Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

4-5-2011

Cogent leadership: transitioning to professional learning communities

Donna Markiewicz

COGENT LEADERSHIP: TRANSITIONING TO

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

Donna Markiewicz

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Rowan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Educational Leadership

February 2011

Glassboro, NJ

Rowan University

Approved: Date:

Robert B. Campbell, Ed.D.   _____   _____
Chair   Signature

Mark J. Raivetz, Ed.D.   _____   _____
Committee Member   Signature

Mary M. Reece, Ed.D.   _____   _____
Committee Member   Signature

DEDICATION

To my husband, our parents, and my family.

Thank you for your continuous support throughout the entire program. Without your support, care, generosity, and thoughtfulness, I would not have been as proud of this product. You all gave me the courage and encouragement to finish and I am grateful to have such wonderful family and friends.

ABSTRACT

Donna Markiewicz
COGENT LEADERSHIP: TRANSITIONING TO
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
February 2011
Robert B. Campbell, Ed.D
Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between traditional professional development and the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) in one suburban middle school in New Jersey. A mixed-methods approach was used to gather data. Quantitative and qualitative results were gathered from surveys from teachers (N=59) that attended the in-house professional development workshops. Twenty interviews were also used to gather data on the teacher perspective.

Most of the teachers appreciated the paradigm shift from traditional professional development to a more collaborative model. They appreciated the time to work in their professional learning communities to develop common goals and assessments, and discuss teaching and learning strategies. The test score results in language arts improved and the math score results decreased from 2009 to 2010 in the 6th to 7th grades, and when compared to schools in New Jersey of similar socio-economic status were also under the average for 7th grade in 2009 and 8th grade in 2010. The data also suggested that the language arts PLC worked more collaboratively and were more unified as a team than the math teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Table   Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since Hord's research in 1997, professional learning communities (PLCs) have been a prominent initiative in education. Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree and Fernandez (1993) describe PLCs as a collaborative group that consistently works together to improve student achievement. Also known as communities of continuous inquiry and improvement, these groups establish supportive relationships that have shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values, and shared vision (Astuto et al., 1993; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997). Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker are the catalysts of the development of PLCs. "The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. xi). After developing a collaborative environment, teams can focus on learning and results to improve student achievement. This new paradigm shift has caused many educational leaders across the country to implement PLCs in their schools. These teams establish best practices that promote success and help to achieve sustained educational improvement.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to analyze the difference between traditional professional development and PLCs in one New Jersey middle school. The school has not had PLCs previously and is currently implementing them. The participants were teachers (N=59) and the study focused on teacher perceptions of PLCs. The methodology included teacher interviews and teacher surveys. The study focused on

the extent to which traditional professional development and the PLC model affects teacher-training and learning. Teacher collaboration was also explored. My research questions were:

1. In what ways do traditional professional development opportunities and the teacher-training experiences found within a PLC differ for teachers in one middle school?

2. In what ways has the collaborative experience altered professional development for teachers at the middle school level?

3. Has student achievement improved based on professional learning community implementation?

4. How did my leadership influence the implementation of professional learning communities?

5. How did this action research project impact my leadership?

First, I created the PLC professional development experiences with the school professional development committee. Next, I presented the PLC concept through establishing teams, group norms, and fostering relationships. Then, the teams continued to look at data and develop their SMART goals. After the teams had time to meet, I observed the teams, analyzed their SMART goals, interviewed teachers on PLCs, and analyzed the professional development surveys distributed at every school-based professional development experience. I compiled all data at the middle school and completed interviews at the middle school.

Significance of the Study

Establishing PLCs could benefit student achievement in my school. Giving teachers time to focus on what to teach, how best to teach it, and whether or not the students are learning, will help focus the curriculum. Creating a collaborative environment where teachers are having discussions about student learning will change the culture of my building. The staff members are used to staff meetings that hand out information, and professional development experiences that are not evaluated or sustained after the session. Staff members are familiar with meetings that primarily disseminate information, and with professional development experiences that do not provide a mechanism for informal or formal feedback. However, most of the staff at my middle school are very friendly, professional, supportive, and if asked would do anything to help each other.

Creating PLCs will also help guide our administration to build a vision and mission for our school. The collaborative culture that is responsible for achieving this will be at the forefront of success. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggest:

> The lack of a compelling vision for public schools continues to be a major obstacle in any effort to improve schools. Until educators can describe the school they are trying to create, it is impossible to develop policies, procedures, or programs that will help make that ideal a reality…Building a shared vision is the ongoing, never-ending, daily challenge confronting all who hope to create learning communities. (p. 64)

Most of the staff members are hard workers, but stick to the traditional method of teaching in isolation. This collaborative effort will allow teachers to focus on results and student learning.

This study is important because there is a need for PLCs in my school. There are numerous articles, journals, and books on the importance of PLCs, and implementing them should result in improved student achievement. There is also a need for sustainable professional development within the district. Current professional development is not sustained and evaluated on a consistent basis. This research study is for the administrators, educational leaders, and teachers in my school district to analyze the professional development program and the transition to a PLC culture. It also will have great impact on the students.

This topic is significant to me because I have attended two workshops given by Richard and Rebecca DuFour, one two years ago and one two months ago. My participation at these seminars greatly inspired me and also caused me to pause, realizing that a concept of such simplicity may present many difficulties and conflicts within my school during the transition to this paradigm. Through extensive study, analysis, and reading, I have realized the impact that PLCs can make on student achievement and the overall culture of my school.

Challenges

As a music teacher in this middle school, I see numerous challenges that might occur as we shift to this new paradigm. Although I consider myself to be a leader in the school, I do not have the formal authority to create or manage the professional development. However, I serve on the professional development committee and have

shared my experiences with the rest of the committee members. It is important for there

to be bottom-up leadership as well as top-down leadership. "PLC principles are not just

articulated by those in positions in leadership; even more important, they are embedded

in the hearts and minds of people throughout the school" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25).

The team creates, prepares, and administers the professional development in the school.

Therefore, I will have a significant impact on PLC implementation.

In the middle school, students are organized into teams; there are three teams for

the eighth graders and three teams for the seventh graders. The language arts, reading,

science, and social studies teachers are part of the team. The math, expressive arts,

physical education/health, and special education teachers are not part of a team. It may be

hard for teachers to mentally separate these interdisciplinary teams with the PLC teams

that all teachers will be separated into by subject matter. Teachers were separated into

groups by subject matter rather than interdisciplinary team so that teachers can create

common assessments, monitor students' progress, analyze curriculum, share teaching

strategies, and plan together. Understanding the difference between a group of people

coming together to talk about individual student behavior problems and test scores, and

a PLC will be challenging. It is easy to be part of a group, but it is difficult to be part of

a team.

It also may be problematic for people to internalize the PLC concept; "…actually

transforming a school to function as a professional learning community requires much

more than a superficial understanding of the concept and feeble attempts at reorganizing"

(Eaker & Keating, 2008, p. 14). It is second-order change (Watzlawick, Weakland, &

Fisch, 1974, p. 10) and human beings are sometimes afraid of change. It also requires a

culture shift that must be dealt with slowly and carefully. Ongoing, sustainable change does not happen quickly. It takes time. It may take three years for PLCs to be banked within the culture of my building. Believing in and living the PLC concept will be difficult for some people. There also may be some resistors that believe it is just a new program and that we are reinventing the wheel.

Time is another challenge. During year one, my school has created three early dismissal days for PLC implementation and there are also two full professional development days. During year two there will be three early dismissal days and only one full day. According to teacher contract, teachers can also meet afterschool on Wednesdays twice a month. It will be difficult for PLCs to meet. Common planning time is scheduled by interdisciplinary teams. Although, it is not an additional period, it is the teachers' single prep time. Finding the time to meet, foster relationships, analyze data, create common assessments, and create common goals will be demanding. Also, it could be infringing upon the teachers' contract to require PLCs to meet during their prep time.

My district has a very diverse student population and there are approximately 600 students in the middle school. The school has one principal, one assistant principal, and 59 teachers. The district does not have supervisors, but does have a staff developer. The current staff developer does not have a master's degree, but has over 20 years of experience at the elementary school level. The professional development program has focused on the PLC topic for the past two years. Although the school climate, culture, and environment are at a high level, teachers do not routinely examine data with the intent to improve student results. Most teachers do not create common assessments, unless it is a final exam and could benefit from these collaborative experiences. The

PLCs will start to create common assessments, analyze data, and collaborate in meaningful discussions that will be the catalyst of future professional development topics and student achievement.

Throughout this action-research project, I hope to learn what teachers view as important criteria in the PLC implementation process. I hope to learn what worked and what did not work so that I can assemble an implementation guide for educational leaders. I hope to gain increased confidence as a presenter and researcher. This will be one of the first times that I will have to present a concept to my peers in a formal capacity. I will learn about my own leadership style and what I need to do to become a better leader.

The next chapters will focus on the literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion. The literature review will discuss PLCs and will be separated into themes such as culture, teams, change, professional development, and roles and responsibilities. The methodology section will explain my setting, purpose, sample, and data collection methods. The results chapter will discuss the findings and the conclusion chapter will discuss the recommendations, limitations, and summarize the overall study. These chapters will continue to describe my action research project and who I am as a leader.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the *No Child Left Behind Law* was implemented in 2001, schools across the country have been made more accountable for academic achievement of all learners. Schools that do not meet the yearly standards are faced with sanctions and other penalties. This education act has made schools consider implementing new programs and changing curriculum to meet the needs of every learner. One concept that has been commendable, accepted, and widespread is the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs).

Since Hord's research in 1997, PLCs have been a prominent initiative in education. Also known as "communities of continuous inquiry and improvement," these groups establish supportive relationships that have shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision (Hord, 1997). The current PLC expert is Rick DuFour. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), a professional learning community (PLC) is "an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xii). DuFour (2004) states, "To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results" (p. 6).

School leaders, whether teachers or administrators, must be professionals. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state, "A professional is someone with expertise in a specialized field. It is an individual who not only has pursued advanced knowledge to enter the field, but

expects to remain current in their evolving knowledge base" (p. xi). Professionals are committed, motivated individuals that seek to improve their skill and knowledge. PLCs are thought to be the best method to increase teacher development and, in turn, increase student achievement.

Collegiality, collaboration, and developing professional relationships within schools strengthen the school's culture and academic achievement. Barth (2006) states, "The nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else" (p. 9). There are four different types of relationships that can take place in a school. They are parallel play, adversarial relationships, congenial relationships, and collegial relationships (Barth, 2006). Parallel play and adversarial relationship describe the isolation and competitiveness that may occur in schools. Barth (2006) states, "The cost of concealing what we do is isolation from colleagues who might cause us to examine and improve our practices" (p. 10).

Congenial relationships are friendly, but collegial relationships are professional and center around doing what is best for the students. "Collegiality is about getting them to play together, about growing a professional learning community" (Barth, 2006, p. 11). Imagine schools where teachers shared their assessments, practices, and knowledge. A school where true collaborative learning occurs forces teachers to leave behind ego and pride. It encourages and motivates teachers to develop professionally, and continually analyze student learning within their classroom and the school community.

These teams meet on a consistent basis to improve academic achievement of all learners. Teachers do not work in isolation. They work together to analyze data, learning

objectives, student achievement, and assessments. They discuss student strengths and weaknesses, and share materials, knowledge, goals, and concerns (DuFour, 2004; Jessie 2007). DuFour and Eaker (1998) list six characteristics of professional learning communities: (1) they should have a shared mission, vision, and values, (2) they should demonstrate collective inquiry, (3) foster collaborative teams, (4) implement experimentation, (5) seek continuous improvement, and (6) should be results orientated (p. 25). These groups have shared principles, seek improvement through innovative strategies, are open to new possibilities, reflect, and seek to implement long-lasting results.

There are four building blocks to PLCs: mission, vision, values, and goals. The mission describes the purpose of the group. It clarifies why the organization exists, what it hopes to accomplish and gives it a compass to succeed. A vision represents what the organization wants to become. It represents the future. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state, "Whereas mission establishes an organization's purpose, vision instills an organization with a sense of direction" (p. 62). The most challenging part of this building block is to achieve a shared vision between the administrators, the teachers, the faculty, the students and the community. A good vision motivates organizations and encourages staff to be continuous learners. Values represent how an organization intends to make its vision happen. These values represent behaviors, attitudes, and commitments to the organization, and how the people must act to address their vision. Goals represent the steps that will make an organization accomplish its objectives and realize its vision. Goals must be clear, attainable, measurable, clearly linked to the vision, and monitored continuously.

Many schools choose to accomplish these tasks by working in collaborative teams. These teams may have a common planning time and work together to plan meetings with parents and activities for building team achievement. These teams work together, have shared beliefs, values, and attitudes, trust one another, communicate effectively with all stakeholders, set rules, establish norms, and continually assess and monitor the team's goals. They reflect on their learning and research to make the best decisions possible.

Establishing professional learning communities is the best way to improve student achievement. Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker are the catalysts of the development of these cooperative groups. In their book, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing School Achievement* (1998) they state, "The most promising strategy for sustained, substantial school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities" (p. xi).

Teachers have a large role in the success of implementing these building blocks. What happens in a classroom has direct impact on learning, who the students are, and what the students become. Fullan (1993) states, "You cannot have students as continuous learners and effective collaborators, without teachers having the same characteristics" (as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 46). Teachers must focus on learning, collaborate, reflect, communicate effectively, engage students, be continuous learners, monitor achievement data, and review results. Teachers need to develop communication skills, collaborative abilities, and the culture of the environment needs to develop to support student achievement. Teachers will:

Participate in reflective dialogues; observe and react to one another's teaching; jointly develop curriculum and assessment practices; work together to implement new programs and strategies; share lesson plans and materials; and collectively engage in problem solving, action research, and continuous improvement practices. (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 117)

Without good classroom teachers effective learning communities will not exist.

Schools that rely on the factory model of teaching and learning and have top-down managers are no longer effective in today's schools. Leaders must continue to learn and reflect upon the best way to reach their students. When implementing PLCs, school leaders must keep in mind that change is a delicate process. Changing culture and people's habits takes finesse, and if people do not feel that the change is necessary they will resist change. They could even grow to demonstrate negative emotions that could be detrimental to school culture.

Teacher acceptance to change is important during the implementation of learning communities. Sustainable change will alter the school's culture, beliefs, values, assumptions, and habits. These changes will take time, effort, and a willingness to change. The staff members will need to celebrate success and keep their vision in mind. Principals play a large role in motivating and engaging the staff in day-to-day activities and gathering building consensus. Creating learning communities is impossible without the support of the principal and effective leadership. Principals are not able do it alone. They must involve the staff, hire the best teachers possible, and continuously enrich the teachers with good professional development opportunities.

It is also necessary to involve the parents and the community when establishing these learning groups. The partnership between school and parents and schools and the community is part of their success. Schools must communicate their goals, mission, and vision. They must communicate about parenting, student learning and possible volunteering opportunities. Engaging the parents and the community in their children's education is key to the success of the students. Parents can be involved not only in the parent-teacher organization activities, but school activities such as dances, book fairs, and service learning.

