Summary and Recommendations

This study offered a description of the effects a PLC had on the implementation of writer's workshop as measured by student writing achievement, teacher perceptions, and administrator perceptions. The student writing analyzed through this study did improve. However, the improvement cannot be directly correlated to the PLC or the implementation of writer's workshop. The teacher's perceptions of the improvement of student writing showed that their excitement and preparation of the writing unit through the PLC participation created an excitement for the students as they wrote their realistic fiction pieces. The specific benefits that the teachers described included support from their colleagues as they worked together and the knowledge of all of the teachers as they implemented a new program. Teachers' perceptions described in the previous chapters showed that they developed skills and strategies for implementing writer's workshop. Throughout the study, I identified those changes in the school organization, schedule, structure and resources necessary to build and sustain PLCs. As a result of the study, my leadership grew and collaboration amongst staff increased, which in turn created more leaders within the school. The creation of PLCs benefits the teachers in the support that they need to continue to improve their teaching practice for the benefit of student learning. As a result of this study, my recommendations include creating a schedule so that teachers can come together regularly to discuss student writing and create unit plans with a focus on clear and consistent learning goals. Another recommendation is for the leader to offer support to teachers through educational resources, such as journals and guides that can be used to develop lessons. Necessary data must be provided or the means

to obtain the data on student learning provided. Teachers must know where students are beginning in the process in order to move them forward in their learning.

In conclusion, I reflect on my leadership style as it grew throughout this study. In Chapter 2, I stated that a leader must possess seven key attributes in order to create second order change. These included:

- 1.) Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- 2.) The extent of a leader to inspire others and being the driving force for implementation of change
- 3.) Providing intellectual stimulation
- 4.) Being a change agent
- 5.) Monitoring and evaluating the change
- 6.) Being flexible
- 7.) Maintaining and communication ideas and strong educational beliefs. (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 70).

My experience throughout this journey has proven that each of these attributes plays an important part in leading change. At the beginning of the study, I did not realize the influence that I had over the changes in my building. After this project, and while observing the changes within my building as the enthusiasm for writer's workshop and working as a PLC increased, I realized my influence has far reaching potential for the improvement of teacher and student learning. It is my intention that this transformation of professional development will continue throughout the school and will continue to benefit the future students of Brookside School.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised

Directions:

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement. Comments after each dimension section are optional.

Key Terms:

- Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- Staff/Staff Members = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- Stakeholders = Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

2 = Disagree (D)

3 = Agree (A)

4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared and Supportive Leadership	S D	D	A	S A
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
3.	Staff members have accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	0	0	0
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0
10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0
11.	Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared Values and Vision	S D	D	A	S A
12.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
13.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
14.	Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
15.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	0	0	0
16.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0
17.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
18.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
20.	Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Collective Learning and Application	S D	D	A	S A
21.	Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
22.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
23.	Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
24.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0
25.	Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0
26.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
27.	School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
28.	School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
29.	Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
30.	Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared Personal Practice	S D	D	A	S A
31.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
32.	Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
33.	Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0
34.	Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
35.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
36.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0
37.	Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	S D	D	A	S A
38.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
39.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
40.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0
41.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0
42.	Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Supportive Conditions - Structures	S D	D	A	S A
43.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
44.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0
45.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
46.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
47.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
48.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0	0	0	0
49.	The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
50.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	0	0	0	0
51.	Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0
52.	Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

