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Power, Positioning, and the Potential of Adult Learning Communities

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Abstract

An initial curiosity around the variations and effectiveness of literacy coaching led to the extension of this research study, which explored the needs of adult learners in general as they existed and operated in their professional learning communities (PLCs). With a greater understanding of what adult learners sought from their learning communities, the research also established why certain adult learners pursued leadership positions, specifically was there a common profile of an adult learner who decided to lead PLCs instead of just participating. This study explored the functioning of the adult learners in their current PLCs and the perspectives of those learners as potential leaders at Westlake Middle School. Qualitative and quantitative methods of data were collected using two surveys and individual interviews. Results indicated that adult learners sought more democratic teams with more voice in the shared envisioning of the school. Structural constraints limited these two adult needs. Team trust and mutual respect were identified as areas for cultural improvements.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Top-down mandates from the national and local level impact teachers' day-to-day work significantly. All too often, teachers hear the analogy that the train is moving; the choice becomes clear: stay on and accept the new work, or get off. Existing research proves the need for improved reading instruction and many studies recommend the use of literacy coaches, even though the quantifiable data proving the effectiveness of coaching is scarce. Because the rapport between the coach and the teacher being coached is paramount, the idea of the growth mindset of the adult learner became relevant and essential. The purpose of this study is to explore what adults seek from their professional learning communities, and subsequently, to identify the factors that cause certain teachers to seek administrative roles.

Most schools over the past 40 years have addressed the reading and writing scores through the use of in-house coaches to improve the professional learning communities in the hopes that a *rising tide lifts all boats*. With the collective faculty collaborating, sharing, and sometimes modeling, each teacher's instructional practices and lesson design should be calibrated to a more successful and student-centered pedagogy (Shidler, 2008). In the practical sense, the in-house literacy coaches are also a cost-effective means of providing professional development as needed (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007; Shidler, 2008). A win-win, right? As teachers become better at diagnosing students' reading needs, now, even high school content-area teachers are finding that they are teaching reading itself- not just literature, or chemistry, but the actual decoding and identifying of main ideas/theme in texts (Stevens, 2011). So, add to the growing number of students who need support, to those students' teachers who need support in instruction, and then add this ambiguous role of the coach, who

may or may not be certified to be an administrator, and therefore, evaluative, and the dynamic is most likely precarious and unclear (Jones & Rainville, 2008).

For the most part, schools have not done an effective job of helping teachers understand how to best use the support of the literacy coach and the actual objective of the literacy coach. Further, most teachers were never trained to work as a team; they were trained to teach in isolated classrooms, and increasingly they are being corralled into student support teams. While professional development has always been a requirement for maintaining a teaching certificate, the current professional development is on-going, whereas it used to be isolated and spread out over a few days of the calendar school year (Marsh & McCombs, 2009; Shidler, 2009). Professional development leaders must aim to create authentic motivation (Steckel, 2009). Teachers are not against change; they are against poorly planning and rushed selection of change models (Bell & Spellman, 2011). Teachers are uncomfortable being 'coached' because they may already feel effective – or they may not feel invested in updating instructional strategies. Therefore, the mindset and identity of the teachers being coached becomes a make-it-or-break-it factor in the success of the coach (Jones & Rainville, 2008).

Teachers are expected to show students' growth over time, but coaches have had little accountability in showing the same level of effectiveness. The role of the coach is not consistent across schools, or even within districts. Having worked in schools for my 15 year career, I know first-hand that there are very few lazy teachers. However, there are certainly roadblocks to the effectiveness of the current professional learning communities – even in especially high-functioning schools, or perhaps even more so in especially high-functioning schools. As a result, I was curious about these well-funded, high-functioning schools, which attract extremely

intelligent, capable, and hard-working individuals. Why aren't our professional learning communities more effective? To understand this, it is first necessary to answer the questions:

1. What do adult learners seek from their adult learning communities?
2. What do teachers believe is missing in adult learning communities that causes them pursue leadership positions?

The goal of this research study was to understand what adult learners needed from their professional learning communities in order to suggest ways to create more teacher-centered PLCs. In addition, the purpose was to identify the profile of teachers who were interested in seeking administration with the hopes of improving those PLCs. Through a case study approach (Yin, 2002), fourteen teachers were invited to participate confidentially in two reliable and valid surveys. Based off of the feedback in the surveys, a smaller sub-section of teachers who had sought administrative certificates were interviewed to develop a deeper understanding.

A case study of ten teachers was conducted at a middle school in the northeast United States. Through the use of two surveys, information about the feelings regarding the current state of the professional learning communities and team trust within the communities was gathered. Finally, interviews were conducted as information became available through the use of the surveys.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I established the researcher's interest in this topic and the relevance of this topic in today's schools. The urgency for understanding the research questions was clear. In order to best serve our students, we must first understand the needs, motivations, and frustrations of the adults as they function in their PLCs. In fact, according to Hipp and Huffman (2010), with

a deeper understanding of the level of functioning of the operating PLC, goals for improvement can be determined by asking essential questions of the PLC.

In Chapter 2, I will outline the shifting educational landscape, the rationale for coaching, and the challenges that exist for the coaches themselves. Then I will delineate the process of the literature review and the ambiguity around the title of "literacy coach". Next, I will review the literature that exists which supports the time, effort, and energy invested into training and developing coaches. I will corroborate the literature that shows that even without substantial data to support the investment and employment of literacy coaches, coaching is still perceived to be the most promising means of supporting and growing teachers. Subsequently, part of problems is that the title of literacy coach varies across schools, and the coaches' extensive responsibilities leave little actual time for coaching. Finally, themes and through-lines from the literature will be synthesized.

In Chapter 3, I will outline the methodology of the research portion. To begin, I will frame my research objective and guiding inquiry questions. After describing the case of interest and the research design, I will demonstrate my understanding of the data collection tools and methods I will use. Through the analysis of qualitative and quantitative responses yielded from surveys and interviews, I will argue the reliability and validity of the instruments I plan to utilize.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the results that the research yields in response to the two guiding questions regarding democratic, trusting, respectful teams and the importance of shared vision in PLCs. As the rigor of the curriculum was ratcheted up in every department at every grade level, teachers' needs for PLCs increased. Schools became cultures of thinking for the adults as much as for students. Purchases of electronic platforms eased the flow of communication, however, the

relationship building within the PLCs needed attention. I will show the relevance of the literature review in Chapter 2 as it relates to the research.

In Chapter 5, I will make technical recommendations for increasing the cohesiveness in a large school setting through professional learning opportunities and adaptive strategies for improving the relationships within the adult learning communities in one specific school context. I will then forecast future research on adult learning theory and growth mindset as they pertain to literacy coaching and professional learning communities that can be transferred to any PLC. Finally, I will call for building teacher leadership capacity within schools as a means of ensuring that once a PLC is established, it can be sustained.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following two key terms have been listed as a glossary for reference and clarification:

Literacy Coach – The International Reading Association (2004) defined a literacy coach as "a reading specialist who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by giving them the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practice" (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 776).

Professional Learning Community – *"Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults"* (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 12 –italicized in original). A professional learning community is a comprised of a group of professionals with a common purpose. "Collaboration is thought to help teachers support each other's learning and provide opportunities for them to share views about effective instructional practices" (as cited in Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 776).

Chapter 2

Why Literacy Coaching?

As an English teacher for the past 15 years, I have personally witnessed some dramatic shifts in education. In 2001, I began teaching in an English language arts classroom with approximately 20 students. Today, 15 years later, I co-teach two classes and have paraprofessionals in two classes; literacy coaches push-in as needed; and administrators pop in biweekly to conduct mini-observations. I never entered the field of education to pursue administration, and yet I began to see myself transitioning from teaching to administration. I was finding a voice as a teacher coaching other teachers.

Nudged by my mentors, I completed the Intermediate Administration Certification 092 program—and began to see that colleagues who I had known for years began to perceive me differently, almost as someone who might someday evaluate them. This subtle shift that I observed started my thinking around people in power positions in school (i.e., leaders), and even, more specifically, to the instructional coaches. I wondered why the literacy coaches, who seemed relegated to a higher status than teachers, were not satisfied with their coaching relationships. As a member of a small study group based on my district's professional growth model in Westlake, Connecticut, I have been privy to these literacy coaches' honest feelings of dissatisfaction, which they have voiced in our 'Teachers Teaching Teachers' study group. I began to wonder if this issue was specific to my district (and these women), or if there is a larger commentary that the literature provides on this concept of teachers teaching teachers—specifically, literacy coaches teaching, or coaching, teachers.

To begin with, research was sought to understand the complexities of this peer collaboration. The literature did indicate a consistent desire for literacy coaching as an on-going

and on-site professional learning model (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). Yet, the literature also indicated the consistent failure to clearly define the roles and objectives of the literacy coaches (Boatright, DeVoogt Van Lare, Gallucci, & Yoon, 2010). Defining the role, responsibilities, and objectives of the literacy coach was a difficult task as was determining the extent to which literacy coaches were able to effectively impact student achievement in literacy. The literature then led to a discussion on the benefits of effective coaching and also the limitations of coaching. Researchers noted the lack of empirical data to support literacy coaching and its correlation with student achievement (Marsh & McCombs, 2009).

Methodology

The literature search for this review was conducted by searching the broad topic of teacher professional development in literacy, then narrowing to literacy coaching focused on improving student achievement, and further narrowing to literacy coaching and the adult learning theory. In the journal articles that I read, there was consistently an issue of power within the coach/coachee relationship. So I further narrowed my search to literacy coaching and power and student achievement. In identifying the issue of power/lack of power between the coach and the teacher, the role of the coach became even more complex and precarious. The following keywords were used separately, and in combination: professional development, literacy coaching, student achievement, power, instructional coaching, reciprocal peer coaching, peer coaching, adult learning theory, and common core state standards. To ensure that the search would generate a range of high-quality, peer-reviewed research on the topic of literacy coaching its impact on student achievement, the following electronic databases were utilized: *Education Resources Information Center*, *Education Research Complete*, *Educator's Reference Complete*, and *Journal Storage*.

The search was limited to articles published since 1995; with most being articles from the last ten years and in international peer-reviewed journals. It was a deliberate choice to set the parameters starting in 1995 because I wanted to ensure that this literature review would present the most recent research. Specifically, I aimed to research the most recent literature on professional development in the educational landscape. For each piece, specific analyses were noted, including: (a) authors, (b) year(s) of publication, (c) journal, (d) objectives of the study, (e) important findings and conclusions, (f) keywords, and (g) times cited. The current list consists of 25 peer-reviewed articles, including a balance of qualitative and quantitative data. More articles tended to have qualitative data rather than quantitative data. Articles were selected based on their relevance and reliability; a range of articles was collected to uncover patterns in this topic of study, but also to try to discover nuances within the topic.

Eight Complex and Interconnected Themes

Within this topic, I found themes that I could track across articles. The following themes were dominant in my analysis: 1) a lack of data that supports the practice of literacy coaching, 2) the call for high-quality and on-going professional learning, 3) a lack of a common role/definition of a literacy coach, 4) a diversity of roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches across states and educational levels, 5) barriers to effective coaching, 6) goals of effective coaches, 7) effective coaching strategies, and 8) the limitations of coaching. Finally, as I researched the topic, I realized how complex it was, as many other topics became central to the analysis. For example, professional learning communities (PLCs), the adult learning theory, school climate, teacher efficacy (as well as perceptions of self-efficacy), and situated identities all become factors that collided within this topic. Interestingly, although the literature captured snapshots of coaches across educational levels and across socioeconomic situations, the themes

were explicit. To understand the interconnectedness of the themes, it is essential to first understand the federal mandates that provided the impetus for increased professional development.

High-Stakes Factors that Impact Education

According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (2002), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001, (NCLB 2002) legislation included the requirement for higher quality and on-going teacher professional development to increase teachers' efficacy, specifically with the goal of improving reading instruction (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010; Shidler, 2008). Moreover, Crilley, Good, Kohler, and Shearer (1997) noted that "the enhancement of teachers' professional development and expertise has become a predominant area for educational reform over the past 10 years" (p. 240), which in fact extended the intense focus on professional learning back into the 1980s. Yet, education has become an even higher-stakes conversation as teacher evaluations and standards for college and career readiness have become more rigorous (Wiener, 2013).