One of the last requirements of building effective learning communities is having patience and persistence. There may be downfalls and there may be celebrations. When the end result is reached, new ones can be formed and new visions created. It is a never-ending cycle that only helps the students. It is a voyage that is taken together for the greater good of the school. PLCs are established because administrators, teachers and other staff care and believe that they can make a difference in the lives of every student.

Leadership

Stogdill (1950) states, "Leadership may be considered as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement" (p. 3). Leaders are made, not born. Leaders know how to motivate and inspire individuals. Good leaders have a vision for their organization and certainly have great followers. They are confident, enthusiastic, transparent, have high standards, willing to take risks, honest, and creative. Through the categories of leadership theories, emotional intelligence, ethics, values, philosophy, leaders, teamwork, motivation, reflection, culture, change, conflict, and professional learning communities, my morals,

beliefs, and leadership characteristics are identified through the best practices in educational research.

There are several styles of leadership, some include: autocratic, democratic, laissez-faire, bureaucratic, charismatic, people-oriented, task-oriented, servant, transactional, transformational, collaborative, and environmental. My belief is that a good leader understands each style of leadership and intuitively knows when to use which form. I tend to be a democratic, collaborative, transformative leader in most situations. However, there are times that leaders naturally use the other forms of leadership. For example, someone in a leadership position may use the autocratic or transactional leadership style when dealing with emergency situations, and the servant style of leadership if she were a new administrator in a building wanting to build consensus and foster collaboration amongst the staff. However, servant leadership is very different: "…the only way to change a society (or just make it go) is to produce people, enough people, who will change it (or make it go)" (Greenleaf, 1995, p. 22). Servant leadership works on creating an environment of trust, empathy, morality, and collaboration. The leader works for the good of all people and lacks ego. Serving others, professional development of staff, and other peoples' growth are the focus of this style.

Robert Greenleaf (1995) states:

The servant-leader *is* servant first… It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions…The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types.

Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of

human nature. (p. 22)

Servant leadership is not about the ego of the leader. It is concerned with the good

of the people. The leader focuses on the needs of others in the organization and is always

searching for a better way to accomplish tasks and goals.

But if one is servant, either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening,

expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making. It may emerge any

day. Any one of us may find it out from personal experience. I am hopeful.

(Greenleaf, 1995, p. 20).

When the leader is always looking for improvement, an organization will be accepting

of change.

Emerson said, "Every wall is a door" (as cited in Greenleaf, 1995, p.21). This

phrase reminds me of Alexander Graham Bell's phrase that states, "When one door

closes another door opens; but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the

closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us" (Alexander Graham Bell,

n.d., para. 1). Servant leaders are consistently looking to facilitate growth of others and

build a sense of community in an organization. Servant leaders are looking at the

possibilities and nurturing the growth of their followers. They are optimistic and see the

learning possibilities in challenges and difficulties.

Curriculum

Dewey had one of the most powerful influences on education in the United States

throughout the twentieth century. Dewey states in *Democracy in Education* (1916)

"…things gain meaning by being used in a shared experience or joint action" (p. 20). He

believed that learning should be active and that students should be reflective thinkers. Dewey was concerned with the experiences that would make children learn, and the types of experiences that would motivate and inspire them to continue learning and have a better life in society. Aristotle said, "The things we have to learn before we do them, we learn by doing them" (Aristotle, n.d., para. 1).

Providing a diverse curriculum embedded with technological and multicultural explorations is also of importance. Children need to become confident individuals of society. Outside of the general education classroom, the enrichment programs, exploratory programs, special interest programs, extracurriculars, and activities support the development of individual character. These extracurricular activities should be part of the students' curriculum. Involving students in such activities will develop each student's goals, aims, and values. Research has shown that exceptional extracurricular involvement lead to achievement in college, individual development, positive characteristic traits, self-esteem, leadership, and better grades. Students who are involved in extracurricular activities learn life-lasting lessons that are not in the objectives created by the teacher. These concepts that are learned create a better future for the students and better citizens in our communities (Finn, 1993).

Leaders

Educational leaders need to provide clear objectives, understand emotional intelligence, build professional learning communities, motivate, be committed, know their strengths and weaknesses, be good listeners, and collaborate. Good leaders are visionary, look toward long term results, and can make decisions. Followers of leaders can be leaders too. They often have certain traits, experiences, or strengths that the

educational leader does not. Therefore, it is important to encourage leadership in the workforce. Good leaders surround themselves with people that complement their leadership styles. They also know their strengths and weaknesses and have people on their teams that fill in their gaps. Good leaders understand the importance of reflection and continuous learning. (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002)

Overall, a leaders' educational philosophy should be to provide the best possible education for each and every student through great leadership, and inspiring educational programs and experiences. They need to involve the students in their delivery of each lesson and continue to focus on each individual student, their improvement, and success.

Emotional Intelligence

One of the most important leadership theories is emotional intelligence. Goleman et al. (2002) state:

> Great leaders move us. They ignite out passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions. (p. 3)

Emotional intelligence assets are the most important quality of a leader. Understanding how people feel and working through these emotions benefit in relationship building and leadership building.

Encouraging others to be creative, use their talents, and lead is an art of leadership. People want to feel accomplishment and success. Motivation to transform from follower to leader starts with good leadership. It starts with good people inspiring others to break free from the status quo and the norm.

Ethics

Moral leaders understand the difference between right and wrong. They have ethical beliefs, behaviors and values, are true to themselves, and have strong qualities that influence their decision making. They are compassionate, great at building relationships, and are competent leaders. Moral leadership is also based on "the fundamental wants and needs, aspirations, and values of the followers" (Burns, 1995, p. 483). Many theorists believe that it is the thought process that determines morality and not the behavior. People start developing moral behavior at a very young age.

The strengths of moral leadership are that the leaders act on what is proper, acceptable, ethical, are goal setters, intuitive, and have good consciences. These leaders are committed to the follower's needs and wants. The followers trust and accept the leader, and are very obedient. They take the time to reflect on daily issues and look to achieve goals. Moral administrators truly care about their organization and will do anything to transform. Burns (1995) states that, "Transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (p. 101). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (1996), the ISLLC standards state that, "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner" (para. 12)

Values

Richard Barrett (2005), author of *Values Based Leadership*, defines values-based leadership as "a way of making authentic decisions that builds the trust and commitment of employees and customers" (para. 8). Barrett believes that there are three different ways

to make decisions. "We can use our beliefs to formulate a response, we can use our values to formulate a response, or we can use our intuition to formulate a response" (para. 1). When making decisions based on beliefs, we base our decisions based on past history and experiences. When we base our decisions on values, we are thinking about the future and what we are looking to experience.

Barrett (2005) states that companies that have values-drive are the most successful.

> When organizations unite around a shared set of values, they become more flexible, less hierarchical, less bureaucratic, and they develop an enhanced capacity for collection action. When employees not only share the same values, but also share the same vision, the performance of a company is significantly enhanced. Shared values build trust, and trust is the glue that enhances performance. (Barrett, 2005, para. 7)

There are seven levels of leadership based on Maslow's needs hierarchy (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, p. 328). The first level is based on the autocratic theory (the crisis director/accountant). The second level is based on developing relationships and enhancing communication. The third level is based on managing, organizing and the fourth level is based on influencing others and transformation. The fifth, sixth, and seventh levels are based on inspiring others, making a difference and visionary leadership (service). These levels of leadership tend to link transactional leadership to transformational leadership. The lower levels of leadership are more transactional and the upper levels of leadership are transformational.

This also links the four levels of leadership discussed by Sergiovanni (1990). The four styles are also related to Maslow's hierarchy. They include barter, build, bond, and bank. The "banking" stage is the most transformational stage. "School improvement initiatives become real only when they become institutionalized as part of the everyday life of the school" (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 24). Without values, trust, commitment, and shared values, the higher levels of leadership will be difficult to reach. Shared values energize others, and create qualities and attitudes that are beneficial to an organization. It is when leaders have reached beyond level seven of leadership, that intuition-based decision-making occurs.

Culture

Bolman and Deal (2003) describe four organizational frames. They include the structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames. Each of these lenses challenge leaders to look at situations in a different perspective. The human resource frame centers on people. It focuses on its members' wants and needs, and the relationships between the people. The leaders are people managers and work through interpersonal relationships. Through the human resource frame, leaders understand how personalities are the main ingredient for success. People feel appreciated and know that they are cared about. Feelings are important and people believe that they are a good fit for the company. As a school administrator, this frame is used daily. People have families and may need to go home early, take time off, etc., and administrators need to understand these situations. School leaders can show that they care about their employees' needs, wants, goals, and even bits of their personal lives. Leaders can also

compliment and allow faculty to lead certain projects, or assemblies, which will develop the interrelationships.

The structural frame focuses on the day-to-day procedures, routines, responsibilities, policies, tasks and is quite transactional with top-down management. Goals are well defined and leaders communicate clearly. In schools, meeting agendas, evacuation and lockdown procedures, attendance, policies, grading, rules, are examples of the structural frame.

The political frame is mostly about power and control. These "politicians" know how to network, negotiate, bargain and know how to influence followers. The symbolic frame centers on the leader being inspirational and transformational. The workers in the organization feel motivated, passionate, and are excited about their work. They are rewarded for their efforts. Leaders understand the organization's culture, values, and communicate a vision and mission. There are rituals, stories, banquets, mascots, and other artifacts that give life to the organization. Understanding the attitudes, norms, guidelines, expectations, values, and beliefs of an organization helps a leader to better understand the behaviors shared by a group of people. Cultures are learned and they can be molded. When having a vision that requires organizational change, leaders should use these frames to ensure banked, sustainable change. Knowing these frames may eliminate failure and help maintain motivated professionals that are willing to try new things.

Analyzing the cultural of an organization will help leaders better understand their beliefs, morals, and values. It allows administrators to understand the organization's strengths and weaknesses. With this new information, a leader can begin to enhance or start to change the group norms, attitudes, and behaviors. Reframing allows leaders to

"look from the balcony" and gain new perspective. It is a creative, thoughtful task that leads to best practices. This allows administrators to align and attune staff. It helps initiate best practices which will give the students the best education possible.

This paradigm shift has made administrators and school leaders across the world incorporate these teams into their educational organizations. Despite the growing popularity of PLCs, it may not lead to immediate success. Implementing these teams will take time. "Building and maintaining a collaborative culture is one of the most difficult aspects of a PLC" (Jessie, 2007, para. 8). Administrators will have to change the culture of the school, and teachers will have to understand their urgency.

PLCs are very effective when instilled in an organization. Learning the definition and how to participate in a PLC may be easy, but a full understanding can only happen when schools truly believe, participate and find it is essential to the teaching and learning process; "…actually transforming a school to function as a professional learning community requires much more than a superficial understanding of the concept and feeble attempts at reorganizing" (Eaker & Keating, 2008, p. 14). It is more than the change in the structural frame. It is not just about the changing of procedures, schedules, and policies. It is about transforming a culture.

After administrators decide to implement PLCs in their schools, the first step, and most important step, would be to analyze the culture of the school. DuFour (1998) states,

> School reform initiatives have tended to focus on structural issues-policies, procedures, rules, and relationships. Reform efforts have generally overlooked the culture of a school – the assumptions, beliefs, values, and habits that constitute the norm for that school and that shape how its people think, feel, and act. (p. 58)

According to Schein (2004), culture is

> …a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Schein also describes the three levels of culture, which are artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. These categories will help any administrator analyze the climate and culture of their building.

A cultural change may need to take place before PLCs are even mentioned. If a school has a hostile, negative environment, new initiatives will most likely fail. Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) state that, "We must shift from a culture of teacher isolation to a culture of deep and meaningful collaboration" (p. 10). School leaders need to develop a positive school environment where school professionals are working collaboratively. Adjusting the environment may take time, even a whole school year. DuFour (1997) states, "But the most important element in a professional development program that promotes the creation of a learning community is the context of the school's culture – the attitudes, behaviors, expectations, and beliefs that constitute the group's norm" (p. 53).

Changing school culture so that PLCs will be successful may require change in "collaboration, developing mission, vision, values and goals, focusing on learning, leadership, focused school improvement plans, celebration and persistence" (Eaker et al., 2002, p. 10). Changing personal beliefs may be difficult within a school community that is not accustomed to change. "Changing the structure without altering the belief system

will not produce fundamental changes" (Eaker et al., 2002, p. 9). Learning how to implement change successfully is an art form.

Even when PLCs are established, there may still be staff resistance. Change will most likely cause conflict. When school leaders try to implement a new program, negative behaviors and performance levels may decrease at first before improvement is made. This is known as the implementation dip. "The implementation dip is literally a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings" (Fullan, 2001, p. 40). Many people have a fear of change and a fear of not understanding new concepts when change is occurring. This is when leaders must lead, reassure their followers, and encourage them to continue in their endeavors. Leaders can also remind that the new ideas are in the best interest of the students and are based on research and best practices.

Conflict

Most likely there will be some type of conflict within an organization when implementing PLCs. Conflict can lead to new understanding. Brett, Goldberg, and Ury (1995) state, "Reconciling interests tends to produce higher satisfaction with outcomes, better working relationships, and less recurrence of conflicts, and it may incur lower transaction costs than determining who is right" (p. 438). Leaders need to listen to and learn how to react to conflict. Fullan asserts:

> We are more likely to learn something from people who disagree with us than we are from people who agree. But we tend to hang around with and overlisten to people who agree with us, and we prefer to avoid and underlisten to those who don't. (Fullan, 2001, p. 41).

Conflict is best managed in education when looking out for the best interests of the students. It is wise to not let conflict continue to simmer. Dealing with conflict in a timely matter will accelerate resolution and minimize dysfunctional situations. The leader must listen to the people involved, understand the situation fully, gather more data if needed, and address the situation calmly. When morale is high and school culture is positive, conflict resolution will be easier. Keeping faculty involved and aware of all procedures, good communication, and maintaining relationships, are all strategies to manage conflict and ensure high quality PLCs.

There are several ways to deal with conflict. One way that is of particular interest to me was created by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg in 1988. They created a dispute resolution system based on power, rights and interests. When interests are the base of conflict resolution, both parties will be more satisfied with the outcomes (Figure 1). When power or rights is the focus, it can yield poor relationships and the costs are greater. Sadly, most conflict resolutions that are centered on power or rights can often be settled on interest based resolution.