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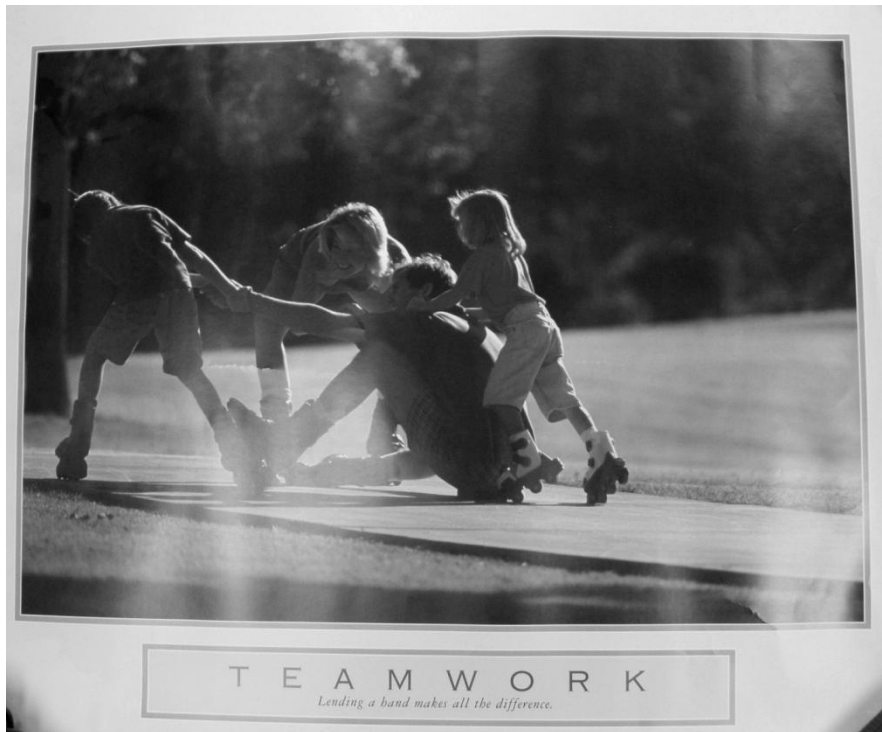
Appendix B

Monroe Township Picture Writing Prompts for Fall Assessment

Grade 3 Girl Power Rules Soccer (Actual poster used is in color)



Grade 4 Teamwork – Family of Skaters (Actual poster used is in color)



Grade 5 Winners Never – Football (Actual poster used is in color)



Appendix C

New Jersey Registered Holistic Scoring Rubric

Used for the Picture Prompt and Persuasive Writing Items

	Inadequate Command	Limited Command	Partial Command	Adequate Command	Strong Command
<i>Score:</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<u>Content and Organization</u>	May lack opening and/ or closing	May lack opening and/ or closing	May lack opening and/ or closing	Generally has opening and/or closing	Opening and closing
	Minimal response to topic; uncertain focus	Attempts to focus May drift or shift focus	Usually has single focus	Single focus	Single focus Sense of unity and coherence Key ideas developed
	No planning evident; disorganized	Attempts organization Few, if any, transitions between ideas	Some lapses or flaws in organization May lack some transitions between ideas	Ideas loosely connected Transitions evident	Logical progression of ideas Moderately fluent Attempts compositional risks
	Details random, inappropriate, or barely apparent	Details lack elaboration, i. e., highlight paper	Repetitious details Several unelaborated details	Uneven development of details	Details appropriate and varied
<u>Usage</u>	No apparent control Severe/ numerous errors	Numerous errors	Errors/ patterns of errors may be evident	Some errors that do not interfere with meaning	Few errors
<u>Sentence Construction</u>	Assortment of incomplete and/ or incorrect sentences	Excessive monotony/ same structure Numerous errors	Little variety in syntax Some errors	Some variety Generally correct	Variety in syntax appropriate and effective Few errors
<u>Mechanics</u>	Errors so severe they detract from meaning	Numerous serious errors	Patterns of errors evident	No consistent pattern of errors Some errors that do not interfere with meaning	Few errors

Non-Scorable Reponses	NR	No Response	Student wrote too little to allow a reliable judgement of his/her writing.
	OT	Off Topic/Off Task	Student did not write on the assigned topic/ task, or the student attempted to copy the prompt.
	NE	Not English	Student wrote in a language other than English.
	WF	Wrong Format	Student refused to write on the topic, or the writing task folder was blank.