According to Wiener (2013), with the nationalizing of standards through the Common Core and the Race to the Top initiatives, many teachers heard the call-for-action and began the process of reinventing their curriculums. State education agencies have also began the process of reinvention to be prepared to support the teachers as they teach the Common Core. Therefore, looking at a very brief outline of the history of education, the passage of the Common Core State Standards is just the most recent cause of teachers feeling professionally even more accountable. In fact, according to Haag, Kissel, Shoniker, and Stover (2011), "the demands of high-stakes testing and curriculum mandates often result in top-down distribution... and leaves teachers with little interest or ownership" (p. 499). Further, Garnier, Matsumura, and Resnick (2010)

corroborated that state and federal policymakers had embraced instructional coaching as a solution for improving student achievement.

A Lack of Data To Support the Practice of Literacy Coaching

There is pervasive support for coaching as a means of improving teachers' instructional practices. However, there is a lack of research to support the increasing student achievement that results from the coaching the teachers received (Matsumura et al., 2010). It is difficult to isolate coaching as the reason behind increased student achievement. Often, coaching is only one centerpiece of many responses to improve student achievement. Beyond implementing coaching partnerships, changes in administrative leadership, changes made to curriculum, and/or changes made in school structures (i.e., block scheduling) also factor in as potential impact(s) on student achievement (Lockwood, Marsh, & McCombs, 2010).

With good faith efforts, many districts have provided funding for research-based best practice(s), such as literacy coaching, yet the districts wonder whether the money is well spent. According to Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007), "high-quality professional development positively influences student achievement in general and specifically in reading" (p. 22). Further, Ferguson and Lynch (2010) reported that in Canadian schools "literacy coaching… is steadily gaining popularity despite a limited evidence base to support it" (p. 200). Many American school districts have also invested money in literacy coaches (Heineke, 2013). Since literacy impacts students' ability to learn in most classrooms, this seems to be the most strategic academic area to make a significant financial investment (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). However, the literature revealed a lack of student achievement data that supports this investment of money. In fact, Heineke (2013) warned that "if funding and resources are going to continue to be provided for instructional coaching, the elements that affect the quality of coaching… must be identified and

addressed" (p. 437). Further, Ferguson and Lynch (2010) even captured the words of a veteran literacy coach who said "we literacy coaches are doing our jobs day in and day out without research's seal of approval" (p. 200). While the theory of literacy coaching is not new, there remains a lack of data on whether or not the literacy coaching is actually benefiting student achievement (Burnham, Peterson, Taylor, & Schock, 2009; Ferguson, 2014; Heineke, 2013).

Despite the lacking data to support literacy coaching, a majority of administrators utilize on-site literacy coaches as a social resource for teachers in order to provide consistent professional learning in schools (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007; Shidler, 2008). For example, Steckel (2009) noted the difference between past versions of professional development models and current professional learning philosophy. "Unlike more traditional modes of professional development, coaching is embedded within schools and classrooms and is responsive to the specific challenges faced by teachers in their daily work with students" (p. 14). Teachers' on-going professional learning and on-the-go training occur while students reside in their classrooms (Bean, Elish-Piper, & L'Allier, 2010). Moreover, the data collected by the International Reading Association (IRA) (2004) corroborated that "literacy coaching provides job-embedded, on-going professional development for teachers" (p. 544), providing the metaphor of coaches as a bridge between the shared vision and making the vision a classroom reality, teacher by teacher.

The Call For High-Quality and On-Going Professional Learning

While the data to support the time and financial investment of literacy coaches is scarce, there is an abundance of data supporting the need for help in supporting students in developing advanced reading skills, such as analysis and synthesis of complex ideas incorporating many perspectives across genres (Boatright et al., 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007; Marsh &

McCombs, 2009). In fact, according to the data collected by the IRA (2006), the statistics on the state of literacy in the United States were stunning; the number of students at the secondary education level is consequential:

> over 6 million U.S. students in grades 8–12 are struggling readers. One in four adolescents cannot read well enough to identify the main idea in a passage or to understand informational text. ACT, a leading producer of college admission tests, reports that approximately 50% of high school graduates in 2005 did not have the reading skills they needed to succeed in college. Without targeted literacy instruction, many who graduate from high school will be ill-equipped for the demands of college or the new economy, relegated to remedial courses or dead-end jobs. (p. 1)

These literacy skills become increasingly more critical for students' success, and therefore the literacy coaches or reading specialists are employed as master teachers leading the work in schools in an on-site and on-going role (Lockwood et al., 2010; Marsh & McCombs, 2009).

According to Lockwood et al. (2010), with literacy coaches on site, teachers would "gain new knowledge and skills or enhance existing knowledge or skills, which will… improve their reading instruction and ultimately improve student achievement" (p. 374). Yet, Garnier et al. (2010) also pointed out that there was research that supported that literacy coaches directly impacted teachers' classroom practices. However, "only limited research provides evidence that coaching increases student achievement" (p. 250). When reviewing the literature, it was not only clear that students' reading scores necessitated additional professional learning for teachers, but also there was enough compelling documentation that teachers' continued work with literacy coaches can provide the essential support to meet students' needs to acquire 21st century reading skills (Bean et al., 2010; Ferguson, 2014; Lockwood et al., 2010).

Lack of a Common Role and Definition of a Literacy Coach

Before discussing the impact of literacy coaching on student achievement, however, it is important to consider the question of what exactly does the title literacy coach mean. The complexity of this seemingly simple question is actually one of the reasons that the evidence of the impact of literacy coaching on student achievement remains so *scant* (Ferguson & Lynch, 2010; Garnier et al., 2010). It quickly becomes clear that the title of the literacy coach depends on what level and type of school is being discussed (Stevens, 2011). For example, Stevens (2011) indicated that at an elementary school level the literacy coach was a common title, while in the secondary school level the role of literacy coach became more varied in title from reading specialist to reading teacher to instructional coach. In secondary schools, for example, reading specialist is the more common title, but the list of duties may vary among specialists to include many responsibilities including the coaches themselves teaching remedial reading classes. In fact, Stevens asserted that, "the role of the high school literacy coach is in its infancy" (p. 19). Regardless of the job title, the problems result from the perceptions that are associated with specific titles (Jones & Rainville, 2008). To illustrate, if every stakeholder in the school, from administration, to the teachers, to the coaches themselves, has a different then there are certainly going to be issues. Thus, in order for coaching to work, all stakeholders in the coaching process must collaborate as a professional learning community (Shanklin, 2007).

Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007) called for an explicit framework for literacy coaches and on-site reading coaches in these professional learning communities to communicate the design and implementation of their work. Subsequently, Heineke (2013) supplied *flexible* and *semi-structured* protocols for coaching discourse. Both Galucci et al. (2015) and Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007) suggested the use of Gallagher and Pearson's (1983) gradual release model for

coaches because of its strong potential to impact teachers' effectiveness. Steckel (2009) called this a "fade back… [as teachers became]… more adept at matching instruction and instructional materials to the diverse needs of their students" (p. 22). Without clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, the degree to which coaches can serve as a beneficial human resource in teachers' professional development becomes more limited in scope and influence.

The Diversity of Roles and Responsibilities of Literacy Coaches

Beyond just the confusion around what to call literacy coaches, there is role confusion around what literacy coaches do and how they spend their time (Crilley et al., 1997; Jones & Rainville, 2008). The IRA (2004) provided the following definition; a literacy coach is "a reading specialist who focuses on providing professional development for teachers by giving them the additional support needed to implement various instructional programs and practice" (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 776). Further, Garet et al. (2008) reported that coaching could, itself, be considered a professional development strategy, as the coach was seen as "a link between formal opportunities to learn and the practical aspects of learning to use new knowledge to modify the materials and methods to teach reading" (as cited in Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 777). Similarly, according to Stevens (2011), literacy coaches were primarily responsible for the professional development of teachers in the areas of "overseeing instruction and assessment, and for providing leadership" (p. 19). Additionally, Marsh and McCombs (2009) pointed out that the daily work of coaches takes many shapes and forms with the coaches' time spread out over many activities, including: formal work with teachers to observe, model and plan instruction; informal work with teachers (e.g., listening to teachers' venting); administrative-level duties in planning and reading assessment data; data analysis; and non-coaching, traditional teacher duties (e.g., bus duty). Further, Ferguson (2014) reported that, "increased student achievement was

found to be an indicator of student achievement… the literacy coach indirectly worked with students to improve achievement" (p. 23). Finally, Boatright et al. (2010) documented the indirect impact coaches had on student achievement through the four significant roles they provided: mentor, peer coach, district-wide professional learning representative, and whole-school improvement team member.

To add, Stevens (2011) warned that the *unique features* of secondary schools must be considered in describing and defining the roles and responsibilities of coaches. In an on-going and non-evaluative manner, the theory behind coaching in the middle and high school levels is obvious; most secondary education trained teachers received very little pre-service training in teaching reading, as they focused mainly on their content areas instead (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). Therefore, these teachers have strong background and experience with their content knowledge. However, content-area teachers have little if any experience with teaching reading (Beers, 2003). Additionally, Stevens (2011) reported that high school teachers are more resistant to coaching. As students' needs vary and teachers' classrooms become more inclusive, content area teachers are increasingly becoming teachers of reading as well as teachers of content (Beers 2003).

The Benefits of Good Coaching

The literature clearly demonstrated that there are many variations of the literacy coach's work (Boatright et al., 2010; Stevens, 2011). Despite the variations, there are many reported benefits for teachers who engaged with coaches (Garnier et al., 2010; Haag et al., 2011; Shidler, 2009). For example, Bell and Spellman (2011) reported that when a coach was present in a classroom and engaged in the teacher's classroom, change in the teacher's instructional practice was more likely. In fact, coaches are referred to by some as *change agents* because of the

collaborative partnership between teacher and coach (Boatright et al., 2010; Haag et al., 2011), which provides a structure for the teacher to reflect, practice the new instructional strategy, and reflect again (Bell & Spellman 2011; Boatright et al., 2010; Elmore, 2011). Both Heineke (2013) and Shidler (2008) presented the term *cognitive coaching* to explicitly describe what coaches aimed to provide for teachers' improvements in instruction. However, in order for sustainable change to occur in teachers' practices, Bell and Spellman (2011) provided a Reeves and Allison's (2009) coaching model of seven essential criteria for coaches: 1) recognition, 2) reality, 3) reciprocity, 4) resilience, 5) resonance, 6) relationship, and 7) renewal. With a framework, sustained coaching partnerships were effective.

To ensure the effectiveness of the coaching partnership, Berebitsky and Carlisle (2010) called for measuring the impact of professional development by measuring changes in teachers' attitudes, changes – improvements – in teachers' practices and instruction, as well as through student achievement. To be clear about the impact of the literacy coach, the research conducted by Berebitsky and Carlisle compared the first grade teachers who were provided literacy coaches with first grade teachers who were not assigned a literacy coach. Similarly, Lockwood et al. (2010) noted that there was "little empirical evidence about coaching's effectiveness in changing teacher practice and improving student achievement, particularly at the secondary level" (p. 373). However, Berebitsky and Carlisle (2010) found that "while at present coaching is a promising component of school based professional development in reading, there still is the need to determine the extent to which coaching adds to the value of high quality professional development" (p. 777). For the researchers to qualify their study as, at best, *promising*, it still left a lot of unanswered questions. While the study conducted by Berebitsky and Carlisle was sound, *promising* was not strong enough research to convince a Board of Education to invest such a

significant amount of time and money into coaching. Further, Berebitsky and Carlisle had not reported consistent findings in this specific study, but did list a few studies with positive outcomes of coaches on student achievement (Correnti, 2007; Desimone et al., 2002). Teachers who collaborated with literacy coaches did lead to "improvements in the content focus of instruction" (Beretbitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 777). However, positive outcomes from the coaching must be considered along with the additional and substantial program aimed at improving teachers' content knowledge in reading. Similarly, Ferguson (2014) also reported the *limited* support for the correlation between coaching and positive impact on teaching and learning. Ferguson described the subjective nature of research on this topic due to the subjective nature of the description of successful literacy coaching.