Figure 1. Dispute Resolution System
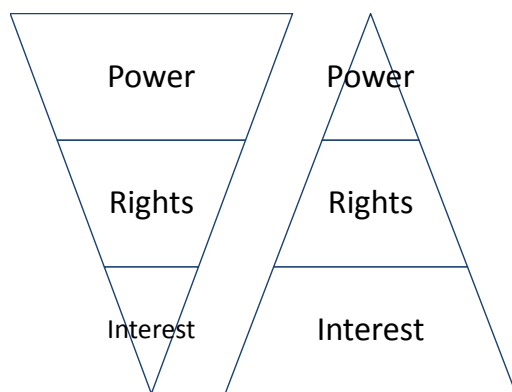
Brett et al. (1995) suggest:

…conflict is inevitable within organizations. Although certainly affected by the personalities and ideologies of the parties, conflict within and between organizations is primarily due to the roles, rules, incentives, and constraints of the organizational structure within which parties interact... if successfully managed, conflict can produce high quality, creative solutions that lead to innovation and progress. (p. 435)

After conflicts occur, positive outcomes can exist. They can yield stronger relationships, better communication, better programs, and positive, long-lasting solutions.

During the past two years, I have learned to deal with resistance from staff. Emotional intelligence and understanding people play a large factor in resolution. There have been staff members who do not want to be bothered with the new professional development experiences. Understanding their experiences, past, present, or future, help create a plan to deal with the situation. Appealing to the individual, and not just the purpose, creates a more inviting aspect so that the resistors can learn to appreciate the new ideas.

Change

Change is a delicate concept, one that needs special attention and lots of thought and consideration. One of the major issues in implementing PLCs is organizational change. It is inevitable that some teachers or leaders will resist change. School leaders and administrators will have to develop a positive culture, a climate of trust, and positive relationships amongst staff before trying to implement a new, major program. Wald and Castleberry (2000) and Fullan (2000) each agree that the key to successful, sustainable,

change lies in relationship building. One part of building relationships requires establishing trust."Trust allows people to proceed on a path of change even though precise directions might not be clear" (Novick, Kress, & Elias, 2002, p. 13).

Roberts and Pruitt (2009) state that, "The transformation of a new school into a learning community requires teachers and administrators to engage in conversations that may question their instructional practices, their mental models, and the school's structures" (p. 57). This causes teachers to not teach in isolation, but collaborate with other teachers, and share knowledge. Leaders must facilitate the change process and the culture shift by acquiring new knowledge and understanding of the issues, demonstrating faith in PLCs, providing teachers with the proper resources and materials to strive, and monitor implementation. Leaders need to continue to be patient, communicate with staff, set small goals, celebrate even the smallest of successes, be committed, motivate, and persevere.

Kotter (1996) describes eight steps of successful organizational change. They include: (1) Establish a sense of urgency, (2) Create a coalition, (3) Develop a clear vision, (4) Share the vision, (5) Empower people to clear obstacles, (6) Secure short-term wins, (7) Consolidate and keep moving, and (8) Anchor the change (p. 21). Kotter believes that if these eight stages are followed in chronological order, organization change will be successful. Stage one is the most crucial. Leaders need to get cooperation from all stakeholders and get them to buy-in to the new initiative.

Fullan (2001) describes a model for leadership. As noted in Figure 2, the five components of leadership include moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, coherence making, and moral purpose. Leaders

also need energy, commitment, and hope; they are committed and inspiring to their

community. As a result, Fullan believes that this model makes, "more good things happen

and less bad things happen" (Fullan, 2001, p. 4).

Figure 2. A Framework for Leadership

Figure 2. Reproduced from *Leading in a Culture of Change* (Fullan, 2001, p. 4).

Sustainable change becomes banked and rooted in the culture of the school.

"Schools have demonstrated time and again that it is much easier to initiate change than

to sustain it to fruition" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 105). When change becomes

embedded in the school culture, it creates a new shared value, a new belief and a new

vision. The new idea has truly become a part of the learning environment and will

continue to improve student achievement.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) also stress the importance of communication, collaboration, and culture. Successful change requires effective communication. DuFour and Eaker (1998) list eight questions that can be used to focus their goals when communicating and collaborating with their PLCs. They include:

1- What do we plan for?

2- What do we monitor?

3- What questions do we ask?

4- What do we model?

5- How do we allocate our time?

6- What do we celebrate?

7- What are we willing to confront? And

8- Keep it simple (p. 107).

Effective communication will aid in the collaborative process. Whether a person is a teacher or administrator, these steps will help see the big picture of PLCs and also focus group meetings.

Successful change also requires effective collaboration. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that there are four ways to implement successful collaborative teams:

First, time for collaboration must be built into the school day and year. Second, the purpose of collaboration must be made explicit, and structures must be provided to facilitate it. Third, educators must be trained and supported in their efforts to become effective collaborators. Fourth, educators must accept their individual and collective responsibilities for working together as true professional colleagues. (p. 131)

Successful change that is banked into the school culture will require leadership from administrators and teachers.

Change is personal. Fullan (2007) states, "We have become so accustomed to the presence of change that we rarely stop to think what change really means as we are experiencing it at the personal level" (p. 20). It becomes a humanistic issue and revolves around emotional intelligence. Understanding people becomes an important reality and leaders must learn how to handle each individual. Fullan (2007) also states, "Real change then, whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty" (p. 23).

"People do not understand the nature or ramifications of most educational changes" (Fullan, 2007, p. 29). Most reform that occurs is not understood by teachers which creates resistance, anxiety, and concern. Kotter (1996) states, "People who have been through difficult, painful, and not very successful change efforts often end up drawing both pessimistic and angry conclusions" (p. 17). This can be avoided by good leadership and how new concepts are Presented. School leaders and administrators must develop a positive culture, a climate of trust, and positive relationships amongst staff before trying to implement a new, major program. Having the trust of the staff will make the change transition smoother.

Evans (1996) states, that "…the key factor in change is what it means to those who must implement it, and that its primary meaning encourage resistance: it provokes loss, challenges competence, creates confusion, and causes conflict" (p. 21). Change can be motivating and invigorating, but sometimes in educational communities, change equals more work, which causes teachers to resist change. It takes a skillful administrator

to work with these teachers and to guide them to accept the change through praise and encouragement.

Teams (Communities)

After the culture of a school is traveling in a positive direction, teachers will be divided into their PLC groups. Schein (2004) states, "Every group must learn how to become a group" (p. 133). Groups must establish a system of communication and a language that permits interpretation of what is happening. According to Schein, groups must define their language, understand boundaries, establish consensus, define rules, and understand rewards and punishments. They must establish respect, relationship boundaries, and understand what is important. They must establish ways to deal with conflict and know how to focus on what is important. They must distribute power and understand behaviors and emotions of the group.

Groups must learn how to communicate effectively and listen to one another. Establishing group norms, criteria for membership, authority, and learning about the people in the group will lead to better dynamics. Being aware of individual and group wants, needs, and vision is also necessary. This will develop camaraderie, loyalty, dedication, and commitment to a group. In education, there are many groups that are established. Such teams include administrative teams, leadership teams, teacher leaders, and different committees. Enjoying the time spent with the group is another key to success. Groups should remember that having fun and laughter are a sign of camaraderie.

Lencioni (2002) states that members of a team must, "1- Trust one another, 2 – Engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas, 3 – Commit to decisions and plans of action, 4 – Hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans and 5 – Focus on the

achievement of collective results" (p. 89). The staff members must not be afraid of conflict or fearful of the unknown. When groups come together as a team to work in the best interests of the student it becomes a powerful force. These group guidelines will help teams establish a professional relationship.

After group norms are established, teachers will collectively develop a mission, vision, values, and goals that impact student learning. They will create "SMART" goals which stand for Strategic and Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Time-bound (Eaker et al., 2002, p. 45). These SMART goals are based on collective inquiry and will help assess student progress.

After these goals are created, they must be assessed and revisited on a continuing basis. These groups develop collegial relationships, support each other, celebrate success together and share knowledge and data. They come together to share data and make decisions on how to respond. Hord and Sommers (2008) state that, "Collegiality is collaborating plus sharing information and feedback. Collegiality is learning and working together and toward a common purpose. Collegiality is giving and accepting feedback, which makes us better practitioners" (p. 34). This type of process requires the whole school to have the same vision and be working toward the same goal. The staff is all aligned and heading in the same direction.

One of the major responsibilities within a PLC is to reflect. Whether reflecting together during meeting times or alone with an intention to share, it is critical for group development and gained knowledge. Reflection gives a deeper understanding of how things could have been done differently.

Reflective practice can help to close the knowing-doing gap. The collective knowledge and wisdom in our schools is our most valuable asset. As we embed reflective practice into the culture of the school through professional learning communities, we facilitate the transfer of information, we widen the use of effective practices, and trust is built through enhanced relationships. (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 105)

Through PLCs this knowing-doing gap will be eliminated as accountability is increased. Teachers will lead teachers, motivate, and inspire each other to try new things and incorporate new concepts.

Other responsibilities that teams will accomplish are curriculum changes and creating common assessments. First, teachers must decide what they want students to learn according to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. Then, teachers need to decide on how they will assess if students have mastered the concepts. They can create common assessments that are scored via a rubric model. The rubrics will also be created within the PLC. Eaker et al. (2002) state, "Teams work together to clarify the intended outcomes of each grade level, course, or unit of instruction. They develop common assessments that they consider valid measurement data, draw conclusions, and establish team improvement goals" (p. 5). After the data is collected, it is analyzed and new goals are created. This is a cyclical process that will be institutionalized within the school culture.

One of the most difficult tasks to do as a leader is to build highly effective teams. The five reasons why teams become dysfunctional are "(1) absence of trust, (2) fear of conflict, (3) lack of commitment, (4) avoidance of accountability and (5) inattention to

results" (Lencioni, 2002, p. 188). The "absence of trust" stems from individuals in a team that are not willing to be open and honest. They often find it difficult to share their weaknesses and strengths. They have a need to be powerful and consistently right. They waste time defending themselves and do not know how to ask for help. This can be solved through shared experiences, personality tests, and sharing their flaws with the team. "Fear of conflict" leads to team members keeping quiet when they believe something is not right or have other ideas. They avoid conflict and are scared of constructive criticism. In a team, improving on weaknesses benefits the team and the individuals. Sometimes, people do not remember that this it is not a personal issue. Productive, healthy, and conflictive discussion will better the team.

The third dysfunction is "lack of commitment." Each team member must be committed to their team's decisions. They must support one another and understand every group member's thoughts and opinions on all the issues. Each team member must buy-in to the group's decisions. The fourth dysfunction is avoidance of accountability. Each team member must hold their team members to completing their part of the work. Each individual must understand the expectations and goals of the team. All commitments must be adhered to and completed in a timely manner. The fifth dysfunction, "inattention to results," requires teams to be attentive to their goals and outcomes. They must continually analyze their progress. Some teams become hindered by individuals looking out for themselves instead of for the team. The leader's job is to make sure that the team is on track.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) in their book The *Wisdom of Teams*, describe six characteristics of high performing teams. They are: (1) they are all working towards a

common goal, (2) they have group and individual performance goals, (3) the group is

small, (4) the members have complementary expertise, (5) they have a common approach

to working together and (6) they hold themselves mutually and individually accountable

(p. 45). These group performance goals can positively impact an organization.

Understanding these goals will improve team performance and yield better results.

Defining clear goals, individual tasks, and group tasks will focus the group. Groups

should be small and have complimentary expertise. Not everybody has to be an expert in

everything. One person's weakness can be another person's strength. When a product is

reached, the team is responsible. If the project fails, it is not about blaming one person.

The whole group is responsible. Likewise, if the product is successful, all get credited

and rewarded. They all should celebrate together.

Groups have to be emotionally intelligent. They need to be in sync with the

feelings and emotions of the individual members and the collective group. The team

needs to feel a sense of belonging, and that the people are caring and listening to their

ideas. Teams need to establish group norms. Rules for dealing with conflict, issues,

individual problems, and other consuming matters can be established before the group

starts to work together. Creating an agenda, staying on track, establishing a leader,

defining individual roles and responsibilities, creating a schedule, and taking the time to

reflect are all important in group dynamics. Team members and leaders have to support

and understand before acting. There must be trust, awareness, efficacy, and consensus.

According to Bolman and Deal (2003), "Conscious attention to structure and roles can

make an enormous difference in group performance" (p. 108). This total effort is called

synergy. These concepts will drive the mission and efforts of a group.

Motivation

"Many people believe the most important quality of a leader is the ability to motivate others to accomplish group tasks" (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1995, p. 327). The Adair 50:50 rule (from his book *Effective Motivation*, 2009) states that: "50% of motivation comes from within a person, and 50% from his or her environment, especially from the leadership encountered therein" (p. 38). Adair (2009) states that there are eight rules to consider when motivating others. They are:

1. Be motivated yourself.

2. Select people who are highly motivated.

3. Treat each person as an individual.

4. Set realistic and challenging targets.

5. Remember that progress motivates.

6. Create a motivating environment.

7. Provide fair rewards.

8. Give recognition.

Educational leaders must know how to motivate others and continue to be self-motivated. Learning how to inspire followers is a challenging task. There are many factors that are involved including, morale, climate, and relationship building. Continuous learning is also an important part of leadership. Leaders must stay abreast of new information, strategies, and research. They also need to motivate others to be leaders and continuous learners in their organization. An old anonymous proverb states that, "A person who graduated yesterday, stopped studying today is uneducated tomorrow." People of all ages need to reap in the joys of learning new information.

Reflection

Reflection should play a major role in professional development in education. Whether a teacher, administrator, or student, it is an important learning tool that improves teaching and learning. Reflection can happen on a daily, quarterly, or yearly basis, after the event or during an actual event. This is a never-ending cycle that aids educational leaders in refining their skills, and being conscious of their weaknesses and strengths. It is a form of professional development that leads to organizational improvement. It can be used in any business or organization to ensure personal and professional growth. According to Ferraro (2000), it allows teachers to develop "a deeper understanding of their own teaching style and ultimately, greater effectiveness as a teacher" (para. 14). School administrators need to encourage their teachers to reflect on their own teaching and professional growth.

Roles and Responsibilities

DuFour (2003) described the role of the superintendent in fostering PLCs. He described how a superintendent should keep the focus on learning, collaborative teams, and teacher teams focused on results. He then described how a superintendent continued to monitor the principal's process of implementation and continued to provide any assistance. It is also important for school leaders to continue to monitor and assess PLCs and their success.

It is the responsibility of the principal or school leadership to instill the necessity of PLCs. According to DuFour (2002), leaders should:

1. Insist staff work together in collaborative teams that focus on students learning, and then provide the time, support, and parameters that promote team success,

2. Insist that teaching teams establish SMART goals, 3. Provide individual

teachers and teams with relevant feedback that indentifies the levels of mastery of

each student and informs teacher practice and 4. Celebrate improvements. (p. 76).

Haberman (2004) discusses that teachers will have to be convinced that spending time

with other teachers, instead of their students, will directly impact their students learning.

He also describes how the school leader will need to motivate the "star teachers" to share

their ideas and become teacher leaders. Teachers should not work in isolation but,

collaborative, professional groups. McKelvy and Thompson (2007) state, "The principal

must take leadership in creating and supporting an environment where stakeholders talk

freely about student achievement, where staff members reflect on their practices and take

risks to support student learning" (p. 14).

It is also the responsibility of the administration to make time for the teachers to

meet with their teams. "We believe it is insincere and disingenuous for any school district

or any school principal to stress the importance of collaboration, and then fail to provide

time for collaboration" (DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, para. 1). Rearranging

schedules so that PLCs can meet during the school day is a tough job, but it is possible.