Content/ Organization	Usage	Sentence Construction	Mechanics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates intended message to intended audience Relates to topic Opening and closing Focused Logical progression of ideas Transitions Appropriate details and information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tense formation Subject- verb agreement Pronouns usage/ agreement Word choice/ meaning Proper Modifiers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of type, structure, and length Correct construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spelling Capitalization Punctuation

Appendix D

Interview Protocol-Teacher Interviews Initial PLC

Prepared: January 19, 2010

Set up: I plan to organize the interview time to coincide with the teacher's planning period or before/after school so that there will be sufficient time to talk. We will meet in the teacher's classroom so that I will not be interrupted during the interview. Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed.

I would like to talk with you today about how you prepare your lessons for writers' workshop, including what you have researched, your choice of topic, and your assessment of your students. I would then like to spend some time talking about how you organize your classroom space. Then, I am interested in how you will organize the lesson for all of the steps of the writing process and to meet the needs of all students.

1. I know that you have read Units of Study and are following the program with your students. Have there been any other sources that you have looked at to prepare your lessons?

Follow-up: What made you choose to start with this topic? Did the students have a say in choosing this topic?

2. What forms of assessment have you used with your students to assess their writing skills? What are some of your findings?
3. How did you decide to physically set up your classroom the way it is? How is it working so far? Is there anything you would do differently?

Let's talk about the actual lesson planning.

4. Tell me about your writers' workshop lessons. How are they organized? Does the topic of the lesson change the organization of the lesson plan?
5. How have you planned for student conferencing?

I am interested in hearing about how you choose your topics of writing and how much time you spend preparing your writer's notebook.

6. How did you decide on your writing topics in your notebook?
7. Tell me about your writer's notebook that you share with your class.

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol- Cycle III

Prepared: April 5, 2010

Focus Group Meeting scheduled for April 13, 2010

Set up: I plan to hold the focus group after school so that there will be sufficient time to talk. We will meet in the school conference room so that I will not be interrupted during the discussion. Focus group discussion will be tape recorded and transcribed. The questions prepared are open-ended to allow for discussion among the participants. I listed some possible questions, but will decide which questions to use based on the progress of the discussion.

Thank you for attending our meeting today. I would like to spend the time today talking about Writer's Workshop, get a sense of how it is going this year, talk about the training that you have received so far and what training you believe you still need, and what affect you think Writer's Workshop will have on NJASK scores for our students. I would like the discussion to be informal so we can all share in the conversation.

Let's start. How do you think Writer's Workshop is going this year? How comfortable were you implementing the program? What do you see as the benefits/negatives of the program for teachers? For students?

What kind of training did you receive this year and did you feel it was the right kind of training?

What do you feel were the advantages/disadvantages of working together as a PLC as you implemented this new program?

What would you change about working in a PLC?

Is there anything that you need from me or the district to help you implement this writing program and/or work as a PLC?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol-Teacher Interviews Cycle IV

Prepared: December 5, 2010

Set up: I plan to organize the interview time to coincide with the teacher's planning period or before/after school so that there will be sufficient time to talk. We will meet in the teacher's classroom so that I will not be interrupted during the interview. Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed.

I would like to talk with you today about your involvement in the PLC of third grade teachers as you organized, designed, and implemented the unit of study on realistic fiction.

How does your participation in a PLC affect your perceptions of your ability to deliver the Writer's Workshop?

- Did you learn specific skills from your participation in the PLC that you were able to use in your classroom to inform writing instruction?
- Did the PLC offer you support and strategies to try with students when things were not working out as well as hoped while in Writer's Workshop?
- Was there a level of comfort and support in the PLC that increased your ability to teach Writer's Workshop?
- What contributions do you feel that you made to the PLC?
- What are your overall feelings about your participation in the PLC? Do you feel you will continue to work with your team on other projects?
- What negatives did you encounter during your PLC time? Positives?

Let's talk about the actual lesson planning.

1. Tell me about your writers' workshop lessons. How are they organized? Does the topic of the lesson change the organization of the lesson plan?
2. How have you planned for student conferencing?

Is there anything that you would like to add about your experience with this topic?