Based on other research, though, effective coaching strategies have been identified as positively impacting student achievement (Bean et al., 2010; Bell & Spellman, 2011; Shidler, 2008). Effective application of the reciprocal peer coaching model offers the chance for teachers to observe each other and "exchange support, companionship, feedback, and assistance in a coequal or nonthreatening fashion" (Crilley et al., 1997, p. 240) This model has been more effective than a title of coach because with the title of a coach there may be a supervisory, evaluative, or an even threatening association. After coaching sessions, teachers reported that they were more likely to try a new strategy or practice as a result of that collaboration. Similarly, according to Berebitsky and Carlisle (2010):

> collaboration is thought to help teachers support each other's learning and provide opportunities for them to share views about effective instructional practices... Support through collaboration has been associated with improvements in teachers' individual and collective self-efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008) and with changes in instructional

> practices and improvements in students' reading (Vescio et al., 2008). (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 776)

Clearly, there are benefits to literacy coaching as they impact the professional school culture, which ultimately impact student achievement; if adults engage with each other around their professional lives, then students benefit (Church, Morrison, & Ritchhart, 2011).

Interestingly, many of the effective coaching strategies cited are not actually around professional content knowledge (Boatright et al., 2010). Effective coaching strategies are good interpersonal skills, such as "communication, relationship building, change management, and leadership for professional development" (p. 922). Yet, Shidler (2008) noted in a qualitative survey that some teacher participants in the study said that the coach would not be competent teaching their content. Clearly, there is an interesting distinction cited, a distinction which is seemingly overlooked in the literature.

Barriers to Effective Coaching

The work of the literacy coach becomes so nuanced with personal, political, and professional dynamics. In fact, literacy coaching requires much more than just content knowledge in teaching and learning in literacy classrooms (Haag et al., 2011; Jones & Rainville, 2008). So much of the coach's position is complicated because of the trust and relationship-building that must occur for the coaching to be effective (Jones & Rainville, 2008). This trust and relationship-building takes time. Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007) outlined 10 best practices for high-quality professional development. According to Olivier et al. (2005), "in observing mature PLCs, teachers [see] themselves as the *first* learners" (as cited in Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 17 – emphasis in original). The first and most paramount practice was building a community of learners that is *sustained* over a period of time through book studies and professional learning

community tasks (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007). Tasks such as Harvey's and Goudvis' (2000) 'Strategies that Work' and the National School Reform's (2000) 'Looking at Student Work' protocol, which provided an outline for a *critical friends* group of colleagues who can professionally dialogue about selected student work to provide a practiced reflection on instruction. Without an established adult learning community, the other nine best practices outlined by Elish-Piper and L'Allier were not likely to result. Further, Stevens (2011) theorized about the sociocultural framework with the coaching occurs; through the system of coaching and the individual experiences situated in contexts, coaches aim to deepen and enrich teachers. In fact, instructional coaching at its core should involved "equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity" (Bell & Spellman, 2011, p. 152). Heineke (2013) noted that for teachers to be open to coaching, "they need the support of adult learning communities similar to those they are trying to establish in their classrooms" (p. 413). Further, Brenneman (2015) reported on teachers' wariness towards the observation cycles in the context of the year 2016. As cited in Heineke (2013),

> continued interest in coaching emerges from the intersection of three developments in the field of education: rising expectations for student achievement (No Child Left Behind, 2001), research indicating the strong relationship between teacher quality and student achievement, (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and a new paradigm for teacher learning (Learning Forward, 2011). (Heineke, 2013, p. 410)

Along with that vulnerability, add the coach who is required to improve the teachers' effectiveness and that could create a really negatively charged climate (Ippolito, 2010).

Since the majority of teachers were not trained to teach collaboratively or cooperatively, both Crilley et al. (1997) and Haag et al. (2010) pointed out that the new model of peer coaching

violates the *traditional norms* of teachers' isolation and autonomy within the comfort and control of their own classrooms into interdependent partnerships. When a professional is assigned a coach, there are natural human reactions of inadequacy, competition, and self- preservation. Teachers, who are already wary because of the evaluation plans, become even more guarded, making the role of the coach even more *delicate* (Haag et al., 2011). According to Boatright et al. (2010), coaches did not have "positional authority to evaluate other adults" (p. 922); yet the teachers being coached still felt guarded. As the standards, curriculums, teacher evaluation systems, and college and career readiness skills shift, teachers' strategies and programs need to shift as well.

Goals of Effective Coaches

Effective literacy coaches not only help teachers to enhance their instruction of reading, but also establish and nurture a culture of adult learning in schools (Steckel, 2009). Further, Langer (2015) cited the importance of the professional learning community environment as part of the context that could significantly and positively influence student achievement. While teachers' professional lives are central to their effectiveness as teachers of reading, teachers with authentic excitement and enthusiasm for their continued professional learning make the adult learning community a much more positive experience with reciprocal learning and respect (Haag et al., 2011).

There is also confusion around the objectives of the coach. According to Haag et al. (2011) a coach's primary job was to nurture the reflective practitioner component of instruction. Further, Bumham, Peterson, Schock, and Taylor (2009) showed that actually "coaching activities accounted for only a fraction of time during coaches' work weeks" (p. 500). Similarly, Shidler (2008) conducted a purposive study to examine the correlation between number of hours

invested in coaching teachers in the classroom with teachers' efficacy in instructional practices and student achievements. According to Shidler the coaching conversations focused on the teachers' single specific goal area: both the coach and the coachee (i.e., the teacher) listened to each other to collect information resulting in an action plan. Clearly, the objectives of the coach are varied. Ferguson and Lynch (2010) cited that while coaches might view their role as working with students, the goal of the coaching was to create a professional learning community devoted to improving the instruction of reading.

Successful coaches have had to find a balance between supporting teachers and supervising them. Not only are coaches building trusting and collaborative relationships with teachers (Haag et al., 2011; Jones & Rainville, 2008). Teachers need to feel like valued stakeholders in their own learning (Haag et al., 2011). In fact, according to Shidler (2008) "adult learning theory holds that adults (i.e., teachers) must be allowed to move through the learning process at their own pace; they also need to be allowed time for repeated and guided practice of their new skills" (p. 454). Thus, professional developers must understand and include an understanding of individualized pacing, along with Kegan's (1994) constructive-developmental theory into account to challenge and support adult (i.e., teacher) learners (Bell & Spellman, 2011). Boatright et al. (2010) stated that a coach's role included: "a) enroll teachers to be coached, b) identify appropriate interventions for teacher learning, c) model teaching, d) gather data in classrooms, and e) engage teachers in dialogue about classroom and other data" (p. 922). According to Shidler (2008) "coaches work together with teachers in navigating a teacher's thinking and behavior toward a specific goal" (p. 459). When coaches see their role as supporting and facilitating the dialogue that improves teachers' learning, they are providing teachers with 'cognitive coaching.' Yet, Boatright et al. (2010) also pointed out that a large part

of the inability to define the role of a coach was due to the fact that the coach's role was 'inherently multifaceted and ambiguous.' Clearly, variations exist in the coach's role and the ambiguity around his/her responsibilities.

To a large degree, the support of adult learners includes an understanding of how adults learn. According to Knowles (1973) adult learners had distinctive characteristics that created unique circumstances for those who supported them. Bell and Spellman (2011) added that professional development leaders must craft professional learning programs to both scaffold and stretch adults with an understanding that adults learned and changed over the *course of a lifetime.* Therefore, in its initial roll out, the professional development must first aim to generate authentic motivation for change through a "shared vision, collecting and synthesizing data on student achievement, identifying gaps between current and desired performance, and collaboratively building an action plan" (p. 150). Teachers are not against change; they are against poorly planning and rushed selection of change models. Ferguson and Lynch (2010) also cited teacher resistance as an issue when "teachers are passive participants in the learning" (p. 201). Further, Mezirow's (2000) adult learning theory provided that, "unless adult learning is transformed through expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action, adult learners remain focused on merely accessing information" (as cited in Bell & Spellman, 2011, p. 150). Through collaborative and social learning, teachers are active participants, discussing, sharing, and planning together (Ferguson & Lynch, 2010). Bell and Spellman (2011) interpreted Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory to include adults' worldview and view of themselves in the world, in addition to a collective shared mission that provides purpose, which would build into the coaching the principles of "equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis, and reciprocity" (p. 152). Without a doubt, the work of mobilizing, supporting, and challenging adult

learners is quite complicated – and, yet, absolutely essential for literacy coaches to understand (Haag et al., 2011).

Effective Coaching Strategies

Since it takes a great investment of time to build these trusting relationships, ideally, the coach is a part of the school culture (Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007). With the coach as an active leader in the school community, whole school-wide benefits are likely. This leadership role as a literacy coach can in fact extend into the community as well as the school, for example, through pre-school/pre-kindergarten programming. Steckel (2009) pointed out that "effective coaching is not a top-down process… the ultimate goal of a coach was to empower teachers with the reflective, problem-solving skills required to accomplish the goals of initiating and sustaining meaningful change" (p. 22). With consistent meetings and the use of professional texts to drive the discourse with research-based best practices, both the elements of time and trust are addressed (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2007). Since time is a critical factor in the success of literacy coaching, the scheduled meetings by design build in the time and the use of professional literature keeps the time focused on *working on the work.*

Similarly, a strong literacy coach can serve as a leader in his/her ability to "foster the development of a positive school climate, a good working relation among teachers, and an expectation that teachers in the school can improve the literacy outcomes for students" (as cited in Berebitsky & Carlisle, 2010, p. 777). Haag et al. (2011) aimed to develop and hone the reflective practitioner through the coaching sessions. Further, specific coaching strategies have been found that successful build rapport and trusting relationships with the teachers who are being coached. However, there is an administrative concern regarding retention of successful

coaches; many coaches ultimately choose the administrative route after their experience in the coaching position (Marsh & McCombs, 2009).

Not only does coaching require an investment of time, but also there is a period of time in which teachers need to practice, hone, and refine new skills, strategies, and practices acquired from coaching sessions. In fact, according to Crilley et al. (1997), "teachers require a period of two to three years to become fully competent in the use of a new instructional method" (p. 248). So, even with this on-the-job, on-going professional development, the full benefit of the impact may not be clear until a few years, and many students, later. To illustrate, Bell and Spellman's (2011) study in urban schools yielded results that demonstrated "an immediate impact on classroom quality can happen after two years of a continuous and sustained professional development and instructional coaching… [impacting teacher and student] growth over time" (p. 161). As with any educational initiative, results acquired over time are necessary.

The Disadvantages of Coaching

Interestingly, the literature showed that there are also disadvantages of coaching. First, Shidler (2008) noted that too much time spent on coaching could be overwhelming for the teacher being coached. With too much coaching there can be an over-stimulation of ideas, a territorial issue over the classroom itself, and a loss of focus on the single goal that was initially determined. Both Marsh and McCombs (2009) and Shidler (2009) presented strong cases on the critical balance of time spent on coaching: "too little time in any component of effective coaching leaves issues unresolved, too much time can cause the focus to become diluted" (Shidler, 2009, p. 459). Since more time is not always ideal, the determining factor for effectiveness is in the method of coaching and the value of the coaching exchange.

Further, Jones and Rainvillle (2008) investigated the *situated identities* and *power and positioning* that occurred as a result of coaching. Effective coaches engaged in *identity negotiations*; they read and responded to *subtle and nuanced context changes* within their role. The "personal and political dynamics are integral in the work of teaching and learning" (p. 441). Knight (2011) established that the act of coaching, or helping, positions the helper, or coach, already up one, and no person wants to feel one down, that teacher is already positioned to want to resist the help. Since the coaching dynamics were so central to the effectiveness, Heineke (2013) also determined that coaches needed more professional learning around the "continuum of coaching models or stances and how to employ various verbal moves to facilitate reflection and the building of meaning" (p. 428). Another drawback in coaching is that some coaches talked too much during the coaching dialogue. Since the time for the teacher's talking builds in the necessary teacher reflection, the coach should not be the dominant talker. However, some coaches were not as capable at navigating the coaching identities. With more understanding of coaching types in the coach's toolbox, the coach could discern between the coaching style that best matches the teacher's goals. This would put more emphasis on meeting the teachers' needs and reduces the disadvantage of power and positioning during coaching (Heineke, 2013).

To address some of the noted drawbacks, both Jones and Rainville (2008) and Heineke (2013) provided recommendations for preparing future coaches for the complexity of the position. For example, Jones and Rainville (2008) framed three helpful hints for coaches: 1) developing an informal relationship with the teacher(s); 2) deliberate and strategic positioning as a co-learner not a supervisor; and 3) a clear explanation of the coach's role. To add, since the coach seemed to have an aura of power as the evaluator/observer, Heineke (2013) recommended that responsive coaching would provide the emphasis on the teacher's goals and structured

reflection. In summary, while the literature captured an outline of the drawbacks to coaching, more literature is required to gain a more complete understanding.