There are many ways that school leaders can prepare. Teachers can meet at in-service

days, administrators can create schedules so they all have common preps, and/or

administrators can adjust the start or end times of the school day so that teachers

can meet.

Principals are instructional leaders. They must occasionally sit in on the PLCs and

offer resources, suggest materials, or just listen and offer encouragement. Principals need

to show dedication to the new project and continue to celebrate success. Even the

smallest success may be a cause for celebration. Principals are culture watchers. The culture should be monitored within the school so that negative attitudes are not overwhelming. Principals can continue to support teachers through hard times and difficulties with any educational effort.

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), principals that are dedicated and want to ensure success of PLCs can adhere to the following guidelines:

1- Attend to the building blocks of a professional learning community.

2- Communicate the importance of mission, vision, values, and goals on a daily basis.

3- Create collaborative structures with a focus on teaching and learning.

4- Shape the school culture to support a professional learning community.

5- Foster an approach to curriculum that focuses on learning rather than teaching.

6- Encourage teachers to think of themselves as leaders.

7- Practice enlightened leadership strategies.

8- Establish personal credibility.

9- Be fixated on results.

10- Recognize that continuous improvement requires continuous learning. (p. 198)

Principals and administrators cannot implement PLCs on their own. It takes the cooperation of the entire staff. "Principals cannot transform a school through their individual efforts. Creating a professional learning community is a collective effort, but that has little chance of success without effective leadership from the principal" (DuFour, 1998, p. 203). It is the leadership of the principal that creates the successful environment when initiating change. Change requires leaders to call upon the followers to step up and

become leaders. Fullan (2001) states, "Leadership, then, is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed" (p. 3).

Teacher professional development is one of the most important aspects of schools. Lambert (2003) suggests that professional development is an opportunity to learn. She states, "I would define professional development to include learning opportunities that can be found in collegial conversations, coaching episodes, shared decision-making groups, reflective journals, parent forums, or others such occasions" (p. 22). Lambert also states that the heart of leadership is quality teachers. Professional development is essential to ensuring academic achievement. Through PLCs teachers can grow professionally and develop skills to enhance student success. The best practices and data that are uncovered through meeting in PLCs will benefit the students, the school, and the community. DuFour (1998) concurs, stating:

> Teachers represent the heartbeat of a school, and the changes essential to school
> improvement must be manifested by individual teachers at the classroom level. It
> is impossible to create good schools without good teachers, just as it is impossible
> to create professional learning communities without teachers who function as
> professionals. (p. 233)

Teachers are responsible for keeping up with new ideas, concepts, methodologies, teaching strategies, and technology. It is the teacher that must be motivated to continue to learn.

> School must be a place where students and adults alike are responsible not only
> for student learning but for their own learning and that of their colleagues. Behind

this definition is the belief that when adults stop learning, so do students. The goal

of learning communities is to build social and intellectual connections among

people. (NAESP, 2001, p. 10).

If teachers continue to learn and build upon their knowledge, so will students. If

administrators are involved in PLCs teachers will be less reluctant to buy in to the

new concept.

When teams are working together to create lifelong learners in PLCs, every state

should want to implement PLCs. There is an abundance of new data that states that PLCs

work toward enhancing student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

However, every school, faculty, community, and district is different. It may take time to

develop a positive culture, teamwork, professional relationships, and implement a

meeting schedule.

One of the last requirements of building effective learning communities is

patience and persistence. It may take time, maybe even years, to effectively establish

PLCs. If school culture and climate are not right and staff do not have collective efficacy,

it may take even longer. There may be downfalls and there may be celebrations. There

may be implementation dips and there may be social events to offer encouragement.

When the end result is reached, accomplishments will be praised and celebrated. Then,

new goals can be formed and new visions created. It is a process that never ends and will

help the students. It will make the school a better place for the students and the teachers.

When developing PLCs, administrators, teachers, and other staff, need to keep in mind

that they can make a difference in the lives of every student. Although the process may

be slow, it will yield great results.

Evidence PLCs Work

Over the past decade, PLCs have become more popular in schools. Schools across the country are showing gains in student achievement because of professional learning communities. (DuFour et al., 2008) Within professional learning communities, teacher knowledge improves and therefore student learning improves. PLCs become a staff development or professional development approach that directly impacts student learning. With a vision to establish PLCs, schools may actually wind up developing a positive school culture and environment first. Any student progress due to new insights that are gained in PLCs should offer educational leaders hope. There are currently over 100 schools that have shared their success stories on the *allthingsplc* website, which is underwritten by the DuFours. In the book *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap* (2010) by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek, there are also several schools that share their achievement data and progress. The schools vary in ethnic, socio-economic status, grade level, location, and type of evidence submitted.

More school leaders need to share their success stories with the rest of the country to prove that PLCs work. If teachers need to work collaboratively, so do principals and superintendents. If administrators across the country or in their states shared with other administrators about the progress that PLCs are making in their schools, today's schools could improve rapidly. Sharing the good things that happen as well as the mistakes can help other school leaders learn and improve student learning as a result. Any dedicated, committed, leader would implement a program that guarantees results. More information and more evidence are necessary to get schools and the country to buy into the importance of establishing PLCs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to study the differences in teaching and learning training within PLCs and how it differs from traditional professional development. Teachers were given the opportunity to work in PLCs and relate this new method of professional development to the traditional professional development previously offered. The study focused on answering the following questions:

1. In what ways do traditional professional development opportunities and the teacher-training experiences found within a PLC differ for teachers in one middle school?

2. In what ways has the collaborative experience altered professional development for teachers at the middle school level?

3. Has student achievement improved based on professional learning community implementation?

4. How did my leadership influence the implementation of professional learning communities?

5. How did this action research project impact my leadership?

This dissertation was an action-research project. It was a job-embedded endeavor that involved a suburban school community and a second-order change effort. Hinchey (2008) described four characteristics of action research:

1- It is conducted by those inside a community (teachers, administrators, community members) rather than by outside experts, 2- It pursues improvement or better understanding in some area the researcher considers important, 3- It

involves systematic inquiry, which includes information gathering, analysis, and

reflection, and 4- It leads to an action plan, which frequently generates a new

cycle of the process. (p. 4)

First-order change involves adjusting what someone is already doing, where second-order change involves a complete makeover of an institution's values and norms. (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974, p. 10)

This project contained both a qualitative and quantitative design. Qualitative research is based on descriptive data that the researcher finds through fieldwork, interviews, transcripts, artifacts, videos, and detailed notes. The study evolves as the process continues. The researcher seeks to understand human behavior by telling the story from the participant's viewpoint. Data collection usually takes place where the observed participants are comfortable. The collected data are coded so that they can be organized, interpreted, and analyzed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described qualitative research as, "An approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subjects point of view" (p. 274).

Although qualitative research focuses on people, their culture, and why they do what they do, quantitative research focuses on numerical data. It involves using statistics to analyze and present data. Although the sample size is often smaller in qualitative research, the data are just as rich and in-depth. Qualitative research requires more time in the field compiling data through various methods. This project was a case study, which is "a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 59).

The participants of this mixed-methods action research project included teachers (N=59) of one New Jersey suburban middle school. This case study focused on teacher perceptions of PLCs over approximately two years and how this new model of professional development differed from the traditional model. It also focused on the collaborative experiences that the teachers participated in and how that impacted their professional development. The methodology included teacher interviews (qualitative), PLC artifacts (qualitative), and teacher surveys (quantitative and qualitative).

The first cycle of this study included creating the first PLC professional development experience with the school professional development committee (SPDC). This type of committee is required in all school districts within the State of New Jersey (State of New Jersey, 2009; NJAC 6A:9-15, 2009). The SPDC collaboratively communicates in order to support the professional development programs and discuss planning and preparation for upcoming workshops.

The SPDC created subject-matter teams, those who teach the same subject and or specialty, so that common assessments could be formed at some point in the future. Based on this, an overall presentation on the meaning of PLCs was introduced along with commonly encountered terminology. During the first meeting, the teams created group norms and continued to develop positive, congenial relationships. Each team received a binder full of PLC documents and resources that helped guide discussions and understand the new shift in thinking.

Then, the SPDC discussed the time factor and how the staff could use their time more wisely in meetings. The staff members were learning how to transition from meetings that disseminate information to a discussion-oriented, student-focused, results-

oriented meeting. Candy and water were given to the staff to enjoy at their tables and lively music was played as the staff members entered and worked in their teams. At the end of the meeting, each staff member was given a survey to complete based on his or her professional development experience (Appendix A) and the new professional development paradigm.

Based on the survey results from the first professional development experience, Cycle II was created. During the second cycle, the teams reviewed their norms as soon as they arrived. Then, the teams continued to look at data and understand SMART goals. Within their teams, they discussed topics such as common assessments, curriculum, 21st century skills, technology, and NJASK scores. At the end of the meeting, the staff members completed a similar survey (Appendix A) on their professional development experience.

From both surveys, data were used to build Cycle III, the next professional development experience based on PLCs. In the third cycle, the teams continued to work on their SMART goals and started to jot down ideas for results-oriented student achievement. Some teams shared their possible SMART goals and were well on their way to achieving their results. Cookies, coffee, tea, hot chocolate, water, and music were provided in order to create a stimulating, positive environment. Again, at the end of this cycle, a survey (Appendix A) was given based on the teachers' perceptions of their professional development experience. Staff members continued to work on their SMART goals, data analysis, common assessments, and curriculum. They continued to work in their PLCs during department meetings and continued the process of implementing this new professional development paradigm.

In the fourth cycle, I interviewed teachers on PLCs and their professional development experiences. The interviews were conducted based on the interview protocol (Appendix B). Each participant signed the informed consent form (Appendix C). I interviewed staff member(s) in each content area (language arts, reading, math, science, social studies, physical education, expressive arts, music, and world language). I also interviewed one support staff member, a school nurse. The special education teachers were on the PLC in which they taught most. The school nurse was chosen from the support staff category, which included two guidance counselors, and the school nurse. The librarian was part of the language arts PLC. The first ten participants were chosen using a stratified random sample method. For example, I put the names of each social studies teacher into a hat and picked one of those teachers to interview. The final ten staff members were chosen from a sample of convenience. These teachers had a similar preparation period or lunchtime, which simplified the interview process. In total, 20 interviews were conducted. I conducted interviews based on the numbers of teachers in the PLC. For example, since there were more teachers in the language arts/reading PLC, I interviewed more teachers in that PLC.

Throughout the first three cycles, teachers completed anonymous surveys (Appendix A) before they left so that the SPDC could determine the needs of future professional development. The surveys asked teachers to respond to different topics in a Likert-type format. The topics included organization, pace, relevance of handouts/materials, knowledge growth, and success. The staff was also asked to write the most useful and least useful parts of their professional development experiences. At the bottom of the survey there was a section labeled, "Please provide any further comments

below," so that teachers had the opportunity to share other ideas or questions that they had. These surveys contained both qualitative and quantitative information. The quantitative data were based on Likert-scale questions and the open-ended questions provided qualitative data.

In the fifth cycle, NJ state standardized test scores in my school were analyzed over the past two years. Language arts and math scores were examined in both seventh and eighth grades. Science scores were examined in only eighth grade because it is only given to eighth graders. The data were compared to the state average. Data were also compared to local schools that had similar socioeconomic status.

The data obtained through the surveys and interviews were coded into relevant themes. The professional development surveys were analyzed and reported in quantitative format and the test scores were analyzed to see if PLCs had any effect on student achievement. The study was not generalizable to other schools, but may help to generate ideas on how to start PLCs and understand the challenges with implementation. It also provided a wealth of knowledge on the PLC topic and resources for development.

Throughout each cycle, I took detailed notes. Based on the surveys, interviews, test scores, and artifacts, I was able to triangulate my data. Triangulation occurs when a researcher uses three or more methods to gather data. It makes the study more valid and reliable. Triangulation makes it more likely that the study can be replicated with the same results. It also increases credibility. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state "It [triangulation] came to mean that many sources of data were better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena you were studying" (p. 115).

I also was careful not to include my own personal views on the pertinent issues. I tried to reduce subjectivity and bias. Subjectivity is when the results of research are based on the researchers feeling or beliefs. Therefore, the data can be skewed. Bias is when the researcher has a particular perspective on a topic that can mask his/her judgment. It can make the data be influenced in a certain direction. Researchers need to be concerned about subjectivity and bias because it can cause the interpretation and validity to be skewed. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 38). Researchers should constantly be thinking about how their feelings, beliefs, and values can hinder their judgment and perceptions on their research topic. It should be a constant thought in the researcher's mind.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to analyze the difference between traditional professional development and PLCs in one New Jersey middle school. Professional learning communities are teams that strive to work collectively to improve student achievement.

Schools that function as professional learning communities are always characterized by a collaborative culture. Teacher isolation is replaced with collaborative processes that are deeply embedded into the daily life of the school. Members of a PLC are not invited to work with colleagues: They are called upon to be contributing members of a collective effort to improve the school's capacity to help all students learn at high levels. (Eaker et al., 2002, p. 5)

The five research questions are:

1. In what ways do traditional professional development opportunities and the teacher-training experiences found within a PLC differ for teachers in one middle school?

2. In what ways has the collaborative experience altered professional development for teachers at the middle school level?

3. Has student achievement improved based on professional learning community implementation?

4. How did my leadership influence the implementation of professional learning communities?

5. How did this action research project impact my leadership?

This mixed methods study took place in a culturally diverse suburban New Jersey middle school. The quantitative material used was from the surveys given from each professional development workshop and the test score data. The qualitative material was from the open-ended questions on the surveys, from the interviews, and from the artifacts obtained throughout the PLC implementation period.

Survey Quantitative Results

The first survey was completed by 53 teachers. The second survey was completed by 47 teachers. The third survey was completed by 44 staff members. The surveys were completed by all staff members in attendance but, due to other school-related professional development obligations, some faculty members were unable to participate. For example, some teachers had training on chemical substances and some had cardiopulmonary resuscitation training. Each survey gathered information in a Likert-scale form to propel the future professional development experiences and teacher perceptions of PLCs (Appendix A).

The first survey yielded much information to help guide the future professional development sessions. Out of 53 participants, 48 (91%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the "workshop enhanced my knowledge of PLCs." When asked if the workshop "helped the teams create norms," 49 out of 53 participants, or 92% of respondents stated that they either agreed or strongly agreed. Also, 46 out of 53 participants (85%) responded that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop "helped me to gain knowledge of teamwork" and "helped me to further understand how to work in teams."

The second survey also asked the respondents to rate based on a five-point Likert scale if the workshop "enhanced my knowledge of PLCs." Out of 47 respondents, 40 staff members (85%) either agreed or strongly agreed. When asked if the workshop "helped me to gain knowledge of teamwork," 42 out of 47 (89%) either agreed or strongly agreed, and when asked if the workshop "helped me to further understand how to work in teams," 41 out of 47 (87%) either agreed or strongly agreed.