Appendix G
Letter of Permission to Use PLC Survey

*Department of
Educational Foundations
and Leadership*

*P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091*

April 6, 2009

Dori L. Alvich
Principal
Brookside School
370 Buckelew Avenue
Monroe Township, NJ 08831

Dear. Ms. Alvich:

This correspondence is to grant permission to utilize the *Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised* (PLCA-R) as your instrument for data collection in your doctoral study in Educational Leadership at Rowan University in New Jersey. I am pleased that you are interested in using the PLCA-R measure in your research. I have attaching a copy of the *Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised* (PLCA-R).

Upon completion of your study, I would be interested in learning about your results. If possible, I would appreciate the opportunity to receive raw data scores from your administration of the PLCA-R. This information would be added to our data base of PLCA-R administration. Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your interest in our research and measure for assessing professional learning community attributes within schools.

Sincerely,
Dianne F. Olivier
Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor
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Appendix H

Results of Survey of PLC Assessment

Table 1

Results of Survey of Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised

STATEMENTS		Responses (%)			
Shared and Supportive Leadership		SD	D	A	SA
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.			6	2
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.				8
3.	Staff members have accessibility to key information.		1	6	1
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.			1	7
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.		1	4	3
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.			5	3
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.			4	4
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.			3	5
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.			4	4
10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.		2	5	1
11.	Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.			4	4
COMMENTS: The leadership style in the building lends itself well to staff members “giving it their all” because of the positive environment.					
Shared Values and Vision		SD	D	A	SA
12.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.		1	4	3
13.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.			5	3
14.	Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.		2	4	2
15.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school’s values			3	5

	and vision.				
16.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.		3	4	1
17.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.		3	2	3
18.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.			5	3
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.		2	6	
20.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.			7	1
COMMENTS: none					
	Collective Learning and Application	SD	D	A	SA
21.	Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.			3	5
22.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.			5	3
23.	Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.		1	3	4
24.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.		1	4	3
25.	Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.			4	4
26.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.			3	5
27.	School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.		4	3	1
28.	School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.			2	6
29.	Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.		1	3	4
30.	Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.		2	2	4
COMMENTS: none					
	Shared Personal Practice	SD	D	A	SA
31.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.		1	4	3
32.	Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.		1	4	3
33.	Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for			2	6

	improving student learning.				
34.	Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.		1	4	3
35.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.		1	3	4
36.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.		1	4	3
37.	Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.		2	4	2
COMMENTS: I feel that our grade level does a great job with sharing. However, I do not always feel like the school as a whole does a good job of this.					
	Supportive Conditions – Relationships	SD	D	A	SA
38.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.			2	6
39.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.			3	5
40.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.		1	1	6
41.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.		1	5	2
42.	Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.			6	2
COMMENTS: There are supportive conditions within grade levels; however, there is not much dialogue between grade levels.					
	Supportive Conditions – Structures	SD	D	A	SA
43.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.		5	2	1
44.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.		5	3	
45.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.		2	6	
46.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.			3	5
47.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	1	3	2	2
48.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.		3	5	
49.	The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	1	2	3	2
50.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.		1	4	3
51.	Communication systems promote a flow of information	1	1	2	4

	across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.				
52.	Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.		1	4	3
COMMENTS: I have been personally disappointed as to support from supervisors on innovations in curriculum, assistance with materials, and communication.					

Note. Responses are measured in total number of respondents for each item.

Appendix I

Analyzing Student Writing Using Year End Benchmarks

Third and Fourth Grade

Directions: Read student writing sample. Place an “X” in the appropriate boxes that are weaknesses in the writing.