The Limitations of Coaching

There are certainly drawbacks to coaching and there are also limitations to coaching that make effective coaching even more difficult. First, teacher reluctance – even resistance, escalated as high as *angry hostility* – was the most limiting and negative result of coaching (Ferguson & Lynch, 2010; Garnier et al., 2010; Ippolito, 2010). For example, Garnier et al. (2010) noted that new teachers saw the coaching sessions as an advantage to building their competencies and professional network more quickly, while veteran teachers viewed the coaching as "not believing that the program would be useful and advantageous for their students" (p. 266). Second, Ferguson and Lynch (2010) also noted teachers' perception that a lack of resources was a potential limitation of coaching. Third, an additional limitation of coaching is a lack of time that coaches are able to spend in classrooms based on the daily work and activities of coaches. To illustrate, Florida State stipulated that coaches should be spending 50% of their time working in teachers' classrooms. However, Florida State coaches reported that they were actually spending only 30% of their time in classrooms. Therefore, the other duties were preventing coaches from fulfilling the allotted time in the classrooms. It is important to note that coaches are also evaluated by supervising administrators and may not be properly evaluated for their effectiveness as coaches (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). If coaches have not been able to meet the required time in classrooms, they may receive a poor performance review. Marsh and McCombs further questioned the validity of administrators who evaluated coaches, since a majority of the administrators were not trained in the teaching of reading. Clearly, although coaching is not a new professional learning model, there remain significant gaps in the training,

knowledge, and evaluation of coaches (Boatright et al., 2010; Heineke, 2013; Jones & Rainville, 2008; Marsh & McCombs, 2009).

To add, there were also limitations noted due to the coaches' lack of training and coaching knowledge. For example, Jones and Rainville (2008) reported that coaches' preparation varies across state lines and school systems; thus coaches may not receive sufficient training. Heineke (2013) noted that, "coaches need to become more knowledgeable about and skillful in their use of verbal moves and coaching stances" (p. 409). Killion (2008) had a similar idea about coaches navigating their relationships and adjusting their strategies in a case-by-case, or teacher-by-teacher, basis, calling it *coaching heavy* or *coaching light.* If coaches only succeed at *coaching light*, they are appreciated and accepted by peers, but they do not improve teaching and learning because *coaching light* coaches avoid challenging conversations with teachers who need coaching. In contrast, "coaching heavy is driven by a coach's deep commitment to improve teaching and learning, even if it means not being liked" (p. 2). Coaches need training in seeing the distinction between the two and prioritizing students' achievement (i.e., as a result of improved teaching) over the comfortable role of supportive listener.

Further, Jones and Rainville (2008) determined that serving as a coach calls for coaches to understand the site-specific context of the situation well enough to engage the teacher with the appropriate selection of *situated identities*, shifting the way they talk or act to be most effective. To illustrate, within one three minute conversation, a literacy coach may ask about the teacher's weekend and suggest a new strategy because coaching "involves enacting varied identities to build personal relationships as well as scaffolding teachers' ongoing learning in literacy education" (p. 441). Bomer (2011) corroborated that "to talk is to negotiate socially" (p.140). Clearly, coaches are doing more than just teaching teachers; they are choosing their identity to

maximize student learning (Jones & Rainville, 2008; Killion, 2008). Boatright et al. (2010) also called for additional research around the professional learning for coaches due to the complexities and challenges of coaching. Undoubtedly, the literature revealed a range of complex limitations.

Summary

Across the research, themes were identified and complexities were clear. There is not enough data to prove the correlation between the time teachers spend working with a literacy coach and an increase in student achievement in reading. However, it is certain that the data provided by the IRA (2004, 2006) compels schools to address the reading students need for college and career readiness in the 21st century through high-quality and on-going professional learning. If literacy and instructional coaching are identified as the best professional learning model to provide on-the-job training with fidelity, then there needs to be a coherent and shared vision of the role, definition, title, and objective of the literacy coach. Since the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches vary across states and across educational levels, the calibration of definitive roles, responsibilities, and objectives should become part of the shared vision. As with any professional development reform, there are bound to barriers. Effective coaches need to know the barriers in order to be able to navigate around them. Coaches are clear on the over-arching goal of working with teachers to improve student achievement. However, there are other secondary objectives, such as building the professional adult learning community and improving school climate as well. Professional development within the PLCs has been sought to provide on-the-job coaches with support in providing effective coaching strategies. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), the purpose of the PLC is ‘staff learning in order to increase student learning’ (as cited in Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 12). “The connection between

culture and learning organizations is critical" for sustaining "momentum for school improvement over time" (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 12). However, there are limitations of any professional endeavor; an acknowledgement of those limitations assists in developing the creating opportunities.

In closing, the literature also leaves gaps for further inquiry into many interesting topics. First, adult learning theory becomes paramount in the discussion of literacy coaching as the coaches and teaching adult teachers. As important as it is for coaches and administrators to understand how adults learn, there is no requirement in either the coaching or administrative certification program, which provides that adult learning theory context. Teaching "teachers may require a different set of skills and knowledge than teaching students" (Marsh & McCombs, 2009, p. 502). Similarly, Lockwood et al. (2010) reported that in theory coaches should facilitate professional learning that is context-embedded and site-specific. In theory, effective coaches should be responsive to teachers' work experiences. In fact, many coaches themselves requested further learning around how to support adult learners (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). It becomes clear that further studies include the learning theory and mindset of the teachers being coached.

A second area for further study includes an examination of individualized educational plans for teachers. Interestingly, Haag et al. (2011) found that, "differentiated support, based on teachers' individual needs and learning styles is crucial for the work of a literacy coach. Learning happens *within* teachers, not *to* them" (p. 499, emphasis on original). Not surprisingly, research has shown that what teachers do for students in supporting their learning with differentiated support and individualized instruction, also works for adults. Further, Haag et al. also reported that "differentiated support, based on teachers' individual needs and learning styles is crucial for the work of a literacy coach" (p. 499). Interestingly, "adult learning theory holds that adults

(teachers) must be allowed to move through the learning process at their own pace; they also need to be allowed time for repeated and guided practice of their new skills" (Shidler, 2009, p. 454), which does imply different paces for different teachers. Unlearning old teaching habits, replacing those habits with new practices, and reflecting on those new practices all take time, and the time that process takes will depend upon the teacher. To date, individualized educational plans are crafted for students with special needs. However, as more becomes known about the special needs of adult learners, more literature will be required to address teachers' needs. Finally, since teacher resistance or enthusiasm towards coaching plays the most critical factor in the potential for adult learning, an inquiry around fixed and growth mindset is relevant (Dweck, 2006).

A third area for further study is the concept of the literacy coach in the high school setting (Stevens, 2011). This is an interesting field for study given its complications. According to the IRA (2006):

> most preservice programs for secondary school teachers only require one content area reading course. Facing considerable pressure to cover content for state assessments, content area teachers also worry that teaching literacy takes essential time away from teaching their subject matter. (p. 2)

While all content area teachers need to teach literacy, teachers with a secondary education certification were not required to learn how to teach literacy. Classrooms are more inclusive of children with all needs, and teachers were not necessarily trained to meet their needs.

Finally, another context-specific study could be crafted around the socioeconomic status of the school and the responsiveness of teachers towards coaching. Bell and Spellman (2011) collected data in a parochial school setting, whereas Steckel (2009) reported on work in urban

schools. A last point to consider as an entry point for inquiry is the socioeconomic context of the school's district reference group and the teacher resistance or enthusiasm. High-need schools are often mandated to implement professional development initiatives, unlike high-functioning and high-scoring schools, which are deemed successful and thriving. Since those high-need schools absorb policies and personnel designed to support their efforts toward improvement, teachers in those schools may be more open to coaching than teachers who have been self-sustaining in successful schools.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

In literature I reviewed on literacy coaching as a professional development model, there was consistently an interesting issue of power within the coach/coachee relationship. In identifying the issue of power/lack of power between the coach and the teacher, the role of the coach became even more complex and precarious. The literature indicated a consistent desire for literacy coaching as an on-going and on-site professional learning model (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). Yet, the literature also indicated the consistent failure to clearly define the roles and objectives of the literacy coaches (Boatright, DeVoogt Van Lare, Gallucci, & Yoon, 2010). Defining the role, responsibilities, and objectives of the literacy coach was a difficult task. Further, the ambiguity that existed around the role, responsibilities, and objectives created vulnerability and discomfort for many of the teachers being coached.

This led to the purpose of this thesis study, which was to examine the complexities of the peer collaboration between coaches and teachers. The topic of coaching teachers collided with the adult learning theory and mindset of the teachers being coached. Marsh and McCombs (2009) reported that teaching "teachers may require a different set of skills and knowledge than teaching students" (p. 502). Similarly, Lockwood, Marsh, and McCombs (2010) reported that coaches who had facilitated professional learning that was context-embedded and site-specific were more effective; in theory, effective coaches were responsive to teachers' work experiences. In fact, many coaches themselves requested further learning around how to support adult learners (Marsh & McCombs, 2009). This led to the following two research questions:

1. What do adult learners seek from their adult learning communities?

2. What do teachers believe is missing in adult learning communities that causes them pursue leadership positions?

Since my research was aimed to yield a more complete understanding of the teachers' and coaches' experiences in this peer collaboration model, the case study methodology was appropriate.

Methodology

According to Tellis (1997), case studies were "designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data" (p. 1). Since the design of the case study methodology provided multiple perspectives across the range of participants, case studies gave a "voice to the powerless and voiceless" (p. 2). The literature on peer coaching described by Jones and Rainville (2008) demonstrated the subtle power and positioning that occurred while teachers worked with coaches. Further, Boatright et al. (2010) corroborated the issue of power in coaching models; teachers who took "on the role of coach are viewed as sharing leadership for instructional reform with central office leaders and principals" (p. 920). This theory of shared leadership between coaches and administration positioned coaches as more supervisory or evaluative in nature than a *guide on the side*. The case study allowed the researcher to collect and include these multiple perspectives to answer the research questions.

Jones and Rainville (2008) investigated the *situated identities* and *power and positioning* that occurred as a result of coaching. Effective coaches engaged in *identity negotiations*; they read and responded to *subtle and nuanced context changes* within their role. Sensitivity to change, vulnerability to criticism, and posturing often made the "personal and political dynamics" uncomfortable, and yet "integral in the work of teaching and learning" (p. 441). Although coaches were non-evaluative peers, experienced teachers felt vulnerable, or even

adversarial, when partnered with coaches. Boatright et al. (2010) called literacy coaches change agents, and any change can create a "delicate balance" (p. 922). Steckel (2009) reported that, "effective coaching is not a top-down process (p. 22). However, many teachers who worked with coaches perceived a *top-down* hierarchy. Since this peer collaboration model was highly nuanced with personal and professional dynamics, the researcher used the case study methodology because the intent was to gauge the scope of both teacher and future leader perspectives, and how those perspectives impacted the learning communities (Jones & Rainville, 2008; Tellis, 1997).

According to Tellis (1997), with an organized and purposeful investigator vetting the most precise information, this study was systematic and replicable. Yin (1994) cautioned that the researcher needed "to rely on experience and the literature to present the evidence in various ways, using various interpretations" (p. 12). Trochim (1989) utilized pattern-matching to reliably analyze the qualitative data. Ultimately, this research method aimed to answer the research questions in an investigation that yielded a breadth and depth of information (Tellis, 1997).

A constructivist framework was applied. The researcher used her perspective to analyze the feedback generated in both surveys and semi-structured interviews to construct an answer to what adults seek from their adult learning communities. According to Charmaz (1990, 2002, 2006) in a constructivist design, the researcher focused on the "views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals" (as cited in Creswell, 2012, p. 429). Based on the intent to uncover answers to the researcher's questions, the constructivist framework allowed for the combined understanding of the *social reality* of the educational context in addition to the individuals' perspectives. Thus, the researcher actively constructed meaning (Troudi, 2014).