The third survey asked the respondents to rate whether the workshop "enhanced my knowledge of PLCs." The data showed that 38 out of 44 (86%) of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed. When asked if the workshop "helped me gain knowledge of SMART goals," 42 out of 44 (95%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. When asked if the workshop "helped me to further understand how to work in teams," 39 out of 44 (89%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed.

Survey Qualitative Results

There were three qualitative questions on the surveys which included:

1- What was the most useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

2- What was the least useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

3- Please provide any further comments below:

The data were coded into the following categories: professional development, collaboration, norms/team building, materials/handouts, confusion/lack of clarity, goals, student achievement, and culture.

Professional development

The teachers compared and contrasted the PLC workshops with previous professional development workshops. Most seemed to appreciate many aspects. such as

collaboration, team building, data analysis, norms, and setting goals. One survey respondent said, "These workshops are much more informative than typical workshops. They further enforce our great relationship with staff." The previous professional development experiences that were not sustained were not beneficial to student achievement. Another respondent said, "Moving from past practice to PLC" will benefit the entire learning community.

Collaboration/Teamwork

The survey qualitative data showed that collaboration and teamwork were the main themes from the respondents. Teachers said they liked, "meeting with others from my department to discuss teaching strategies and methods." Many people enjoyed working with their team members. "The most useful part of this professional development workshop was working with my department and knowing more about each member," said one respondent.

The teachers fostered an environment within their PLCs where there was open communication and discussion. Many were able to support each other's opinions, interact with colleagues, and build a common framework. The staff members learned about the importance of teamwork and sharing ideas. One teacher said that their team was "getting excited about ideas together." The staff enjoyed "building norms because it brought our group closer," said one teacher.

The teams even liked to create their team norms. Although many believed that it may be a bit too "touchy-feely" for them, they understood why it was necessary. One teacher said, "Our team agreed and were motivated to create norms." One teacher said that, "My team is not a team, can't do vs. can do." However, for the most part, the staff

enjoyed being able "to see how into the program everyone was." They enjoyed hearing ideas of the members of their department, and creating a foundation for future team production. One respondent said that they found "team collaboration and discussing norms" useful "because even though we work well together already, it allowed my team to think more critically than before."

Materials/Handouts

Many staff members did not like the numerous handouts. Although, many of them liked the binders given on PLCs per team. The "handouts contained information that mimicked the powerpoint." There was "data overload" when looking at test score data. "Handouts did not give any new information. We were receiving too many handouts which we were not ready for."

Confusion/Lack of Clarity

Some teachers had difficulty with the direction in which PLCs would bring our building. They wanted more clarification on PLCs, the definition, and believed that we supplied too many handouts. One teacher stated, "I feel that nothing has been defined in terms of what is expected of us." Another staff member stated, "I still do not understand what is being expected." One teacher stated:

> This entire meeting was a complete waste of taxpayers' dollars. It seems that you are trying to reinvent the wheel. Look, if it's not broken, don't fix it!! I think this is a rogue project created by some college professors whose main ambition is to make money by selling books on leadership.

Goals

Many teams appreciated the time to get together to create common goals for their department or PLC. One teacher said that they enjoyed "developing SMART goals, getting specific, and the opportunity to discuss amongst the group." Another teacher said, "My team was able to further enhance our SMART goal." The staff members also enjoyed "listening to the other communities' SMART goals and realizing how all of our goals are interrelated." Another teacher said that they enjoyed, "learning about SMART goals, now our department can move forward in uniform." Many of the teachers believed that it was useful to hear the other PLCs SMART goals which helped to reinforce PLCs. They were helpful to make sure that the PLCs were on the same page. Many staff members also mentioned that they learned that these goals must be measurable.

Student Achievement

Many teachers discussed the link between PLCs and student achievement. One teacher said that they appreciated hearing "how PLCs can help students learn" in one of the workshops. Another teacher said, "It was useful to be productive with my department because I think it can help with the success of the students." The interviews yielded positive reactions and that they looked forward to creating common assessments, analyzing test score data, and monitoring the needs of each student. Some also mentioned the importance of deciding on what to teach as a PLC.

Culture

Many teachers even discussed the change in culture and school climate that PLCs will help foster. One teacher said that it helped to "recognize how we need to change our meetings and better use our time and how to pool our knowledge, ideas, and resources."

Many respondents said that it developed the potential for improving the school atmosphere. One respondent said, "I hope we can all continue to work well together as professionals to ultimately help students." The teachers seemed to understand that this program will really benefit the culture of teaching and learning in the school.

The respondents also appreciated how PLCs made them feel more part of a family within the building. The PLCs seemed to inspire accountability, pride, motivation to improve student learning and stray away from the status quo, and truly develop a positive culture. "I am feeling very glad to be part of a group, and when, and if, I retire, I feel by that time, PLCs will be in place and very successful," said one teacher. Since embedded PLCs within the culture of the building is a large-change project and goal of the administration, this statement seems to suggest that the school is on the right direction to bank this new paradigm.

Interview Qualitative Results

In total, I interviewed 20 teachers. I interviewed at least one teacher in each PLC, and if there were many teachers in a PLC, I interviewed more teachers in that PLC. I tried to interview a proportion of teachers in each PLC to gather more reliable data (Table 1). The interviews lasted anywhere from 30-60 minutes. They compiled a wide variety of data based on PLCs, professional development, teamwork, collaboration, and leadership. The interview questions were directly related to the teachers' perceptions of PLCs and the professional development program (Appendix B).

Table 1.

Teachers interviewed

Name of PLC	Number of teachers in PLC, including special education teachers	Number of teachers interviewed
Language Arts	9	3
Reading	8	3
Math	10	2
Science	8	3
Social Studies	6	2
Physical Education/Health	4	2
Expressive Arts	5	1
Music	3	1
Foreign Languages/ ESL	3	2
Support Staff	3	1
Totals	**59**	**20**

I coded the data into similar, relevant areas as the survey codes, which were: professional development, collaboration, norms/team building, confusion/lack of clarity, student achievement, and culture. These were the areas that were most prominent after analysis.

Professional development

Four years ago, the veteran staff developer for this district retired. According to the responses, since her departure the professional development programs have not been sustained, or valuable to staff members. When the teachers were asked to name a successful professional development experience, one teacher said, "I would have to say, [Mrs. Previous Staff Developer], going back a few years. When she would have people come in and she would teach strategies and have everybody work with it and bring in

their own strategies and lessons." Another teacher commented on the fact that the only good professional development programs were organized by Mrs. Previous Staff Developer. "[Mrs. Previous Staff Developer] was really good, we have somebody new now." A third teacher said, "She [Mrs. Previous Staff Developer] was phenomenal. Her program involved teachers and were not centered on one area."

When asked about the current state of the professional development program, one teacher said, "I think it's a work in progress. I don't know if it is hitting and meeting everybody's needs. I think it could be a little bit better." Another teacher said that it should be more eventful. Another teacher said, "I think that the professional development experiences that are in district are less beneficial than the one's outside." Most of the teachers mentioned successful out-of-school professional development experiences and not in-school experiences. They believe that the district needs better, in-house professional development.

When asked to discuss how the professional development program has impacted their teaching and learning, one teacher said, "To be honest, I don't think it has changed how I teach." Another teacher said, "I don't think any has benefitted my teaching and learning. Nothing has stood out." The teachers believe that the current state of the program is not compelling or enlightening. They believe that "More specialized professional development is needed, those that are relevant to subject area," said one teacher.

Current veteran staff members are used to professional development programs that are not sustained or monitored. They are, "famous for starting and stopping programs," said one teacher. "Hopefully this [PLCs] won't be something that disappears.

The veteran teachers are used to something else coming up and what was in place for a year is abandoned," said one teacher. The teachers believe that the professional development is not sustained, that there is little, if no follow-up. The workshops should not be one-shot deals. The teachers discussed how it may be due to the constant change in administration. The teachers believe that they should be asked for input.

Collaboration

Every teacher I interviewed said that it was extremely important for teachers to share assessment, strategies, and ideas. One teacher said, "I think it's very important that everyone collaborates because it does take some of the work load off of individual people and it is great to see different perceptions." They enjoyed the times that they had to collaborate. They said that it is easier to share ideas and are more excited when they collaborate. Many teachers mentioned that since the common prep period for teaming, the middle school concept was eliminated; there was less collaboration between faculty members on students, learning, and teaching. One respondent said, "There was really good collaboration…we worked well together, we planned together. It just worked out really well. There was a good mix of personalities."

Many teachers had some good definitions or purposes of a PLC which included:

1. I think the purpose of a PLC is to better ourselves. We learn more and bring it to a classroom and it will better our teaching ability and help us teach the students and have them learn a different way. Cause we are all different types of learners and maybe it will help them as well.

2. On the same page so that we can help kids reach their full potential.

3. Collaboration of staff in providing a richer academic environment for students.

4. Working together, not arguing, building off of each other's ideas is definitely key, not just taking the first idea thrown out there or taking majority vote, everyone should be understanding and involved.

5. One purpose of a PLC is to get all of the teachers in one discipline, and cross discipline, to work together to reach similar goals.

6. Another purpose of a PLC is to reach those goals for each student in education.

7. To achieve unified goals, assessing, and helping students.

8. A PLC is basically a team of personnel, working together to form a common goal.

According to the respondents, one reason that they do not collaborate is time. One teacher said, "We need more time to collaborate and figure out things, then we would be more knowledgeable, and it would be more beneficial." Another teacher thought that it may be because of selfish reasons. "We need to do more of it. I think a lot of people have a good idea and don't want to share it. They don't want other people to use the same thing or make it better and somehow get the credit for it."

"Communication, it is one of the most important parts of collaboration," said one teacher. "It can't be one dimensional. It must expand. It is the lifeline, the circulation, the blood flow of the school." Many teachers believe that PLCs will help the staff communicate. One teacher said, "We are more of a community, now it's more of a cohesive program." Another said, "I am a big supporter of PLCs, I enjoy it. It is where

teacher growth lies." A third said, "I want to see PLCs develop and be sustained. It should lead everything else." They enjoyed the time to collaborate. Another teacher said that, "the sum is greater than its parts, now we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We can tap into each other's resources."

Norms/team building

The interviews brought about different topics that revolved around team building. Many discussed norms, how they enjoy their team, and how the team can be dysfunctional. One teacher said that teams need to be, "honest, share strategies, on same page, and collaborate." One teacher said that the team's norms were too general and not specific enough.

Many teachers responded that the teams brought about positive experiences and will bring about more positive experiences. One teacher said, "PLCs are good for new teachers to settle into the team and building faster." Another said, "Working in teams is the best way to solve problems, it's the team approach." A third said, "When people collaborate they come up with a result that was better than any would have thought." One teacher even said, "This was the first year that I have even felt like I have worked with a team or even been on a team."

Many of the teachers discussed resistance or team dysfunctions. "I think the people who resisted started coming around. I really think that when people start to understand it there won't be all of these issues. As long as we keep it simple," said one teacher. Another teacher discussed how their team holds discussions. "Conversation skills need to improve. Some people don't let others speak," said the respondent. The teachers also discussed how some of the veteran teachers may not want to change. "It is pride,

they are set in their ways, they need to make it fun, but they don't want to change," the teacher said.

Many teams collaborate often, and many collaborate seldom. "Some teams are functional and some are dysfunctional. Our department collaborates, other departments do not," said one teacher. Many teachers mentioned that some PLCs are more productive than others. Another teacher said that, "Some groups have members that don't believe; they think it's a trendy fad. Every member must believe. They must have a balance and energy to propel."

Confusion/lack of clarity

Many teachers mentioned that there was still some confusion. They wanted different examples and ways to understand PLCs. They wanted more defined, concrete examples and to see the meeting location change from the cafeteria to somewhere that is more conducive to learning. "Maybe if we saw other districts that use PLCs or like if there was video or more handouts that described it more, or more literature," said one of the interviewees.

Many teachers mentioned that they wanted to see more accountability within the teams for what they are doing. One teacher said, "I think we need more time working on it though. And I don't think we should be doing it on our own right away. We need to have set times where we should be meeting to start us off." Another teacher said, "I think we need more directed time to get a hand of, a hold of, what PLCs really are and what we should be doing. I think we need a little bit more direction." A third teacher said that we "need more accountability within the teams." Another teacher said that there was "less energy if everyone is not doing it and that teachers must take it more seriously."

Student achievement

Many of the teachers mentioned test scores and student achievement as a primary reason why the district is incorporating PLCs. One teacher said, "The purpose of a PLC is to raise test scores. To help kids. To help kids learn so they do better on tests." Another said that the purpose was "To enhance student's learning, and have them work to their fullest potential." Many teachers discussed how they need to collaborate to create common assessments so that the teachers can be more responsible and accountable for what the students are learning. One teacher even said that a PLC is, "People that work together and look at the hard core facts and design assessments for achievement."

Culture

According to the staff, the culture of the building and the camaraderie is excellent. "We have an excellent staff here and I think that we have the potential to get there," said one teacher when talking about the impact PLCs may have on student achievement. Another teacher said, "This school stands out, takes care of everybody else. The relationship between the young and old teachers is awesome." Many teachers mentioned how they like that PLCs have built a better bond, and respect. They believe that the professionalism and social climate will improve as long as "We look at our staff as a community and not as individuals," said one staff member.

Even though the school climate is excellent the culture needs to change to a more collaborative unit. One teacher mentioned how the "building culture must change in order for it [PLCs] to be sustained." She believes that the opportunity is there and the potential is apparent, but some teachers are "too used to accepting mediocrity." Many people

mentioned that teacher leadership needed to be raised to a higher standard. "You can't teach a teacher to be a good teacher," said one teacher.

Many teachers even felt like they were more included. "I finally felt like I was part of something rather than always being by myself," said one staff member. When commenting on the impact of PLCs, one teacher said:

I liked it. I think it was excellent and it was very informative. It was well run. It was fun to learn about. It wasn't boring. I copied and framed everything we did. It was good because it made me feel part of a team and I made that known.

Many teachers even believed that PLCs made their team have a much better relationship than before. They thought that it was easier to communicate and understand the other person's perspective.

Relation to health field

When interviewing the nurse, it was interesting to see the comparison between PLCs and medical meetings that discuss the patient's care and treatment:

And they do that in the hospital as well. The nurse, social worker, dietician, speech therapist, doctor, respiratory therapist, physical therapist, whoever, is involved in that patient's care will have a weekly interdisciplinary meeting to discuss that patient's care and their progress. They plan and everybody knows their role. Nothing is duplicated and everything is covered.

In medicine, all of the pertinent individuals get together to discuss each patient, their diagnosis, their treatment, and their progress. In education, we must collaborate to discuss what is best for our students and their learning.

Quantitative and Qualitative Results Discussion

The data suggest that PLCs allow teachers to collaborate, communicate, increase relationship-building opportunities, get to know each other better, improve student achievement, and create a sustained professional development program. The data also suggest that collaboration between members of PLCs has improved. Teachers have also tried to communicate with other PLCs to incorporate interdisciplinary lessons within their teaching.