Content and Organization	Usage	Sentence Structure	Mechanics
Interesting introductory sentence – attention grabber	Proper use of tense	Use of four sentence types	Indent paragraphs
Focus/main idea relating to picture prompt	Subject-verb agreement	Use of compound sentences	All proper nouns are capitalized
Demonstrating sequence and order – use of transition words	Proper use of pronouns	Complete sentences	Proper use of end punctuation
Use supporting details: Grade 3: Approximately one page with beginning (introduction of characters and setting), middle (introduction of problem), and conclusion (solution of problem) Grade 4: Structured 3 -4 paragraph story with beginning (introduction of characters and setting), middle (introduction of problem), and conclusion (solution of problem).	Variety and proper use of word choice	Some use of figurative language	Use of commas and quotation marks
		Adjectives and Adverbs	

Analyzing Student Writing Using Year End Benchmarks

Fifth and Sixth Grade

Directions: Read student writing sample. Place an “X” in the appropriate boxes that are weaknesses in the writing.

Content and Organization	Usage	Sentence Structure	Mechanics
Interesting topic sentence (opening)	Consistently stays in point of view	Use of similes and metaphors appropriately	Expanded use of capitalization and punctuation
Logical transitions	Expanded use of parts of speech	Expanded use of complex and compound sentences	
General sense of organization – details support topic and closing		Knowledge and use of 4 types of sentences (declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory)	
Closing that “sums up” ideas presented		Correct paragraph format	
States purpose within paragraph			
Keeps point of view clear with at least one example			

Appendix J

Realistic Fiction Unit Plan

Day	Teaching Point/Lesson	Materials
1 (generating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduce Realistic Fiction</i>: the idea of a fictional story with believable characters and issues • Read aloud <i>The Memory String</i> or <i>Arthur Writes a Story</i> and discuss how authors get writing ideas from things that have happened to them and by making observations • Model the idea that books come from writer’s minds. Revisit personal narrative stories to mine for possible story ideas • Generate ideas by using a bulleted list of possible story topics in writer’s notebooks 	<p><i>The Memory String</i> or <i>Arthur Writes a Story</i></p> <p>Strategies for Generating Realistic Fiction Ideas Chart</p> <p>(Observe the world or reread entries. Mine your notebook for story ideas.)</p>
2 (generating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generating ideas by relating to issues</i> • Make a class list of problem ideas that relate to their lives • Discuss how writers often choose an issue that they can relate to and develop a story around it • Model choosing a problem and writing to show the problem, not tell the problem • After creating a class list, student will brainstorm issues that relate specifically to them in their writer’s notebooks • They will choose one problem to show, not tell • Add strategy to chart • HW – show not tell entry about a problem 	<p>List of issue in own notebook</p> <p>Show not tell entry about problem selected</p> <p>Strategies for generating ideas chart (think about an issue that you can relate to then create a character that struggles with that issue and show, don’t tell)</p>
3 (generating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Generating ideas through “I Wish” ideas</i> • Model creating a story idea from a book you wish existed, with a character like yourself. Focus on creating a character with desires and difficulties • Also suggest that writers get story ideas from things they have knowledge of (hobbies, likes, dislikes, background, family, life, etc.) • Add to generating strategies chart, ask “What books do I wish existed in the world?” Let this question lead you to invent 	<p>I wish ideas in own notebook</p> <p>Strategies for generating ideas chart (What books do I wish existed in the world? Let this question lead you to invent a character with traits,</p>

	<p>a character with traits, struggles, actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HW- Create an entry at home using strategy 	struggles, and actions.)
4 (generating)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Using yourself to show character traits in the third person</i> • Model by making a web of your own self. Create at least five character traits. Then write a paragraph describing you in the third person. Discuss the difference between first and third person • Students will make a web in their notebooks and do the same • HW-continue describing yourself in the third person by adding traits 	<p>Web of self character traits</p> <p>Example of paragraph written in first person and the same written in third person</p>
5 (choosing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Developing a believable character Part 1</i> • Begin by discussing differences between physical and personality traits (inside and outside traits) • Students will go through notebooks and select some entries they might commit to • Model making a trait buddy (an outline of a person). Show students your personal entry and how you will develop your character. List personality traits on the inside of the buddy and physical traits on the outside of the buddy • Students will do the same for an entry they choose to develop. They will create a trait buddy based on the main character • Mid workshop teaching point – Lucy Calkins p. 32 advice for developing a believable character 	<p>Trait buddy outline</p> <p>Lucy Calkins p. 32 Pre-made chart</p>
6 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Developing a believable character Part 2</i> • Discuss the difference between how someone on the outside views a person and how that person has views of him or herself as well • Model creating a T-chart in notebook labeled others' view of the character and the character's view of themselves. Show students an example. (Mrs. Jones thinks that Julie is a fantastic math student/ Julie does not feel confident in math.) • Students will then create a T-chart in their notebooks, developing the inner character and how they view themselves. Focus on 	Sample T-chart