Lawrenz, Sharp, and Stevens (1993) cautioned that case study data could be over-interpreted and/or over-generalized. However, Yin (2012) recommended that with close attention to "key methodological procedures" (p. xxvii), case studies were highly successful. In order for the case study methodology to work, Yin (1994) suggested that the investigator must have: 1) asked good questions, 2) accurately interpreted responses to those questions, 3) listened well, 4) adapted and adjusted to situations in the work of the research, 5) understood the issues of the study, and 6) remained objective (as cited in Tellis, 1997). This protocol required discipline and focus to ensure reliability. The research questions were answered by a network of teachers who were currently participating in PLCs and served as representatives of the distinct voices in this peer collaboration model. The researcher considered extending the study into the business field, which would have provide another dimension of perspective in a corporate landscape, and perhaps would yield an alternative model for educational coaching.

Finally, Lawrenz et al. (1993) described case study methodology as "engaging, rich explorations of a project or application as it develops in a real-world setting" (p. 61). Creswell (2007) defined a case study as "an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (as cited in Creswell, 2012, p. 465). It was advantageous when the investigator was immersed in the setting because of the on-going observation that occurred as the investigator has spent time in the site of study (Lawrenz et al., 1993). This was a single case study as looked at a single site of study, identified a specific single group for research, and gathered data from that specific group (Creswell, 2012). Tellis (1997) observed that through the multiple perspectives that case study methodology provided, the researcher considered "not just the voice and perspectives of the actors, but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them" (p. 1). According to Yin (2003) case

studies were relevant when the research aimed to answer a descriptive or explanatory research questions, such as "what is happening?" and/or "how/why has this happened?" (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008). This research intended to address both descriptive and explanatory questions to both describe the individuals' perspectives and explain the pursuit of support or leadership positions. Ultimately, using the constructivist framework, the researcher generalized answers to the research (Creswell, 2012).

The Case

This case study took place in one suburban middle school located in Fairfield County, Connecticut. The district was located in an affluent community in the northeast United States. Because of the affluence, the town's socioeconomic demographics were very homogenous. According to Connecticut Economic Resource Center (2014a), Westlake residents' per capita was $549,257, resulting in 379% of the state's average. The district was large in number of students, but divided across multiple elementary schools that eventually funneled into one larger middle school. The degree of parent and administrative involvement was both an appealing factor and a deterrent for attracting and retaining faculty members. According to the article in *The Atlantic* on children in the extremely affluent Silicon Valley article titled, "The Silicon Valley Suicides," students from inordinately wealthy towns were as at-risk as students from extreme poverty (Rosin, 2015). The school district that served as the backdrop for this research faced the same school climate and social emotional needs that those students faced in Silicon Valley, California. Also, what about those students' teachers? The teachers of those types of students were also under similarly intense pressure to keep those wealthy students competitive, so what about their mental health and well-being – as well as their students? It came as no surprise to many that the recent *Google* survey reported that adults most thrived in teams where

they felt 'psychologically' safe (Schlossberg, 2016). So, what could the adult learning communities offer these teachers that they need to be able to support these types of students' emotional and academic needs?

In this particular case, 10 teachers from grades five through eight were studied. Each of these individuals was purposefully selected based on two criteria: 1) was a certified teacher, and 2) was currently engaged in a professional learning community, which operated to collaborate to provide the best instruction to students. A purposeful sample allowed the researcher to understand an essential part of the districts' teaching framework (Creswell, 2012), which was professional collaboration. The teachers in this sample were asked to participate in two separate rounds of surveys. Based on specific results yielded from the surveys, participants in the surveys were specifically sought to participate in individual interviews.

Data Collection Methods

Using a mixed methods explanatory sequential design, surveys and interviews were conducted with participants. The purpose of this study was to explore what the adult stakeholders sought from their professional learning communities and to determine what teachers believed was missing from the adult learning communities that inspired them to pursue administration. In researching to answer both a descriptive and explanatory question, a complex methodology was selected to complement two complex questions. Through the collection of the following: surveys, interview transcripts, artifacts, and observational records, the case study methodology allowed for the synthesis of many moving parts so that the investigator could ensure triangulation of data points and, therefore, increased the reliability. The table below outlined the questions and methods of this study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Research Question and Methods Used to Collect Data

Research Question	Data Collection Method
1. What do adult learners seek from their adult learning communities?	• Surveys • Interviews
2. What do teachers believe is missing in adult learning communities that causes them to pursue leadership positions?	• Surveys • Interviews

Data was collected over a three-week period from May to June. Participation was a volunteer commitment, and participants' commentaries were confidential. Each method of data collection was described in the subsequent sub-sections.

Surveys

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from surveys. According to Creswell (2012) surveys administered to a purposeful sampling of selected individuals and contexts provided a thorough understanding of the inquiry. Although surveys included personal bias, they were ideal for capturing a descriptive snapshot of a wide range of information (Lawrenz et al., 1993). In fact, with a strategic theory or concept sampling, a small focused group of individuals yielded the most "in-depth picture… to present the complexity of a site or of the information provided by the individuals" (Creswell, 2012, p. 209). With open-ended questionnaires, or surveys, themes were traced across the responses. In addition, the open-ended nature of the survey also provided interesting additional information that the researcher might not have even considered initially.

The research into the questions "What do adult learners seek from their adult learning communities?" and "What do teachers believe is missing that causes them to seek support or pursue administration?" aimed to learn about a specific population and its needs. Since people were familiar with surveys, the task of survey completion was routine (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, participants did not feel overwhelmed by an investment of time participating. After a short time commitment, a significant amount of data was captured. According to Lawrenz et al. (1993) surveys allowed for a large number of responses on a range of topics. Further, Creswell (2012) asserted that, "survey studies describe trends in the data" (p. 376). These trends helped to answer the research question. In identifying the trends, it was also possible to "identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals" (p. 376). Surveys were another tool that provided "a voice to the powerless and voiceless" (Tellis, 1997, p. 2). Therefore, surveys certainly provided *multi-perspectival* accounts of what adults sought from their professional learning communities (Lawrenz et al., 1993; Tellis, 1997). After quantifying the data from the surveys, the researcher generalized what adults sought from their adult learning communities. In tables, the researcher distinguished the profile of the adults based on role descriptor (e.g., listening, collaboration).

Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised (PCLA-R). Created by Hipp, Huffman, and Oliver (2008), this instrument was a 52-item survey that allowed educators to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their current professional learning community (see Appendix A for a copy). The survey addressed the physical structure of the school buildings to the communication, relationships, and shared vision across the learning community. Responses to each item were recorded using a four-point Likert-scale that ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' Responses were collected and tabulated to provide a score for an overall rating of the learning community on a continuum, which ranged across levels of PLC development

from starting, called *initiating,* doing, called *implementing,* and sustaining, or *institutionalizing.*

The type of information gathered from this instrument provided a snapshot into the feelings and perceptions of the adults in this school. With clearer understandings of the perceptions, a leader was better able to identify how to respond to the adult learners' needs, thus answering the question: "What do adults learners seek from their adult learning communities?" The following guidelines and individual interview questions were utilized by Morrow (2010) to understand "teachers' perceptions of professional learning communities as opportunities for promoting professional growth" (p. 1). Since my research was designed to answer similar questions, including the trajectory of teachers who sought new leadership roles, this interview protocol allowed for an open-ended dialogue.

Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (TLSA). Created by Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (2004), this 42-item survey was a tool for asking teachers who operated in adult learning communities to self-reflect on their own demonstration of teacher-leadership as they functioned in PLCs (see Appendix C for a copy). Each item was scored using a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 'never' to 'always.' Responses were calculated to reflect a score in the categories from self-awareness, to leading change, to communication, to diversity, to instructional proficiency, to continuous improvement, to self-organization. The *TLSA*'s content validity can be found in the 'Reliability and Validity' section.

Interviews

In addition to surveys, interviews provided "in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints on a particular topic" (Turner, 2010, p. 754). Creswell (2007) asserted that careful selection of participants in interviews was critical for gaining credible and honest testimonies (as cited in Turner, 2010). Although interviews with those

carefully selected interviewees were time-consuming, they yielded the "richest data, detail, and new insights" (Lawrenz et al., 1993, p. 52). It was these *new insights* that were especially interesting in the research of these two questions. According to Turner (2010) interview preparation, candidate selection, and data interpretation were critical to the usefulness of the interviewing. Specifically, with a general interview guide approach, as opposed to an informal conversational interview, the researcher was able to follow the same interview guide with each participant while allowing for a conversational tone. Because of the candor required of participants, one-to-one interviews were preferred to focus groups and/or telephone/e-mail interviews, which ensured that a rapport was gained between the interviewer and the interviewee.

To answer the research question "What do teachers believe is missing that causes them to seek support or pursue administration?" those teachers who have sought support or pursued administrative roles were selected as key people to interview. Lawrenz et al. (1993) defined a key informant as "a person (or group of persons) who has unique skills or professional background related to the issue/intervention being evaluated, is knowledgeable about the project participants, or has access to other information" (p. 59). With the *insider* view from key informants, the in-depth interviews also encouraged "capturing respondents' perceptions in their own words" (p. 52). To operationalize this research, a general interview guide approach was ideal because of its flexibility to adjust the conversation as new information yielded from respondents' answers still allowed for thinking in real-time (see Appendix D for a copy of this guide). Therefore, questions were adapted or omitted to pursue a new line of thinking as information was revealed by participants' answers (Turner, 2010). Each interview was recorded and transcribed for documentation and analysis.

Data Analysis Methods

Multiple methods of data analysis were required because the instrumentation yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Due to the ability to see the frequencies and patterns, descriptive statistics were utilized. In order to uncover the nuances and smaller details, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the qualitative responses provided by participants to ensure a level of consummate understanding of the data and its synthesis with the quantitative data.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics helped the researcher "summarize the overall trends or tendencies [in the data,] provide an understanding of how varied [the data may be, and] provide insight into where one score stands in comparison with others" (Creswell, 2012, p. 187). Measures for central tendency and measures for variability were examples of this type of data analysis. This level of analysis created opportunities for the researcher to describe the significances of the trends in the data to a single question and to infer meaning from the results of a sample of the population.

The two surveys used in two separate rounds generated single item scores. The data gathered from the *PCLA-R* and *TLSA* was used to understand the current adult learning communities and the perceptions of the participants. All surveys were reviewed and entered into *Google Sheets.* Descriptive statistics were used to calculate. Data was triangulated and interpreted in order to understand generalizations.

Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative method, or grounded theory, was a method of analyzing themes found in the data. According to Creswell (2012), the inquirer engaged "in a process of

gathering data, sorting it into categories, collecting additional information, and comparing the new information with emerging categories" (p. 434). The researcher was constantly (and slowly) comparing the data in order to find new themes and new ideas until she reached data saturation – *grounding* the categories in the data.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method was a method that generated a theory on a social phenomenon, event, or setting of interest to the researcher. Further, according to Corbin and Strauss (1990), with open coding, the researcher broke down, examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized data (as cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). As Glazer and Strauss (1967) described, the process of constantly comparing continued until the researcher successfully uncovered a theory of understanding of the concepts, principles, structures, and/or processes of interest – and made decisions around that new understanding (as cited in Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Creswell (2012) noted that, the grounded theorist asked "questions of the data" (p. 434). With one *core category* as the basis for developing the theory, the most central, significant, and frequent theme became the focus point of the researcher.

Interview protocols, questions, and data were prepared and interpreted using the process described by Turner (2010). First, participants agreed to participate in surveys. Next, interview responses were recorded and transcribed into a *Microsoft Word* document. Using a coded chart, interview data was labeled and categorized as responses were interpreted and reviewed. While applying open coding, the inquirer *segmented* and *labeled* the data to "form descriptions and broad themes" (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). This inductive process allowed the researcher to focus on specific data and dismiss other data, funneling the data into specific themes. Instead of axial or selective coding, open coding was more inclusive of all that the data revealed until a broader theme emerged.

Reliability and Validity

Reliable and valid research instruments ensured that a study was replicable and sound. Reliable instruments ensured stable and consistent results, over different administrations of the instrument. “Validity is the degree to which all of the evidence points to the intended instrumentation” for the intended purpose (Creswell, 2012, p. 159). Due to the complex overlap of the two terms, thoughtful preparation of the protocols, questions, and administration of the instruments was essential in creating valid results. The researcher used pilot administrations of the instruments and pilot testing of the necessary technology for recording and transcribing to iron out the barriers to the reliability and validity. Through the procedures of alternate forms, inter-rater, internal consistency, and test-retest, administration of the instrument(s) yielded information about the behavior(s) and profiles(s) of the participants in the study to establish reliable instruments. To ensure validity, external reference, member checking, and triangulation were utilized. Quantitative and qualitative results yielded from the instruments were only meaningful when the *scores* were reliable and valid (Creswell, 2012).