Based on the research and data acquired, the data suggest that the staff members appreciated the PLC professional development workshops. The data suggest that PLCs have improved the culture and climate of the building and that the teachers have gained knowledge of PLCs and teamwork. They appreciated the time to get to know one another better, develop their norms, and work on their SMART goals. They have created good SMART goals based on the professional development sessions (Appendix D) and have continued to develop a new set of SMART goals.

They believe that the current PLC professional development experiences, which are sustained, are more worthwhile than the traditional professional development experiences. DuFour et al. (2008) state, "Unfortunately, the way in which districts have typically approached professional development has not built capacity. Instead, it has contributed to teacher isolation in schools and a lack of coherence in districts" (p. 364). Goodlad (1983) calls for a more focused style of professional development. It should be ongoing, where the teachers are learning collectively and analyzing data to better teach the students.

PLCs have created more time to allow teachers to collaborate. According to the interviews, the teachers believe that it is very important to collaborate, share ideas, and share strategies with other teachers. Many of the departments have used their time wisely to either set norms or discuss strategies for enhancing student achievement. As DuFour et al. (2008) state, "It is difficult to overstate the importance of collaborative teams in the PLC process" (p. 15).

The data also suggest that the language arts and reading departments have the highest performing PLC. The interviews of all six teachers were very positive and mentioned how well their team functions. They created measurable SMART goals and liked how PLCs gave them the time to collaborate and work together to enhance student achievement and their teaching. Several of them mentioned how they even discuss strategies, and create common assessments.

On the contrary, the interviews with the math department were not as positive. Although they believed that collaboration was extremely important, it was noted that they do not collaborate often and they do not work well as a team. One teacher said, that one of the administrators needs to be at their meetings every week to make sure that they stay accountable. There was often no agenda at their department or PLC meetings, and some were not on board with the PLC concept. The teacher said that the team was "not functioning, but work independently."

All of the science department staff members that were interviewed were supportive of the PLC paradigm and were excited to form discussion sessions, new assessments, and learn from the other members of their team. They collaborated and worked well as a team.

Test Score Results and Discussion

During the 2009 NJASK, the state's standardized test, the teachers were not part of a PLC. In 2010, it was the first year of PLCs in my school. There are many ways that the test score data can be compared. They can be compared by class, seventh grade to eighth grade, and grade level, seventh grade to seventh grade. The test scores can also be compared to the district factor group (DFG), like school populations based on socioeconomic status, and New Jersey State average. Both seventh and eighth grades take the math and language arts test. Only the eighth graders take the science test. Therefore, the science test can only be compared by grade level. These tests are measured using a 300-point scale. Students that receive 250 or above are advanced proficient, 200-249 are proficient, and 199 or less are partially proficient.

The language arts proficient and above percentage scores (Appendix E, Figures 3 & 5) for sixth to seventh grade in 2009 were 70.6% to 76% in 2010. The language arts scores in seventh to eighth grade were 77.2% in 2009, and 91.8% in 2010. The language arts scores when compared by grade were: 77.2% to 76% for seventh grade and 92.1% to 91.8% for eighth grade. The scores were above districts of the same DFG or within .3 in both years. In eighth grade, the scores were approximately four points above districts in the same DFG.

The math proficient and above percentage scores (Appendix E, Figures 4 & 6) from sixth to seventh grade in 2009 were 76.5% to 68.5% in 2010. The math scores from seventh to eighth grade were 66% in 2009 and 69.7% in 2010. The math scores, when compared by grade, were: 66% to 68.5% for seventh grade, and 77.4% to 69.7% for eighth grade. The scores were below similar DFG districts for seventh grade in 2009, and

eighth grade in 2010. Although, scores were above districts of similar DFG for eighth grade in 2009 and seventh grade in 2010, it was only by a small % of at most .6.

The science scores from 2009 to 2010 in eighth grade (Appendix E, Figures 7) went from 93.0% to 92.4%. The scores in language arts showed the most improvement. When compared to like DFGs, the language arts scores improved at a similar rate. The science scores showed a consistently high proficiency rate. The math scores decreased from 2009 to 2010 in the sixth and seventh grades, and when compared to similar DFGs, were also under the average in seventh grade for 2009, and eighth grade for 2010 (see Figures 8 & 9 in Appendix E).

When compared to the interview results, the language arts team who worked well as a team, had better test score improvement than the math department. The science department also outscored the DFG average by 2.5% or more.

Leadership Growth and Discussion

Throughout the study I have learned many aspects about the essence of leadership. I have learned about myself, my strengths, and my weaknesses. I have learned about how to deal with resistors and how important it is to carefully explain, and get the teachers on board. I have dealt with negativity, built positive relationships, and have learned more about working with people and the individual people in my school. I have learned when to be a listener, a follower, and a leader. "Effectiveness is dependent upon the leader, the followers, and other situational elements. In managing for effectiveness a leader must be able to diagnose his own leader behavior in light of his environment" (Hersey & Blanchard, 1995, p.148).

Over the past two years I have become more of a servant leader through developing professional development experiences for the staff in the building. I have also tried to listen more to other's needs and help them in any way I can. Whether iwas finding and distributing resources, fostering community, or helping build teamwork, I have grown to be more of a servant leader. I have created a new standard for the professional development experiences and have maintained a positive outlook that this will remain a framework through which future professional development experiences will be offered. These experiences have allowed me to become a better leader, and encourage others to do the same.

I have also grown as a leader tremendously. It is easier to understand people, their needs, and how I can assist them in the process of teaching and learning. Goleman et al. (2002) states, "These emotional intelligence competencies are not innate talents, but learned abilities, each of which has a unique contribution to making leaders more resonant, and therefore more effective" (p. 38). Whether personal or social competencies, I have learned that every person communicates differently, has different strengths and weaknesses, and can become a leader. Motivation to transform from follower to leader starts with good leadership. It starts with good people inspiring others to break free from the status quo and the norm.

Through giving these workshops, interviewing the teachers, and being aware of the climate in the building, I am finding it easier to read body language, facial expressions and I am also learning about my own emotional intelligence gaps. Through the new programs and experiences that I have created for the students and staff, I have learned to understand people in a different way. I often try to think about other

perceptions, and understand the reasons for why people do or say certain things. I have learned to be a better listener and a better public speaker. I have also gained confidence as a speaker, an educator, a professional developer, and leader.

Throughout the past two years, I have been a part of my school's professional development committee. I learned to be part of a team, even though I was looked upon as the leader. I was able to delegate responsibility to other team members and encourage others to read more on new professional development strategies. We worked as a team in a professional manner. We trusted each other, developed strong relationships, and relied on each other for help and support. We leaned on one another for new strategies, concepts, ideas, and activities. We built similar goals and the same mission and vision for the professional development program, and were committed to its success.

I would say that I tried to incorporate more of the "Level 5 Leadership" styles that Collins (2001) discusses. Collins believed that good leaders are humble, willful, curious, reserved, modest, ambitious, and results oriented. I set a goal to spread the concept of PLCs to the staff and have them learn to love the camaraderie and professionalism that it brings. Collins (2001) said that these successful leaders were driven to succeed, even in an almost shy nature. It made me realize that being a quiet, good listener, was more important that being a good speaker or presenter. Learning to understand and hear other people allowed the teachers in my school to "have a voice" and feel as if they belonged. They felt as if what they said mattered. We even started to meet as a group to establish a new school mission statement.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS

After careful reflection and analysis of the data gained throughout this study, I would suggest that more time be given to develop PLCs in the school. There needs to be more accountability amongst the teams. Administration should require that an agenda be given to teachers of the PLC and the administration before each meeting. Someone should take notes during the meeting, and someone should keep the team on track so that the team stays focused.

I suggest that teams should carefully review their team norms at each meeting and that the team develop quality relationships so that they are comfortable speaking and even saying that their norms are not being followed. I suggest that the SMART goals be displayed in a centrally located area with a short monthly progress statement, so that the entire building knows what the other teams are doing.

I suggest that the school and district support the development of PLCs and continually monitor the success. The professional development program needs to develop more in-house training to support the growth of PLCs. The professional development program must ensure that each subject area is being reached within the professional development sessions and that members of each team can gain insight and directly relate it to their own teaching and learning.

The PLC teams must continually make sure that they are collaborating with the intent to improve student achievement. They must make sure that they are not working in isolation, but rather working together on a common goal – improving student

achievement. They must monitor student growth, and discuss curriculum. The shift from isolation to collaboration is the most important component of successful teams.

Limitations and Biases

Throughout the research, I have encountered many limitations. First, I completed the interviews which may have caused the teachers to feel uncomfortable, or not share the whole truth. The tests are different every year and are not the only way to analyze student achievement. The NJASK 2010 was only scored by one reader this year due to budgetary constrictions. Therefore if the reader was tired or had reader rage, they may not have written the appropriate score.

As a teacher in the school, I am aware that some teachers may have not completed the surveys accurately since I am an insider in the school. I acknowledge that the data found may be the result of my reflective practice. I also conducted half of the interviews based on a sample of convenience and may not have adequately represented a differentiated population. This research did not consider the possible effects of having the entire faculty participate in PLCs without having a control group. Although, the previous school year could have been considered a control group as it did not involve PLCs.

This study is not generalizable to other schools because of the specific aspects of this study. With only 280 to 300 students per grade, and only studying the perspectives of 59 teachers, it is not enough of a sample size. There was also a change in administration, not enough time for the PLCs to collaborate, and only studied in one middle school. This study needs to be studied over a longer period of time and replicated in other districts. More research needs to be done to determine the best way to transition to PLCs, the impact of PLCs on teaching and learning, and the impact of PLCs on collaboration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the professional development program must be improved through the establishment of PLCs. The data suggested a need for ongoing, collaborative professional development that is focused on results and student achievement. The PLCs need to be focused and accountable on the professional task of student growth and academic success. The teachers should continue to embrace the development of PLCs and collaborative experiences that focus on student achievement.

The school needs to make sure that the PLCs are accountable for their own collaboration and department. They should continue to monitor, analyze, and work together to improve student achievement. There should be more time for professional development that is in-house, focused, and ongoing. The future professional development experiences need to be sustained and embedded within the culture of the building.

Overall, through the development of PLCs, a strong shared mission, and a collaborative culture, the staff should believe in the best possible education for each and every student through great leadership, and inspiring educational programs and experiences. There needs to be a strong sense of what is right and maintain a vision of moral and ethical beliefs. Leadership must be motivated, enthusiastic, and maintain high expectations. Leaders must share their love to learn and develop as educational leaders. Through best practices and a strong collaborative vision, they need to lead, encourage, motivate, and inspire the staff. The development of the young minds of the community is in the hands of educators and we need to do the best we can to ensure that all students succeed.

Leadership

Throughout the past two years, I have grown as a leader while helping my school transition to professional learning communities. I have developed as a collaborative leader and learned greater listening and analytical skills. Teachers and administrators are leaders and some of the best professional development programs are those that the school offers from within. The teachers can have a great impact on each other's teaching, learning, and professional development. I have had great impact on the teachers through implementing PLCs and because of this my public speaking and confidence has improved.

Since I have learned so much about implementing PLCs while completing this action research project, I have created a simple brochure for leaders that are thinking about or starting PLCs in their school (Appendix F). It provides a short list of excellent resources, an implementation guide, PLC definitions, and other helpful information.

Currently, my school is creating a mission statement that will be monitored and developed by the entire school community. I have learned about persistence through the challenging task of trying to explain why the change needed to happen. I learned about resistance and that large change efforts will require patience and time. I continue to use Kotter's (1996) eight step change theory to reflect my leadership style.

Leading my school through this process has been a tremendous learning experience. The staff of my school is a more collaborative group of professionals that are more motivated to help the students learn. They continue to work cooperatively to achieve new heights and learn from one another. The staff meets more frequently and participates in professional development experiences that are sustained over time.

Through this transition, the professional development program has become a more unified program that functions properly to enhance student achievement. The leaders, teachers, and administrators, are beginning to understand the importance of this change and what it could do for the school and students. The leaders must continue to support this change effort and provide the proper resources for its success.

References

Adair, J. (2009). *Effective motivation: How to get extraordinary results from everyone.* London, UK: Pan Publishing.

Alexander Graham Bell. (n.d.). *Quotes.net*. Retrieved from http://www.quotes.net/quote/42852

Aristotle. (n.d.). *Quotes.net*. Retrieved from http://www.quotes.net/quote/1866

Astuto, T., Clark, D., Read, A-M., McGree, K., & Fernandez, L. (1993). *Challenges to dominant assumptions controlling educational reform.* Andover, MA: Regional Laboratory for the Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands.

Barrett, R. (2005). Values based leadership: Why it is important for the future of your organization. Retrieved from http://inbalanceconsulting.com/values.html

Barth, R. (2006). Improving relationships within the schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership, 63*(6), 8-13.

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

Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2003). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Brett, J. M., Goldberg, S. B., & Ury, W. L. (1995). Designing systems for resolving disputes in organizations. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages* (pp. 431-450). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Burns, J. M. (1995). Moral leadership. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages* (p. 483). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap and other don't.* New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishing.

Council of Chief State School Officers. (1996). Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/isllcstd.pdf.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education.* New York, NY: Macmillan.

DuFour, R. (1997). Moving toward the school as a learning community. *Journal of Staff Development, 18*(1), 52-53.

DuFour, R. (1998). Learning-centered schools grow from strong cultures. *Journal of Staff Development*, *19*(1), 58-59.

DuFour, R. (2002). Bring the whole staff on board. *Journal of Staff Development, 23*(3), 76-77.

DuFour, R. (2003). Building a professional learning community. *The School Administrator*, *60*(5), 13-18.

DuFour, R. (2004). What is a professional learning community? *Educational Leadership*, *61*(8), 6-11.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). *Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2010). *Raising the bar and closing the gap: Whatever it takes.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). Making time for

collaboration. Adapted from *Learning by doing: A professional learning community at work* (pp.95-97). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Eaker, R., DuFour R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Eaker, R., & Keating, J. (2008). A shift in school culture. *Journal of Staff Development*, *29*(3), 14-17.

Evans, R. (1996). *The human side of school change.* San Fransisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Ferraro, J. M. (2000). Reflective practice and professional development. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education Washington, D.C. Retrieved from http://www.ericdigests.org/2001-3/reflective.htm

Finn, J. D. (1993). *School engagement and students at risk*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Fullan, M. (2000). The three stories of education reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 81*(8), 581-584.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change.* San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goodlad, J. (1983, April). A study of schooling: Some implications for school

improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *64*(8), 552-558.

Greenleaf, R. (1970). *The servant as leader*. Indianapolis, IN: The Robert K.

Greenleaf Center.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1995). Servant leadership. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's*

companion: Insights on leadership through the ages (pp. 18-23). New York:

The Free Press.

Haberman, M. (2004). Can star teachers create learning communities? *Educational*

Leadership, *61*(8), 52-56.

Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1995). Behavioral theories of leadership. In J. T. Wren

(Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages*

(pp.144-148). New York, NY: The Free Press.