	<p>strengths as well as flaws of the character</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss homework before assigning that secondary characters are also important to the story • HW – developing secondary characters. Do the T-chart for secondary characters 	
7 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creating small moment scenes based on character struggles and motivations</i> • Discuss that now that we have developed our character's traits, we must focus on the character's struggles and motivations that will be the basis of the plot • Read <i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i> and point out the character's struggles and motivations described through different scenes or small moments • Then students will use a graphic organizer to choose small moments to stretch out based on their character's struggles and motivations • HW – complete three film strip sections 	<p><i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i> or other book that illustrates a character's struggle</p> <p>Film Strip Graphic Organizer</p> <p>Add to Advice for Developing a Believable Character Chart (knowing your character's struggles and motivations for their actions)</p>
8 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Story mountain</i> • Model creating a story mountain that will be a guide to organize the story. Read <i>Peter's Chair</i> to create a story mountain from that story. Show students how to identify and clarify the story elements of the entry they have chosen. Focus on introduction, several pieces of the rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Their story mountain can be general as they will go into more detail with plot events shortly • Students will create their story mountain to keep in their drafting folder • Mid workshop teaching point – Revisit some common conflicts to focus on having a clear climax (Lucy Calkins p. 70) 	<p>Graphic Organizer (Story Mountain)</p> <p>Example story mountain from <i>Peter's Chair</i></p> <p>Lucy Calkins p. 70</p>
9 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Setting the scene</i> • Tell students that today's focus will be on setting. Read one of the stories chosen to model good setting. Read a few excerpts from stories previously read to get a better feel for how the setting was described. As a class, make a chart of the pieces read, the setting, and examples of sentences the 	<p>Books like <i>When I was Young in the Mountains</i>, <i>On Call Black Mountain</i>, <i>Working Cotton</i>, or any model creating a good setting.</p> <p>Excerpts from</p>