PLCA – R

SEDL (2016), formerly known as Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory, established construct validity for the *PCLA – R* (Hipp & Olivier, 2010) through expert study and factor analysis, which yielded “satisfactory internal consistency for reliability” (para. 3). SEDL confirmed internal consistency with “widespread use of the instrument” (para. 2). Using the “Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients for factored subscales (n=1209)” in 'Shared and Supportive Leadership’ (α=0.94), ‘Shared Values and Vision’ (α=0.92), ‘Collective Learning and Application’ (α=0.91), ‘Shared Personal Practice; (α=0.87), ‘Supportive Conditions – Relationships’ (α=0.82), ‘Supportive Conditions – Structures’ (α=0.88), and ‘One-Factor

Solution' (α=0.97). The *PCLA – R* was the result of the revision of the Professional Learning Community Assessment (2003). Designed to assess the daily work of professional learning communities (PLCs), the survey assessed the "practices related to identified dimensions" of PLCs (SEDL, 2016, para. 1). The *PCLA – R* has been administered to many school districts across the United States and across grade levels to fortify the schools' PLCs (SEDL, 2016).

TSLA

Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (2004) documented that the content validity for the *TSLA* was established "through a panel of knowledgeable experts and the use of a pilot survey" (as cited in Wills, 2015, p. 36). According to Creswell (2012) the procedure applied by Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (2004) and Wills (2015) was reliable and valid since the procedure included the proper four steps: 1) a review of the literature; 2) a presentation of general questions to a focus group; 3) a strategic construction of the items in the instrument; and 4) a pilot administration. The panel of experts used in both studies ranged from educators who had experience with nurturing teacher leaders to teachers who had served as teacher leaders. This group studied the literature and data on teacher leaders and synthesized their thinking with teaching standards and indicators. Participants selected survey items that they deemed to be self-reflective in the area of teacher leadership. Through a collaborative review, the final set of items resulted. Applying heuristic factor analysis, the items were categorized into seven thematic categories. For the pilot administration, approximately 40 teacher leadership experts participated. As the survey concluded, an open-ended question provided a platform seeking commentary from those experts on adjustment to the final survey. Based on those suggestions, the final *TSLA* originated.

Member Check

According to Creswell (2012) member checking allowed for the researcher to validate the accuracy of the responses. Member checking was "a process which the researcher asks one or more of the participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 259). The procedure of checking called for the participant to review their own responses and determine that their initial responses were accurate. Either in an interview or in writing, the member checking allowed the researcher to probe the participant to determine if their initial response was complete or incomplete and realistic or not. Further, this member checking dialogue allowed for review of any interpretations that were (or were not) *fair* and *representative.* In this study, the interviewed participants were member checked. Audio recordings and transcriptions allowed for the facilitation of member checking. During the member check, participants were able to add any further thinking, though they did not add anything.

Triangulation

According to Creswell (2012) triangulation was "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals…, types of data…, or methods of data collection…., in descriptions and themes" (p. 259). The researcher used the interview as a qualitative piece of the data and infused participants' words and feelings into the numbers that were reflected in the surveys, thus offering triangulated data. Themes from the responses were generated and generalized. Accuracy and credibility were ensured when the information drew "on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes" (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the *PCLA – R* survey items were selected in correlation with the interview questions to probe selected individuals for further thinking. With more time, a second and similar school district would have been selected to offer additional perspective and triangulation. The overall rating of the pulse of each PLC yielded

from the *PCLA – R* and the *TLSA* created insightful opportunity for the researcher to answer the research question, "What do teachers believe is missing in adult learning communities that causes them to pursue leadership positions?"

Subjectivity Statement

What were my subjectivities in regard to my research? I wrote from the perspective of a teacher in the affluent district described above. I had only ever known this type of district, and while I had interned in middle-class and high-poverty schools, I had never been a contributing stakeholder in another school. I also wrote from the perspective of someone who had essentially been raised professionally in a culture where excellence was expected, but that still had not figured out how to break down the competition to create healthy and functional adult learning communities. Every school faced the issue and complaint of never-enough-time, but in districts like the one I had served in, there were more initiatives every year and less time. In fact, the past two years, our principal had put a moratorium on meetings because of the perceived stress level that his teachers were enduring. Finally, I wrote from the perspective of a stakeholder who had been dissatisfied with the level of professional collaboration and who had been asked to become an educational leader in order to effect change and climate at a grass-roots level, but eventually from a leadership position.

Therefore, I came to this topic slightly jaded, but overwhelmingly enthusiastic to make change happen in my district. Since I understood the *Connecticut State Framework for Effective Teaching* and the *Westlake Public Schools Effective Teaching Framework*, I had a specific lens with which I saw that we were progressing but not quite accomplished as a whole-school learning goal (Connecticut State Framework for Effective Teaching, 2012; Westlake Public Schools Effective Teaching Framework, 2015). As the Common Core State Standards for

Connecticut became more public and expected of each teacher, teachers' feelings of anxiety were heightened, especially when combined with the micro-management feeling of the new teacher evaluation process in this state (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2016). As an aspiring leader of teachers, I embarked with a sense of hope that – with better structures in place and a better understanding of the shortcomings of the current adult learning communities – authentically and intrinsically motivated professional learning communities were possible.

Summary

The purpose of the case study was to more clearly understand the level of functioning of adult learning communities in one middle school. Through the use of multiple surveys and semi-structured interviews, information and data yielded teachers' perceptions of the adult learning communities, as well as what caused teachers to become administrative aspirants. More than 15 teachers 5-8 were invited to participate in the research in the survey portion of the research, and then a smaller strategic group was selected for the interviews. Quantitative data from the surveys as well as qualitative data was produced from the interviews to create a snapshot explaining the themes in the two research questions. The use of previously utilized reliable and valid surveys ensured the reliability and validity in this study. Through the use of member checking and triangulation of data from the surveys, the data ensured validity.

Chapter 4

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the needs of the adult learners as they operated in their professional learning communities (PLCs) in one consistently high-performing Connecticut middle school. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do adult learners seek from their adult learning communities?
2. What do teachers believe is missing in adult learning communities that causes them pursue leadership positions?

In this chapter, I will establish the perceptions and reflections of teachers at this middle school and sketch a profile of an adult learner who sought leadership in his/her PLC; I also will attempt to understand the correlation between the needs of the adult learners and the profile of those learners who went beyond participation in the professional learning communities to actually leading the PLCs.

As previously discussed, two electronic surveys were used to collect information from ten certified teachers. These teachers were carefully selected because they were currently certified with a Connecticut Intermediate Administration and Supervision 092 certification or had held some type of leadership title in the last five years. Fourteen certified teachers were initially invited to participate in both of the surveys. Ten, or 71%, of the teachers who were invited did in fact complete the two surveys. With the exception of one participant, all other participants who completed surveys were currently enrolled in an educational leadership program or had at some point held a leadership position. All participants had been teaching for six or more years. All participants had successfully completed either the Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) program or the Teacher Education And Mentoring (TEAM) program.

Some participants were even trained as TEAM mentors. All participants were ultimately positive about participating in the survey completion, although they were inquisitive about the purpose of the research at first. These teachers' primary role in their current teaching assignments was direct instruction of students. While the roles of the teachers varied from grade level to academic discipline to title (i.e., from classroom teacher to Response to Intervention [RtI] Coach), all of the participants were experts in their own experience as it related to impacting student achievement and functioning as collaborative members of a PLC. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data yielded from the two surveys.

From those completed surveys, two teachers were selected for individual interviews to understand their perceptions more deeply. "Numbers alone rarely tell the story" (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 39). Therefore, interviewing selected survey respondents offered the rich candor that told the story of operating in this PLC. Since the surveys and interviews were administered at the end of May of 2016, participants were able to reflect at the most appropriate and strategic timing on the full academic school year with their experiences fresh in their minds and in already self-reflective mode, rather than a middle of the year check-in (see Table 2 for a summary of this inquiry into the PLC practices).

Table 2

Breakdown of Dimensions for Analysis of PLC According to Hipp and Huffman (2010)

Professional Learning Community Dimensions	Guiding Questions That Prompt Self-Reflection on Professional Learning Community Practices
1. Shared and Supportive Leadership	• How was leadership capacity created, shared, and implemented?

2. Shared Values and Vision?	• How were school efforts aligned to the school's vision, values, and goals?
3. Collective Learning and Application	• How were the staff involved in focused and meaningful learning?
4. Shared Personal Practice	• How did the teachers share their practice?
5. Supportive Conditions – Relationships	• How were relationships of trust and respect established?
6. Supportive Conditions – Structures	• How were structures established that support the culture of the PLC?
7. External factors	• To what degree was the entire school community involved?

From the table above, as supported by Hipp and Huffman (2010), it became clear that the PLCs were engaged in a range of interconnected professional activities that required peer-to-peer relationships and higher-order thinking. Therefore, the selected respondents in the survey and interviews became valuable resources in understanding the functioning of the PLC.

The 52-item *Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised* (*PLCA – R*) survey assessed the participants' perceptions of the stakeholders he/she engaged with in the above listed seven dimension categories. This information helped paint a clear and accurate picture of a wide range of teacher perceptions about the PLC by reacting to statements "about practices which occur in some schools" (Hipp & Olivier, 2010, p. 32). The statements made by

teachers provided honest perceptions of the PLC's effectiveness; research showed that close examination of a PLC revealed that the PLC was not operating as effectively as participants believed (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). The second survey, *Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment* (*TLSA*) aimed to outline the profile of the teachers involved in this particular PLC. This 42-item survey was general in nature; it ranged from issues such as philosophies on teaching and learning, self-reflection, decision-making, professionalism, shared vision, to curricular planning and culture. The findings for the two research questions were synthesized below.

What Do Adult Learners Seek From Their Adult Learning Communities?

In answering this research question, two themes became clear. First, adult learners sought democratic teams. Secondly, related to the first theme, adult learners sought a voice in the shared vision. But, so what? Weren't schools supposed to center around student learning, not teacher learning? In fact, Gordon and Preble (2011) established that schools that "school climate is very simple—it is all about relationships: relationships among adults, relationships between adults and children and relationships among peers" (p. 15). If the relationships between the adults in the PLC did not work respectfully, then healthy school climate was unlikely. Without a healthy school climate, students did not learn as much and did not like learning. In fact, school climate began with the way adults treated adults. To add, Church, Morrison, and Ritchhart (2011) established that schools must be just as much about teachers' learning as they were about students' learning. They theorized that when teachers were engaged in cultures of thinking, they were better able to engage students in the challenging higher-order thinking that all humans yearn for. This literature was consistent with the findings from the research; when adults were engaged in meaningful and respectful team tasks, teachers trickled those positive and purposeful feelings down to their students.

Before addressing the answer to the first research question, it was necessary to assess the logistical obstacles preventing adults from finding what they sought in their PLCs. An obstacle to achieving these democratic cultures of thinking was in the design of the school as isolated upper and lower schools, isolating even the start and end times of the school day. This obstacle was a theme in all of the data. In fact, upon review of the data, the school functioned almost as two separate schools, an upper division and a lower division. Further, the faculty did not meet as a full faculty more than eight times in the 2015-2016 school year, as was typical of any given school year. Therefore, the adults did not feel like a cohesive unit. This was demonstrated by the survey statement, "a variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue," which 50% of respondents disagreed with. This was echoed in the individual interviews. Instead of a 'we're-all-in-this-together mentality,' there was an isolated feeling between grades five and six and grades seven and eight.

Teachers at Westlake Middle School reported that they had access to information and support through professional learning and resources, but also reported that the school schedule prohibited and limited the shared vision and collective learning. Based on the responses from the *PCLA – R* surveys, it became clear that adults sought a role in the decision-making process. The fact that "staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues" elicited 71.5% disagreement showcased the discontent with the overall decision-making process. Teachers wanted more time to collaborate as a full faculty, but even the school start and end times differed so meeting as a full faculty really meant holding half of the faculty almost 65 minutes past their contractual day's end. This discontent supported Hipp and Huffman's (2010) assertion that "when teachers learn together, by engaging in open dialogue, opportunities arise to collaborate and apply new knowledge, skills, and strategies… day-to-day

practices within PLCs foster the role of teachers as learners" (p. 17). Therefore, when a full PLC was not meeting often enough that cohesiveness became almost impossible to achieve.