Hinchey, P. (2008). *Action research.* New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

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

inquiry and improvement. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational

Development Laboratory.

Hord, S., & Sommers, W. (2008). *Leading professional learning communities: Voices*

from research and practice. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Hughes, R. L., Ginnett, R. C., & Curphy, G. J. (1995). Understanding and influencing

follower motivation. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights on*

leadership through the ages (pp.327-338). New York: The Free Press.

Jessie, L. (2007). The elements of a professional learning community leadership

compass. NAESP, *5*(2). Retrieved from

http://www.allthingsplc.info/pdf/articles/Lillie%20G.%20Jessie%20PDF.pdf

Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team.* San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

McKelvy, E. & Thompson, S. (2007). Shared vision, team learning, and professional learning communities. *Middle Ground.* 10(3), 12-14.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). (2001). *Leading learning communities: NAESP standards for what principals should know and be able to do.* Alexandria,VA: Author.

New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:9 (2009). Retrieved on May 10, 2010, from http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap9.pdf#page=119

Novick, B., Kress, J., & Elias, M. (2002). *Building learning communities with character.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Roberts, P., & Pruitt, E. (2009). *Schools as professional learning communities: Collaborative activities and strategies for professional development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Schein, E. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sergiovanni, T. (1990). Adding value to leadership gets extraordinary results. *Educational Leadership*, *47*(8), 23-27.

Stogdill, R. M. (1950). Leadership, membership and organization. *Psychological*

    Bulletin, *47*, 1-14.

State of New Jersey (2009). Collaborative professional learning in school and beyond: A

    toolkit for New Jersey Educators. Retrieved from

    www.nj.gov/education/profdev/pd/

Ury, W., Brett, J., & Goldberg, S. (1995). *Designing systems for resolving disputes in*

    organizations. In J. T. Wren (Ed.), *The leader's companion: Insights*

    on leadership through the ages (pp.432-450). New York: The Free Press.

Wald, P., & Castleberry, M. (2000). *Educators as learners: Creating a professional*

    learning community in your school. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision

    and Curriculum Development.

Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J. & Fisch, R. (1974). *Change: Principles of problem*

    formulation and problem resolution. New York: Norton.

Appendix A

Professional Development Survey Template

NEW JERSEY MIDDLE SCHOOL
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY

During the 2009-2010 school year at ** Middle School, the teachers may be asked to participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As a part of my doctoral dissertation requirements at Rowan University, I am conducting this research to help us smoothly implement PLCs in our school. Please complete this anonymous, voluntary survey and return it after the workshop. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. You do not have to answer all questions. Thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call me, Donna Markiewicz, at (609) 558-5775 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Campbell, at (856) 256-4500 x3517.

Question 1: *Please mark one category for each statement.*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The workshop…					
was well organized.					
was well paced.					
provided supportive handouts/materials.					
enhanced my knowledge of PLCs.					
helped me gain knowledge of teamwork.					
helped me to further understand how to work in teams.					
helped the teams create norms.					
was informative.					
was a success.					

2. What was the most useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

3. What was the least useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

4. Please provide any further comments below:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your comments are very helpful to implementing Professional Learning Communities in our school. Please return the survey at the end of the professional development experience.

NEW JERSEY MIDDLE SCHOOL
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY #1

During the 2009-2010 school year at ** Middle School, the teachers may be asked to participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As a part of my doctoral dissertation requirements at Rowan University, I am conducting this research to help us smoothly implement PLCs in our school. Please complete this anonymous, voluntary survey and return it after the workshop. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. You do not have to answer all questions. Thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call me, Donna Markiewicz, at (609) 558-5775 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Campbell, at (856) 256-4500 x3517.

Question 1: *Please mark one category for each statement.*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The workshop…					
was well organized.	54.7%	39.6%	5.7%	0%	0%
was well paced.	50.9%	45.3%	3.8%	0%	0%
provided supportive handouts/materials.	54.7%	39.6%	5.7%	0%	0%
enhanced my knowledge of PLCs.	32.1%	58.5%	9.4%	0%	0%
helped me gain knowledge of teamwork.	28.3%	58.5%	9.4%	1.9%	1.9%
helped me to further understand how to work in teams.	20.7%	64.2%	9.4%	1.9%	3.8%
helped the teams create norms.	39.6%	52.8%	7.5%	0%	0%
was informative.	28.3%	64.2%	7.5%	0%	0%
was a success.	34.0%	54.7%	9.4%	0%	1.9%

2. What was the most useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

3. What was the least useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

4. Please provide any further comments below:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your comments are very helpful to implementing Professional Learning Communities in our school. Please return the survey at the end of the professional development experience.

NEW JERSEY MIDDLE SCHOOL
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY #2

During the 2009-2010 school year at ** Middle School, the teachers may be asked to participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As a part of my doctoral dissertation requirements at Rowan University, I am conducting this research to help us smoothly implement PLCs in our school. Please complete this anonymous, voluntary survey and return it after the workshop. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. You do not have to answer all questions. Thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call me, Donna Markiewicz, at (609) 558-5775 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Campbell, at (856) 256-4500 x3517.

Question 1: *Please mark one category for each statement.*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The workshop…					
was well organized.	40.4%	44.7%	6.4%	8.5%	0%
was well paced.	25.5%	51.1%	12.8%	10.6%	0%
provided supportive handouts/materials.	42.6%	36.2%	19.1%	2.1%	0%
enhanced my knowledge of PLCs.	31.9%	53.2%	10.6%	4.3%	0%
helped me gain knowledge of teamwork.	34.0%	55.3%	6.4%	2.1%	2.1%
helped me to further understand how to work in teams.	27.7%	59.6%	8.5%	2.1%	2.1%
helped the teams create norms.	27.7%	59.6%	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%
was informative.	31.9%	51.1%	14.9%	2.1%	0%
was a success.	23.4%	63.8%	12.8%	0%	0%

2. What was the most useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

3. What was the least useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

4. Please provide any further comments below:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your comments are very helpful to implementing Professional Learning Communities in our school. Please return the survey at the end of the professional development experience.

NEW JERSEY MIDDLE SCHOOL
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY #3

During the 2009-2010 school year at ** Middle School, the teachers may be asked to participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As a part of my doctoral dissertation requirements at Rowan University, I am conducting this research to help us smoothly implement PLCs in our school. Please complete this anonymous, voluntary survey and return it after the workshop. All responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. You do not have to answer all questions. Thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call me, Donna Markiewicz, at (609) 558-5775 or my faculty advisor, Dr. Robert Campbell, at (856) 256-4500 x3517.

Question 1: *Please mark one category for each statement.*

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The workshop…					
was well organized.	47.7%	43.2%	9.1%	0%	0%
was well paced.	43.2%	43.2%	13.6%	0%	0%
provided supportive handouts/materials.	27.3%	54.5%	18.2%	0%	0%
enhanced my knowledge of PLCs.	20.5%	65.9%	11.4%	0%	2.3%
helped me gain knowledge of SMART GOALS.	47.7%	47.7%	2.3%	0%	2.3%
helped me to further understand how to work in teams.	34.1%	54.5%	9.1%	0%	2.3%
was informative.	31.8%	45.5%	20.5%	0%	2.3%
was a success.	43.2%	36.4%	15.9%	2.3%	2.3%

2. What was the most useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

3. What was the least useful part of this staff development workshop? Why?

4. Please provide any further comments below:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your comments are very helpful to implementing Professional Learning Communities in our school. Please return the survey at the end of the professional development experience.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

I. BACKGROUND/DEMOGRAPHIC

    A. Please tell me your name and your educational background.
    B. What subject areas do you teach and/or have you taught?
    C. How long have you been working in this school district?
    D. How long have you been a teacher?
    E. Why did you become a teacher?
    F. Describe how you been a part of any leadership role in our school?

II. EXPERIENCE/BEHAVIOR
    G. Elaborate on a time that you worked in a successful team.
    H. Elaborate on a time that you worked in a non-successful team.
    I. Describe a successful PD experience.
    J. Describe an unsuccessful PD experience.

III. OPINION/VALUES
    K. Describe why our district is incorporating PLCs.
    L. How well do you think our PD program is running? Do you think it motivates both more and less experienced teachers?
    M. How important is it for teachers to share ideas, assessments, strategies, etc. with other staff?
    N. How has the PD program benefitted your teaching and learning?

IV. FEELING
    O. What do you believe is the best part about being a teacher?
    P. Describe a collaborative experience and how it made you feel.
    Q. How can our staff more easily embrace change?
    R. How will our administrators handle implementing a new program like PLCs?

V. KNOWLEDGE
    S. Describe the purpose of a PLC.
    T. Describe how a team would function and what they could discuss.
    U. Has the district previously incorporated PLCs?
    V. Who generates/initiates most of the PD experiences in our district? Are the experiences mostly in district or out of district?

VI. SENSORY
    W. What does it look like when teams work collaboratively?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in a study entitled "Cogent Leadership: Transitioning to Professional Learning Communities," which is being conducted by Donna Markiewicz. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs). The data collected in this study will benefit the strategies for PLC development.

I understand that I will be audio taped and the study should not exceed one hour. I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Donna Markiewicz at (609) 558-5775 or her faculty advisor at Dr. Robert Campbell (856) 256 – 4500 x3517.

_____ _____

(Signature of Participant)   (Date)

_____ _____

(Signature of Investigator)   (Date)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Associate Provost for Research at:

Rowan University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701
Tel: 856-256-5150

<u>Appendix D</u>

Middle School SMART Goals 2009-2010

Middle School SMART Goals 2009-2010

Language Arts

This year, we will have 95% of our students be able to differentiate between and master timed and untimed writing.

Math

To change district policy on moving children to the next grade when they have not mastered the material of the present grade.

Science

To create science literacy

A. Terms

B. Suffixes and Prefixes/Root Words

C. Everyday elements & compounds and symbols

D. Common vocabulary used in science

Expressive Arts

To identify and reduce non-productive students within the first two week of the marking period.

Music

To have 90% of student musicians to understand the foundations of music theory.

Guidance/Nurse

All SPMS students will be safe, both in school and in their home environment as well as healthy in body and mind in order to learn and become active contributing members in our community. Initial goal: 95%

PhysEd/Health

By the end of the 8th grade year, students will be educated on how to reduce obesity by teaching them proper nutrition and how to implement life physical activities.

Reading

To raise reading comprehension so that 90% of our students can complete working with text and analyzing and critiquing text.

Social Studies

To improve not taking-includes graphic organizers, map skills, study skills, and improve written scores through essay questions.

Appendix D

Test Score Data

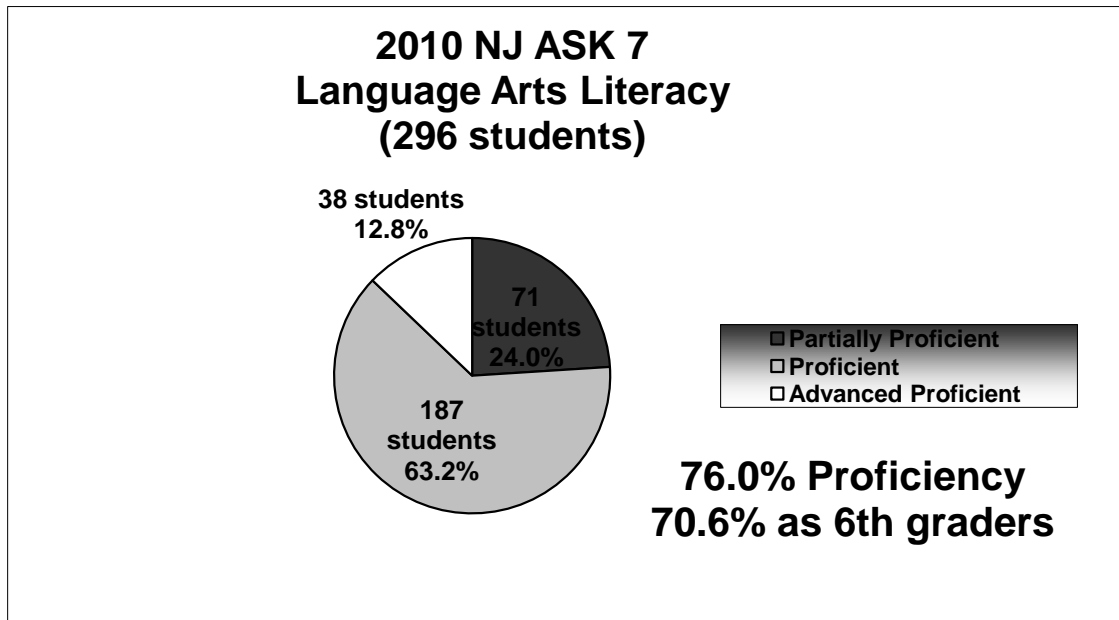Figure 3. Current 8th Graders - Language Arts

2010 NJ ASK 7
Language Arts Literacy
(296 students)

38 students
12.8%

71 students
24.0%

187 students
63.2%

□ Partially Proficient
□ Proficient
□ Advanced Proficient

76.0% Proficiency
70.6% as 6th graders

Figure 4. Current 8th Graders - Math

2010 NJ ASK 7
Mathematics
(299 students)

74 students
24.8%

94 students
31.4%

131 students
43.8%

□ Partially Proficient
□ Proficient
□ Advanced Proficient

68.6% Proficiency
76.5% as 6th graders
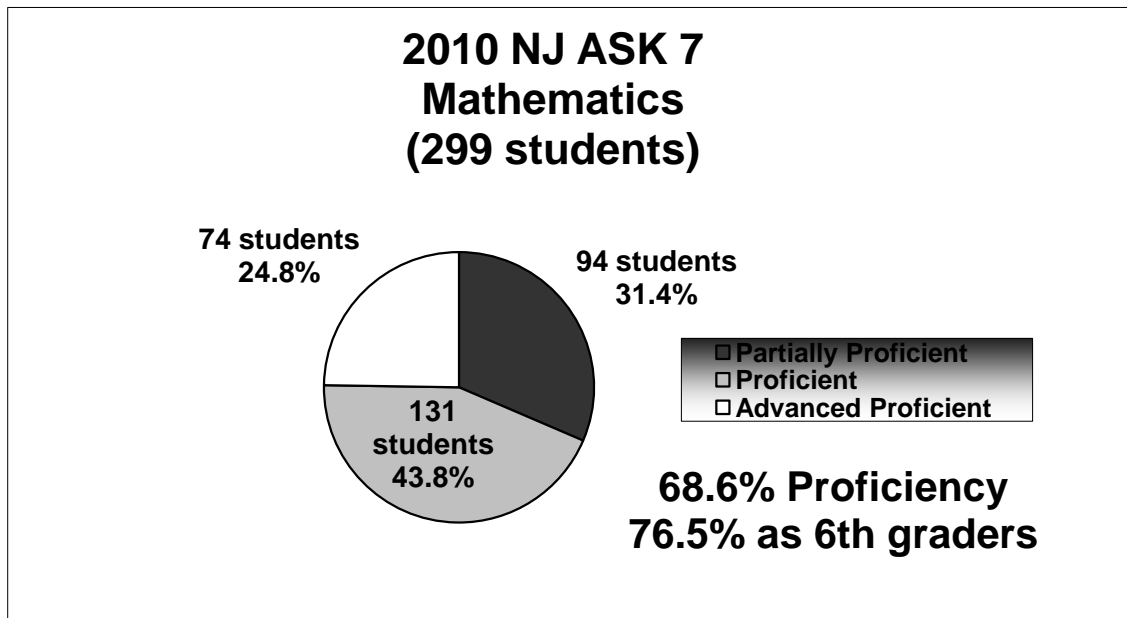
Figure 5. Current 9th Graders - Language Arts