	<p>author wrote to describe the setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will create a setting for their story in their drafting folder, using this strategy • Mid workshop teaching point – discuss describing multiple settings if the background of the story changes (i.e. if the story begins with the character as a first grader and later moves to the character being a fourth grader – how is the scene different?) • HW – finish developing the scene 	<p>stories previously read that show setting</p> <p>Chart set up with three columns (story –setting-examples describing setting)</p>
10 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Timeline of plot events</i> • This is a more specific story mountain focusing on scenes, or different plot events (both the rising and falling action) of the story • Model creating a timeline of each scene, or plot event. Students already began imagining scenes when doing the film strip graphic organizer. This is an extension of that and the story mountain. • HW – finish timeline 	<p>Example of timeline from own story</p> <p>Film Strip Graphic Organizer that students already made</p>
11 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creating a sensory chart for specific scenes</i> • Set up a sensory chart (see, hear, feel, taste (if applicable) and smell). Model choosing one of my scenes or small moments to zoom in on. Use the sensory chart to create description and use descriptive words • Students will choose at least 3 scenes from their timeline to zoom in on and use a sensory chart. Focus on choosing scenes that can really be stretched out and are important to the plot • HW – finish sensory chart for three plot events 	<p>Timeline from previous lesson</p> <p>Sample sensory chart</p>
12 (drafting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Putting it all together</i> • Students are going to be doing their complete draft today (this may take an additional day to finish before moving on). Using their resources, students are going to put the pieces of the puzzle together to create their complete first draft. Focus on character development, plot events with story elements from the story mountain, setting the scene, and using sensory details 	<p>All the resources created from the drafting folder</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid workshop teaching point – focus on creating the story, not writing the story 	
13 or 14 Depending on the time it takes (revising)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Crafting a lead</i> • With students, make a chart of ways to create good leads by reading different excerpts from stories. i.e. the give-away lead (Louis the Fish example), dialogue, action, setting, focusing on tone, etc. • Students will craft their own lead for their stories by revising their draft • Mid workshop teaching point – checking to make sure the strategy works with the story 	<p>Excerpts from stories that model creating different kinds of leads (list of books in Calkins personal narrative unit p. 69)</p> <p><i>Louis the Fish</i> book or the excerpts from craft lessons p. 67</p>
15 (revising)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Crafting an ending</i> • First show the students a chart of ways to end a story (circular ending, surprise ending, emotional ending, and ways to use them: action, dialogue, lesson learned, etc.) • Show students examples of endings, focusing on choosing a type of ending that will work with the story • Add to “ending chart” the questions to ask yourself as a writer for ending your story. Make sure that students know that the solution to the problem must be evident and all the loose ends should be tied up 	<p>Chart 4 ways to end and things to think about when ending (Calkins p. 136)</p> <p>Appendices and book titles from craft lessons 69-71</p> <p>Excerpts from previously read stories with good endings</p>
16 -17 (revising) Lesson will take longer than typical mini lesson so this may use more than one day for students to be able to revise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Show don't tell</i> • First give out the mentor text of different ways to show, not tell. Using the overhead, go over examples of each strategy for showing, not telling. Then the students will be given a few sentences to change into show sentences • Make sure to use dialogue throughout the piece, especially when illustrating the conflict, or struggle of the character (give students an example scenario to practice by changing it to include dialogue: two friends dare you to eat a worm) • Students will go back to their writing and find sentences to fix by showing, not telling • Mid workshop teaching point – review that an adverb compares or describes an action. Show sample sentences 	<p>Samples and overhead from 10 lessons for overhead book</p> <p>Mentor text for show, don't tell examples</p> <p>Sentences written before an adverb and after using an adverb</p>
18 (revising)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Using imagery: similes and metaphors</i> 	<p><i>Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the terms: simile and metaphor • Read aloud the book, <i>Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds</i> by Cynthia Rylant or other text that has successful examples of imagery. Have several pages copied for students. They will go through and highlight examples of similes and metaphors and other sensory details or concrete examples that show imagery • Students will apply this strategy to their drafts, including at least two examples of similes and two examples of metaphors • HW – finish adding similes and metaphors 	<i>Birds</i> by Cynthia Rylant or other text that has successful examples of imagery
19 (editing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Editing for spelling, capitals, grammar, complete sentences, and using a checklist</i> • Give students their revising/editing checklist (they should have completed the steps of the revision part of the checklist but this is the time to make sure their writing has everything it needs) • Review strategies for editing from last unit's chart • Students will edit looking for specific things on their checklists 	Editing strategies chart
20 (editing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Editing for paragraphs, transitions between scenes, and punctuating dialogue</i> • Discuss ways to transition between scenes so that the story flows. Next, use the overhead to show students how to correctly punctuate dialogue. They will have this to use a mentor text when editing • Reiterate that each time a speaker changes, there is a new paragraph needed, as well as during time changes and scene transitions 	Using dialogue mentor text to show correct punctuation
21-? (publishing) Author's celebration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Publish and Celebrate!!</i> 	

Appendix K

IRB Exemption



February 24, 2010

Dori L. Alvich
2120 Washington Blvd.
Robbinsville, NJ 08691

Dear Dori L. Alvich:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has exempted your project:

IRB application number: 2010-118

Project Title: Implementation of Writer's Workshop to Improve Student Writing Achievement

If you need to make significant modifications to your study that will compromise the basis of this exemption, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Gautam Pillay, Associate Provost for Research (pillay@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Robert Campbell, Educational Leadership, Education Hall

Office of Research
Bole Hall Annex
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150
856-256-4425 fax