However, despite the structural limitations of the PLC, adult learners sought democratic teams. Through active listening, self-reflection, careful planning, and conscientious communication of information, adults in this learning community demonstrated deliberate consideration for other adults. Adults were willing to spend more time completing tasks so that they could include more team members in the working on the work. In fact, 100% of respondents noted on the *TLSA* that they either 'Often' or 'Always' involved "colleagues when planning for change," even if that meant staying late after school or arriving much earlier. Since 83.3% of this PLC believed that there were often "opportunities… provided for staff members to initiate change" on the *PLCA – R* survey, these respondents often included team members in their thinking around change. Both the *PCLA – R* and *TLSA* surveys reflected this priority of communication. Thus, these adults were knowledgeable about the change process and aware of how negatively some members of the PLC had handled changes in the past. In fact, Interviewee A noted that, "it's much easier and quicker for me to work by myself, but I've learned that I get a better product… and a safer product… working with my department team." When this interviewee used the word 'safer,' she was referring to an uncomfortable past experience when she felt she had been deemed an independent worker rather than a team player. Therefore, the conscious inclusion of the team in decision-making was noted as a learning-from-experience feature of this PLC.

To ensure the desire for a democratic team, adult learners at Westlake Middle School wanted more talk time and communicative support from the school leaders. This was echoed in the individual surveys. For example, Interviewee A noted, "it's really hard to see the whole

scope and sequence for grades five to eight because we so rarely meet as a full faculty." The discontent noted in the research is cautioned about by Hipp and Huffman (2010), "the central task of a leader, therefore, is to involve others in creating a shared vision for the organization that connects teaching and learning and developing a PLC" (p. 16). In order to create a shared and collective vision, personal visions had to be integrated. As both Stevens (2011) and Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007) established that the school leaders must participate in every step of the process and must model the *atmosphere* for the PLC. In fact, Berebitsky and Carlisle (2010) and Hipp and Huffman (2010) both confirmed that the principal him/herself had a substantial impact on the effectiveness of any professional development initiative, particularly in PLCs. They understood that, as Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007) established, PLCs developed each adult learner over time as the learners experienced the support of the PLC. However, Interviewee A noted that, "sometimes the school just feels too big." Interviewee B echoed the same concern that the size of the PLC was a disadvantage in terms of rapport-building and collective vision. Clearly, shared vision and constant communication were noted frustrations that prevented the PLC from fully maturing.

Participants indicated that the school's vision, a focus on student achievement, and communication systems were all strengths of the PLC. Adults both formally and informally self-reflected in order to deliberately and systematically improve teaching and learning. The *PCLA – R* survey provided information about the participants' perceptions and feelings about their PLC as it currently functioned. Most notably, the statements that elicited 100% agreement on the *PCLA – R* were:

- "policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision,"

- "stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement," and
- "communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members."

The district's purchases of electronic platforms such as *PowerSchool*, *PowerTeacher*, *SchoolCenter*, *DropBox*, *ZenDesk*, *Google Apps*, and *Google Drive* all helped align the schools' policies and programs with the over-arching district mission of caring, communication, and commitment. Therefore, it was not surprising that the respondents felt content about knowing, accessing, and analyzing data in PLCs; as it was in fact the third most important practice in PLCs according to Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007). Clearly, there were strategic technological investments into ensuring that PLCs functioned effectively.

Further, the SafeMeasures School Climate work, Universal Screening Teams, RtI team, Crisis Committee, and Professional Learning team all provided spaces for collective and individual teacher voice. However, even with all of these purchases and established teams, the areas of decision-making, open dialogue, and recognition were weaknesses that were uncovered through participants' self-reflection. It was easier to talk about student data than other more polarizing tasks, like school policies and curriculum re-writing. In fact, the statements that elicited the most disagreement on the *PCLA – R* are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Characteristics That Demonstrate Weaknesses in the Current Functioning of the PLC

Survey Statement	Percentage of Disagreement
"Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues."	66.7%

"Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas."	40%
"Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school."	66.7%
"A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue."	50%
"Staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems."	50%

While they have been clear and purposeful efforts made around including teacher stakeholders in the decision-making and shared envisioning, this data exposed areas that teachers believed would assist in improving the PLC.

In general, teachers at Westlake Middle School were knowledgeable and positive overall about their peer-to-peer collaborations. According to Hipp and Olivier (2010), schools that worked effectively as PLCs had cultures that valued and supported "learning by all, as well as honest and forthright dialogue" (p. 29). However, finding schools that successfully operated at this *honest* and *forthright* level of functioning were 'challenging' to identify. Instead of finding utopian PLCs, Hipp and Olivier also suggested assessing each PLC's "progress along a continuum by analyzing specific school and classroom practices" (p. 29). The continuum ranged across levels of PLC development from starting, called *initiating,* doing, called *implementing,* and sustaining, or *institutionalizing.* Therefore, according to this continuum, this middle school was currently at the *implementing* level. Identifying the current level of functioning was important for PLCs so that goals for growth could be determined (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). "In order to address areas of greatest need, as revealed through dialogue, staff need to listen to the

voices and experiences of *all* staff as they develop priorities, design next steps, and engage in immediate action" (p. 39). Interviewee B noted that her PLC was re-writing her curriculum again, and that without forthright and honest dialogue the process would not have worked. This was consistent with the literature. In her case, curriculum reform would not have been possible without the support of the PLC team. In fact, Hipp and Huffman also noted that, "the notion of PLCs must be understood clearly for educators to regard the PLC model as a viable and lasting option for school reform" (p. 12). In fact, while it was challenging to create a PLC, it was – and will continue to be – even more challenging to *sustain* the PLC.

In summary, technical characteristics of the PLC were barriers to the democratic teams that adult learners sought. With more individual teacher voice in the collective vision, the overall school climate would be positioned advantageously. Further, as schools communicated the message to all stakeholders that schools were as much about adult learning in PLCs as they were about student learning, more authentically engaged adults were better able to engage their students. Finally, schools that acknowledge the fact that PLCs were challenging to create, implement, and sustain were best served diagnosing the level of functioning so that realistic goals for improvement were set.

What Do Teachers Believe Is Missing In Adult Learning Communities That Causes Them Pursue Leadership Positions?

The most significant themes that surfaced in the research of this question were the issues of team trust and mutual respect. From even a small sample size of ten experienced and capable teachers, a substantial number of adults believed that a culture of trust and respect were lacking. What adults believed was missing in this PLC was best and most succinctly be stated in the following statement from the *PCLA – R*: "a culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks." In

fact, 33.3% of respondents disagreed with this statement. This revealed a major flaw in the PLC, as team trust and respectful relationships were deemed the most paramount foundational factors. As previously noted, the recent *Google* survey reported that adults most thrived in teams where they felt 'psychologically' safe (Schlossberg, 2016). The below table contained statements that helped sketch a profile of the quality public school teachers who participated in the both surveys.

Table 4

Characteristics of Teacher Participants According to the TLSA Survey

Survey Statement	Percentage of Agreement
"I persist to assure the success of all students."	100%
"I have a reputation for being competent in the classroom."	100%
"I act with integrity and fairness when working with students or adults."	100%
"I am approachable and open to sharing with colleagues."	100%
"At work I behave in ways that are ethical and meet expectations for a high level of professional performance."	100%
"I listen carefully to others."	100%
"I promote a positive environment in the classroom."	100%

As demonstrated by the above table, the carefully selected participants in this research shared a similar profile. All were effective listeners, had a strong reputation among staff, persisted with stakeholders until success, acted ethically and with integrity, and sustained a positive classroom environment. When discussing issues as critical as team trust and mutual respect, it was

important to showcase the hard-working individuals who deserved those basic community member rights.

While the *TLSA* sketched the portrait of extremely capable, ethical, professional, and considerate team players, a staggering 33.3% of those team players operated at successful levels even though they did not feel safe enough to trust the PLC to take academic/professional risks. Interviewee A noted that often times when meetings adjourned with a let's-agree-to-disagree stalemate, she was told to independently pilot a new initiative, text, skill, strategy. Even though she had research-based reasoning to experiment with the pilot, she did not feel supported enough to take the risk without the team to think it through with her. Instead of making concessions or moving forward without dialogue, Hipp and Huffman (2010) recommended modeling of the gradual release of professional learning, starting by role modeling simply the "desire to learn in community, which is the foundation of the PLC" (p. 141). Interviewee A noted that she would have gladly coordinated a short mini-lesson for her next PLC meeting as opposed to being told by the leader to agree-to-disagree and pilot her own proposed curricular idea. Interviewee B echoed this 'fear' and vulnerability in taking risks without a 'net.' Thus, it become clear that these teachers pursued leadership positions to build the rapport and trust that they established in their own classrooms (Heineke, 2013). Interviewee B supported this thinking:

> there is a huge trust factor [there] because… if… (sighs)... we [teachers] are going to put ourselves out there… you know… to be evaluated, we have to have a net to fall on and a relationship of coaching rather than like punishment because we're human and there is a lot of human error in education, so I think that (uh) those relationships are what make us trustworthy.

Interviewee B noted the same increased vulnerability that was emphasized in Brenneman (2015), that teachers felt vulnerable with the new teacher evaluation system and how it took a few years to build relationships over time instead of becoming competitive. However, as the literature indicated those trusting and respectful relationships took time to build (Jones & Rainville, 2008). It was those relationships, and the possibility of stronger professional relationships, that propelled teachers into certification programs for Intermediate Administration and Supervision. In fact, this lack of trust and respect led 90% of the surveyed respondents to acquire educational leadership certification so that they were certified to pursue leadership positions.

Further, only 33.3% of respondents on the *PCLA – R* survey felt that, "relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning." Consider then that these teachers who have had a challenging time balancing personal and professional lives, did not even feel 'recognized' and/or 'celebrated' in the school. Interviewee A noted that:

> I feel like through the simple use of positive weekly email updates on everything going on in each other's classrooms, that we can open up the conversation… and recognition… across the grades. Like, if I know that grade five teachers are doing a really cool book club on dystopian literature, I am more knowledgeable about what kids are doing and can commend peers when I pass them in the hallways.

In talking with the interviewee, it became clear that recognition for a job well done did not need to come from administration, but from peers; and, recognition of peers supported the more efficient respectful relationship building. Interviewee B added that "those relationships [with other PLC members] actually are what makes us trustworthy… how can I fix that and having people to fall on… is… you know… very important. Pursuing it alone is very difficult." The

survey and interview data showed that staff spent time in their PLCs on analysis of student work/data and curriculum design/revision. In contrast, with increased and conscious attention on the peer-to-peer relationships, staff would begin to feel more team trust.

According to the *TLSA* survey, the profile of the teachers included in this survey was succinctly sketched in the following statement, "I show initiative and exhibit the energy needed to follow through to get desired results," which 100% of respondents agreed with. With the profile of candidates this researcher focused on, this statement's response was not surprising. Based on the respondents' backgrounds, they were clearly go-getters who went beyond required coursework to attain certification to lead others. Interviewee B noted that her leadership program helped her see the "bigger picture." In the past, she would have argued about the purpose of certain mandated tasks because she thought it was a "waste of time," but now she understood the "change process." The questions "What are we doing?" and "Why are we doing it?" became mantra questions in this PLC so that all work was purposeful. Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2007) established that PLCs worked best when they invited teachers to "engage with colleagues over a period of time because doing so fosters the development of learners that supports them as the implement changes in their practice" (p. 22). These respondents did not feel the support or progress towards shared goals, and a general discontent with the culture of the PLC was enough for most to pursue their own leadership certifications. If the adult learner had not experienced that support over time, the adult learner would either switch careers, or the growth-minded adult learner would seek additional learning to continue to grow (Dweck, 2006).

As evidenced by the commentaries from Interviewee A and B, continuing to build teacher leadership capacity was the key for extending the respectful functioning of the PLC along the continuum (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). In fact, Hipp and Huffman recommended intentional

preparation of teachers as informal leaders with the necessary skills, professional learning, and dispositions. L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2007) encouraged this capacity-building through teacher-led discussions, in which teachers prepared for meetings with a 'Share the Wealth' segment and/or posed the guiding questions (p. 24). Knight (2011) established that "people aren't motivated by other people's goals" (p. 46). Further, Gordon and Preble (2011) established that we are all experts in our own experiences. Therefore, through deliberate partnerships with those "expert" teachers, PLC leaders embedded the opportunities for teachers to grow themselves as leading contributors to their PLCs.