2010 NJ ASK 8
Language Arts Literacy
(280 Students)

52 students
18.6%

23 students
8.2%

- Partially Proficient
- Proficient
- Advanced Proficient

91.8% Proficiency
77.2% as 7th graders

205 students
73.2%
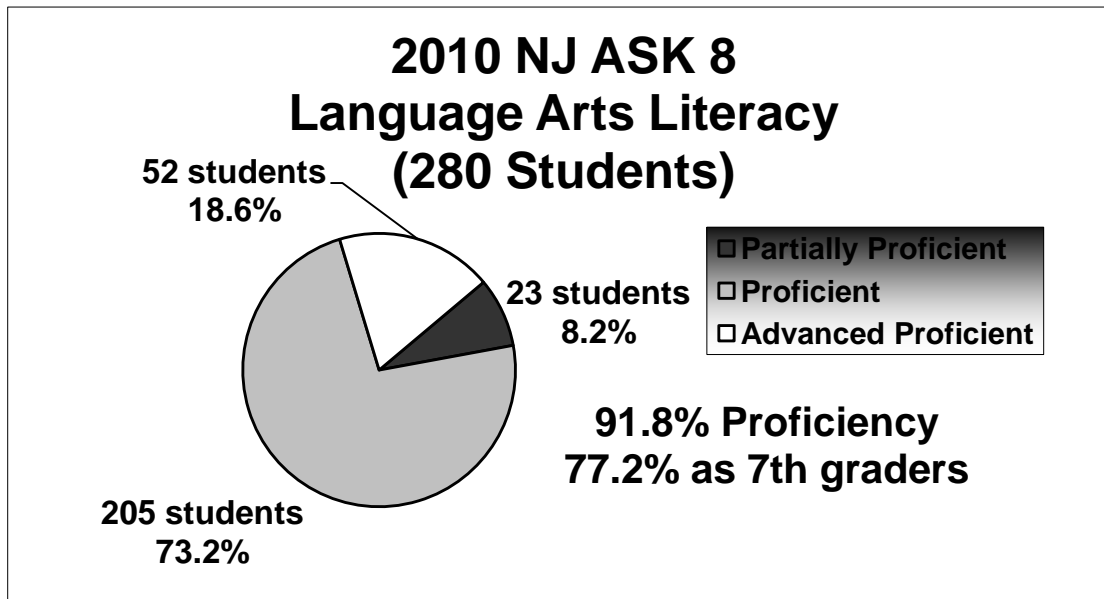
Figure 6. Current 9th Graders - Math

2010 NJ ASK 8
Mathematics
(277 students)

65 students
23.5%

84 students
30.3%

- Partially Proficient
- Proficient
- Advanced Proficient

69.7% Proficiency
66.0% as 7th graders

128 students
46.2%
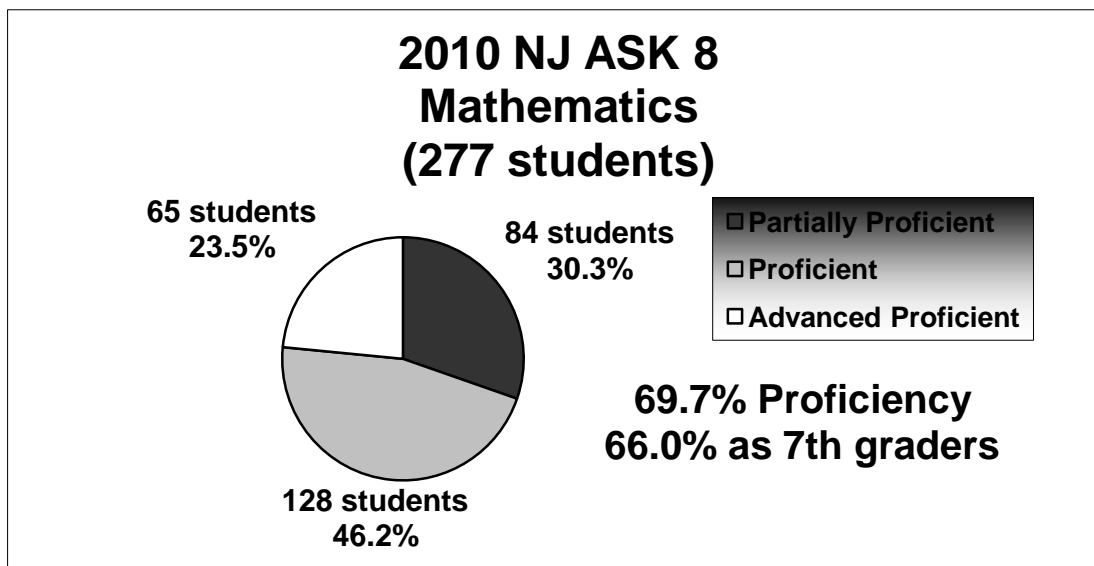
Figure 7. Current 9th graders - Science

2010 NJ ASK 8
Science
(278 Students)

- Partially Proficent
- Proficient
- Advanced Proficient

21 students
7.5%

146 students
52.5%

111 students
40.0%

92.5% Proficiency
(last year's 8th grade - 93%)
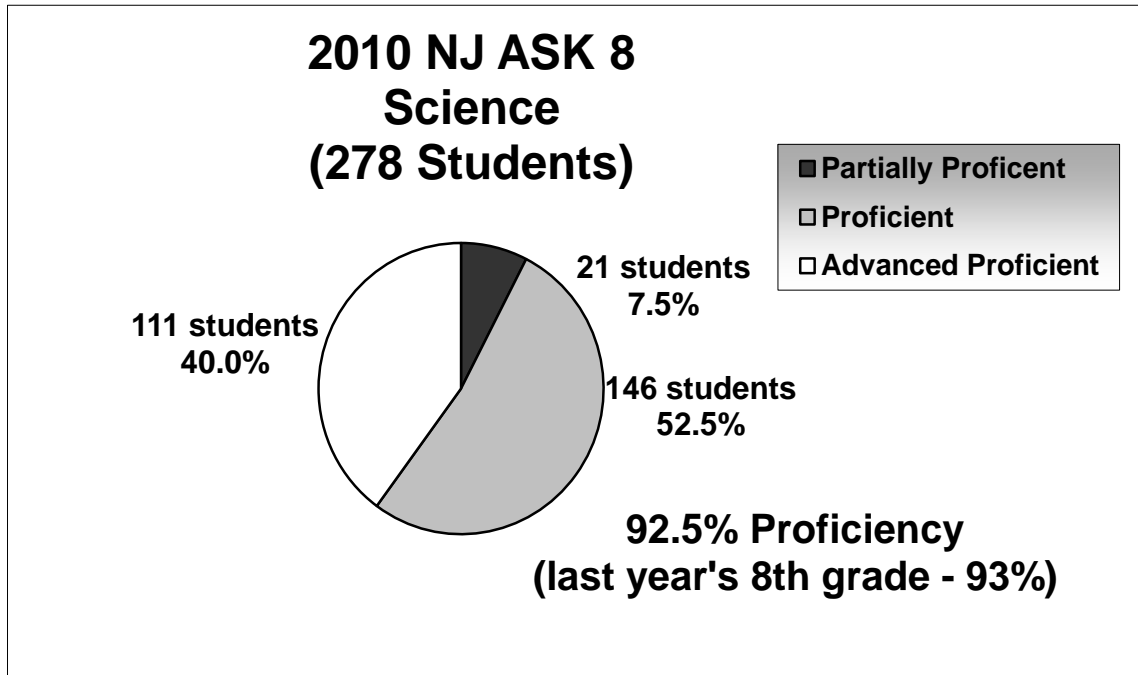
Figure 8. 2010 Comparison of 2010 DFG & State Grade 8

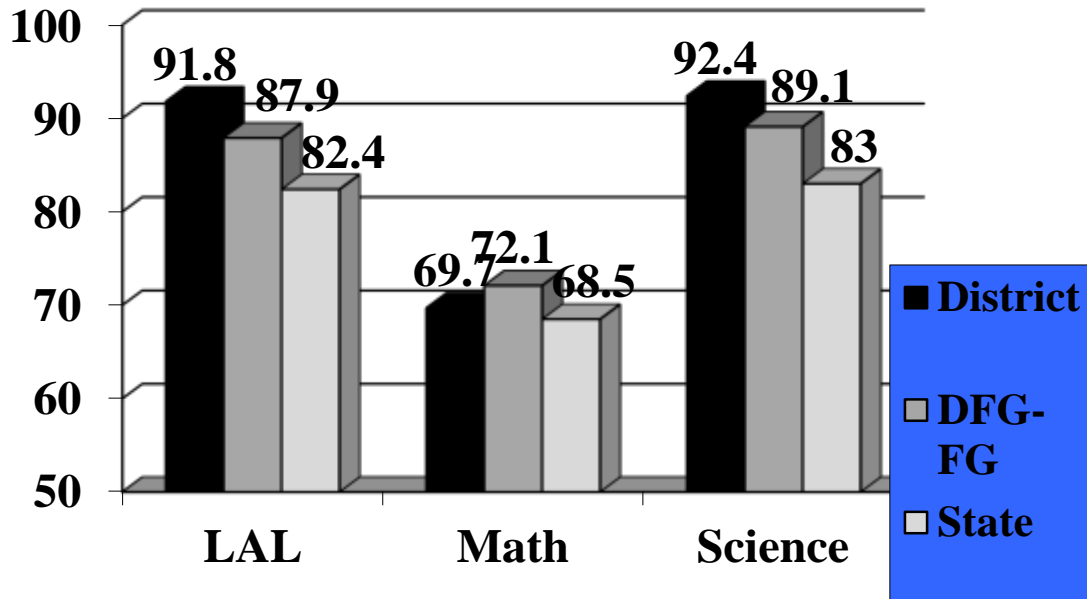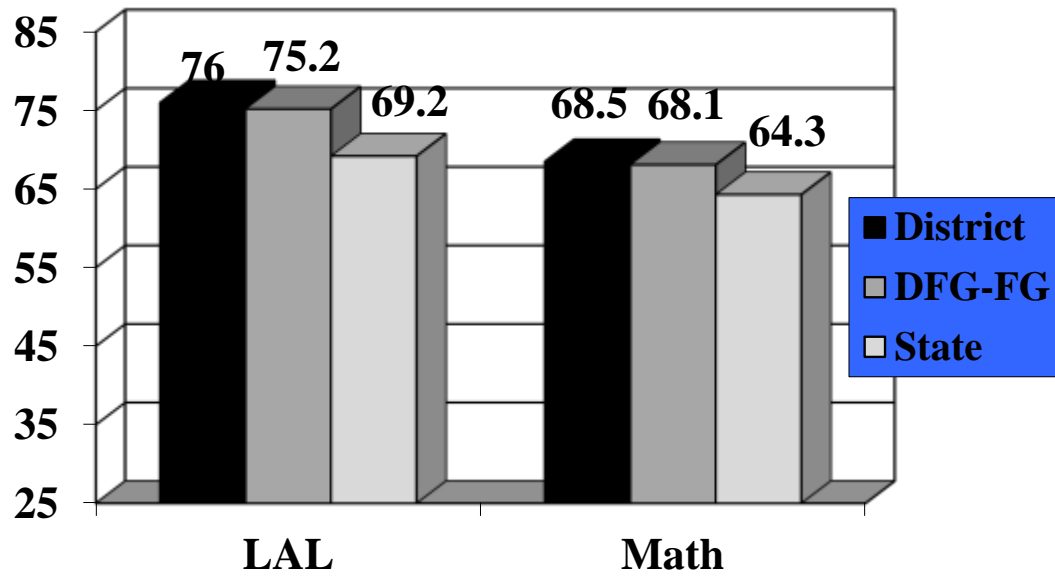|	LAL	Math	Science
District	91.8	69.7	92.4
DFG-FG	87.9	72.1	89.1
State	82.4	68.5	83

Figure 9. 2010 Comparison of 2010 DFG & State Grade 7

Appendix F

PLC Brochure

Leadership

Throughout the PLC implementation process it is important to have cogent leadership. There must be a focus on shared leadership and the leader needs to understand change theory. Kotter's (1996) 8-step change theory or Fullan's (2001) model for leadership would be sufficient.

For more information visit...
www.allthingsplc.org

References

DuFour, R. (2004). What is a professional learning community? *Educational Leadership*. 61(8), 6-11.

DuFour, R., Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Eaker, R., DuFour R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hord, S.M. (1997). Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S. & Sommers, W. (2008). *Leading professional learning communities: Voices from research and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Kotter, J. (1996). Leading change. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Professional Learning Communities

A Leader's Guide to Implementing Professional Learning Communities

Adapted from insights and lessons learned From a mixed methods action research project on Professional Learning Communities. Submitted in partial fulfillment for the Doctorate in Educational Leadership Rowan University

Donna Markiewicz
Rowan University
February 2011

Professional Learning Communities

Implementation guide:

1. Analyze culture, create strong mission and shared vision.

2. Get people on board (shared leadership)

3. Brief overview of PLCs

4. Create teams, develop teams & team norms

5. Continue developing teamwork and collaboration skills

6. Look at curriculum, data, student learning

7. Develop SMART goals

8. Continue working on SMART goals

9. Analyze results

10. Celebrate success!

11. Monitor improvement continuously

12. Embed within culture

(Adapted from DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008)

What is a PLC?

"Schools that function as professional learning communities are always characterized by a collaborative culture. Teacher isolation is replaced with collaborative processes that are deeply embedded into the daily life of the school. Members of a PLC are not invited to work with colleagues: They are called upon to be contributing members of a collective effort to improve the school's capacity to help all students learn at high levels" (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 5).

Hord says that a PLC is "communities of continuous inquiry and improvement," these groups establish supportive relationships that have shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision (Hord, 1997).

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), a professional learning community (PLC) is "an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xii).

DuFour (2004) states, "To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results" (p. 6).

Tips to remember...

- Build an implementation team. This can be a school professional development committee. Think of who you want on your team and the proper stakeholders.

- Keep the focus on student learning, collaboration, & results (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

- It is ok to go slow. It may take three years to have PLCs function properly.

- Continue to work on culture and team norms, stress their importance!

- Build leadership capacity of team members

- Build relationships and monitor understanding

- Keep people accountable!