To address the concerns with mutual respect, as evidenced by the literature on the more effective PLCs all members of the PLC positioned themselves as learners. The literature indicated that if some members of the PLC were positioned as more powerful, then the PLC did not function effectively. For example, Jones and Rainville (2008) established that "power and positioning are always operating" (p. 441). Instead of strategic positioning as a superior leader, strategic positioning as side-by-side learners was proven to empower teachers. In addressing the issue of team trust, the professional learning piece became paramount, not a specific individual in the PLC as the provider of answers and information. Interviewee A noted an instance in a PLC that was cross-departmental when all three departments present went into shut down; she noted:

> The three instructional leaders spent most of the meeting on wait time. Yes, it was awkward. No one would volunteer. There was such an air of this kind of "we-know-more" feeling that we all became silently outraged. One member of the PLC finally spoke up in dissent and we had a more frank conversation. But, it was awkward for sure…. The following PLC meetings were in a much different talk protocol it avoid the adversarial nature of that failed PLC meeting.

This was consistent with the literature. In fact, Knight (2011) established that teachers were demoralized:

> when a select few do the thinking for others, when people are forced to comply with outside pressure with little or no input, when teachers asking genuine questions are labeled resisters, when leaders act without a true understanding of teachers' day-to-day classroom experiences. (p. 8)

Clearly, this positioning of authority instead of peers as co-learners jeopardized the functioning of the PLC.

In summary, the most paramount foundations that PLCs needed to function were team trust and mutual respect. Without those two non-negotiables, PLCs never reached the full potential, which left the students without the benefit of adult learners who worked together. Top-down mentality leadership prevented adult learners from putting themselves out there to personally share best practices. Instead, co-learning with a purpose was established to *unmistakably impact* the adult learners, which trickled down to student learning. Schools that have found ways to build teacher leadership in formal and informal ways have begun to build capacity for increased efficacy of PLCs.

Summary

PLCs ultimately benefitted from teachers who understood the bigger picture as a result of the educational leadership certifications they completed. To continue to nurture the newly certified administrative aspirants, schools needed to build teacher leadership capacity to develop middle level positions so that teachers eventually secured their own leadership positions. Leaders who understood that the more teachers were engaged in purposeful and relevant learning, the more their students were learning facilitated more effective PLCs. Fear and vulnerability in

sharing resources and ideas manifested as the rigorous work of curriculum design took center stage. The challenge was to position each member of the PLC as a co-learner not as a helper/learner. Members of the PLC wanted to do the thinking that was required in working on the work; thinking together created a culture of trust and strengthened relationships.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

With the demands of the Common Core State Standards and the requirements of the new teacher evaluation plans, teachers supplied anecdotes that painted the picture of great camaraderie with their professional learning communities (PLCs). It came as no surprise that the research established that PLCs became a make-it-or-break-it factor in teacher retention. In fact, according to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005), "too many teachers, 14 percent, leave by the end of their first year; 30 percent have left within three years; and nearly 50 percent have left by the end of their fifth year of teaching" (as cited in Knight, 2011, p. 5). The energizing and 'humane' PLC was the key to retaining good teachers (Knight, 2011). However, functioning top-down and hierarchically, both Jones and Rainville (2008) and Knight (2011) established the adversarial positioning that occurred in PLCs if one was seen as a helper and another (or others) as the learner.

There was nothing surprising or alarming about the research findings cited in Chapter 4. Team trust and mutual respect were areas that most teams across professional contexts need to consciously consider. In fact, Davenport (2005) believed that "knowledge workers [(i.e., teachers)] require autonomy" (as cited in Knight, 2011, p. 37). So often, coordinators, leaders, and administrators positioned themselves as helpers, fixers, and thinkers, and in doing so eliminated that necessary autonomy. As teachers do so with students, leaders needed to gradually release the work to the 'knowledge workers,' which aligned with Knowles' (1973) adult learning theory. When school leaders positioned themselves as co-learners as opposed to teachers, PLCs operated more fluently. There were common characteristics that the teachers in this research shared. All participants were directly involved in student achievement and active members or

multiple PLCs in the building and district. They had, on average, more than seven years of experience teaching. One hundred percent of the teachers who took both surveys have Master's Degrees and beyond. 90% of those participants were additionally certified in another specialty (e.g. Special Education, Educational Leadership). Results from both the *PCLA –R* and *TLSA* surveys generated an above-and-beyond, intrinsically motivated adult learner. Indicators on the surveys showed the persistence, commitment, active listening, and personal consideration of the participants.

Student achievement dictated the purpose and meaning behind professional learning and communication. However, even with an excess of communication and information, the survey results showed that relationship-building and team trust had not been established in PLCs yet. To add, the school-wide goal of higher-order thinking also created a more urgent need for effective PLCs. As dictated by the administrative team, the whole-school community learning goal was that students were engaged in higher-order thinking for 50% of every lesson. This shifted the culture of the school drastically into defining and understanding the challenge as directed by the administrative team. Teachers who had been able to work in isolation were now leaning on the PLC for support. It became common during PLC time to hear the vulnerabilities and self-reflections of other team members, who struggled to support every learner. Universal Screening Teams offered another PLC venue for discussing specific students and their intended learning outcomes. Ultimately, the directive that drastically shifted the whole-school PLC became the challenge that began to unite many of the smaller PLCs.

Limitations

The first significant limitations of this study result from the sample size of the selected participants. When a sample size is not large enough, it would be obvious to conclude that there

was not enough data to accurately evaluate the patterns and themes in the data. However, with my interest in the profile of teachers, I had already limited my scope of research to a very narrow sample size. Clearly, there are always the issues of a lack of available data and a question of reliability in the data. To add, as always with self-reported data, the unreliability increased because of the issue of perception versus reality. In fact, the timing of the research in May/June of a school year would have captured teachers' positively or negatively charged reflections on the year, when celebrations or stressors are heightened. This would certainly influence their feelings on the PLC as they responded to the survey items.

The research questions drove the selection of the participants in the research. Since the profile of the selected participant was quite specific, it would have been impossible to increase the sample size at this one school alone. With greater access to other PLCs, the second significant limitation would be eliminated. The researcher's access to other PLCs with the identical profile of participants would allow the researcher to increase the sample size and draw more numerically-supported conclusions. The timing of the research in May and June impacted the access to networking with other PLCs to gain access into similar but local PLCs.

Implications For Practice

Based on the responses from the two surveys, there were two implications for future practice. The surveys indicated the strengths of the current operations of PLC and other indicators provided specific, measurable, achievable realistic, and time-bound (SMART) goals for improvement. In fact, since there was on average 44.9% disagreement with the below indicators, the indicators could become a PLC member's goal for the year. Indicators were listed in the previous chapter in Table 3.

- "Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues."
- "Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas."
- "Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school."
- "A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue."
- "Staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems."

Teachers are required to show progress over time. Individual teachers or leaders could use the indicator and develop a SMART goal around recognition or solving complex problems anew. Through the use of surveys like the *PCLA—R,* teachers could use this before and after to show that growth over time or a stagnating PLC.

The subsequent implication was this SMART goal work might offer a viable solution for the lack of leadership positions in Connecticut. There are few jobs available for the teachers who have now become certified as leaders. In 2016, an Assistant Principal position in any Fairfield County public school can receive over 800 applicants. There has become an implication for schools now to provide or to create middle teacher leadership opportunities for these professionals to attain some experience before attempting to make the jump from the classroom to administration. To date, middle schools have not success in creating those titles for these newly certified administrative applicants. Cooperative Educational Services, servicing as a resource center for Fairfield County teachers, responded to this limitation by offering a four-day training program called the Administrative Aspirant program, as a resume and experience

builder. So, while 90% of this research's surveyed respondents have acquired educational leadership certification so that they may pursue leadership positions, they were, and have been, unable to attain leadership positions. These certified leaders were still teaching with aspirations of leading. It will become a challenge if/when these certified leaders continue to be unable to transition out of the classroom and into leadership roles. This would become a factor that would affect the PLCs, since there could potentially become an 'I can lead better' mentality negatively impacting the peer-to-peer relationships. More research is needed around creating middle level positions for those teachers who are attempting to become promoted to leadership roles

Suggestions for Future Research

One potential future study could involve the increased attention in PLCs on being cognizant of the adult learning theory. It is not a new concept, but the idea that schools are as much about teachers' learning as they are about students' learning is a newer theoretical stance. The inclusion of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1973), into professional learning combined with Dweck's (2006) work with mindset and adult learners, would be valuable areas to research as they pertain to improving PLCs. As a member of a high-performing district with an extremely talented PLC, this research would be valuable in a larger sample size. In fact, it would be worthwhile to compare PLCs across the District Reference Group to compare for improved practices. With potentially very similar teacher profiles and school-wide goals, comparative work would offer perhaps a new set of ideas or practices, or the conclusion that the PLC operations and functions were typical. Often, in doing the comparative work, evaluation occurs, and in comparing often there is a sense of normalcy or a set of answers. Why reinvent the wheel? There is the possibility that another PLC could offer an answer to meeting the teacher needs more efficiently. Teacher training and preparation focused solely on student learning, but

consider the leverage if teacher training programs included a requirement in understanding adult learners as well.

An additional possibility for future research is how staff turnover affects PLCs. Staff turnover occurred every year compounding the challenges of achieving a PLC at the sustaining level. Jones and Rainville (2008) suggested co-learning with a purpose because the collegial relationships are so nuanced and shift so quickly. In this research, it was a challenge to even build rapport and trust with some colleagues who I had selected to complete the surveys. Future research around PLCs and the new teacher evaluation programs is needed to determine if PLCs work better with the pressures of the evaluation plans or if PLCs are more difficult to maintain because teachers are becoming more competitive.

A final potential for future research would be to address the structural limitations that prevented the work around the cultural changes that need to be addressed in this PLC, Hipp and Huffman (2010) reported that:

> administrators throughout the nation are working with their communities to buy time during the school day in the form of early releases, late starts, banking time, block scheduling, reorganizing time within the school day, team teaching, and small learning communities. (p. 20)

Technical changes are certainly easier to change than adaptive changes. If districts start with adjusting with technical changes to create time and space for PLCs, the adaptive changes may be quicker to occur. Many districts have provided early release days for students one day a month. The future research would center around those early release days. Are those professional learning afternoons effective in better meeting the needs of adult learners, or not?

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Appendices

Appendix A

Professional Learning Community Assessment – Revised

Professional Learning Communities Assessment - Revised

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

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

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)
2 = Disagree (D)
3 = Agree (A)
4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Shared and Supportive Leadership

1. **1. Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.**
   Mark only one oval.
   - ◯ Strongly Disagree
   - ◯ Disagree
   - ◯ Agree
   - ◯ Strongly Agree

2. **2. The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.**
   Mark only one oval.
   - ◯ Strongly Disagree
   - ◯ Disagree
   - ◯ Agree
   - ◯ Strongly Agree

3. **3. Staff members have accessibility to key information.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

4. **4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

5. **5. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

6. **6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

7. **7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

8. **8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.**
   Mark only one oval.
   - ◯ Strongly Disagree
   - ◯ Disagree
   - ◯ Agree
   - ◯ Strongly Agree

9. **9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.**
   Mark only one oval.
   - ◯ Strongly Disagree
   - ◯ Disagree
   - ◯ Agree
   - ◯ Strongly Agree

10. **10. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.**
    Mark only one oval.
    - ◯ Strongly Disagree
    - ◯ Disagree
    - ◯ Agree
    - ◯ Strongly Agree

11. **11. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.**
    Mark only one oval.
    - ◯ Strongly Disagree
    - ◯ Disagree
    - ◯ Agree
    - ◯ Strongly Agree

Shared Values and Vision

12. **12. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

13. **13. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

14. **14. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

15. **15. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

16. **16. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

17. **17. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

18. **18. Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

19. **19. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

20. **20. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Collective Learning and Application

21. **21. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

22. **22. Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.**
Mark only one oval.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

23. **23. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.**
Mark only one oval.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

24. **24. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.**
Mark only one oval.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

25. **25. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.**
Mark only one oval.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

26. **26. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.**
Mark only one oval.
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

27. **27. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

28. **28. School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

29. **29. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

30. **30. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Shared Personal Practice

31. **31. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

32. **32. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

33. **33. Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

34. **34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

35. **35. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

36. **36. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

37. **37. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Supportive Conditions - Relationships

38. **38. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

39. **39. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

40. **40. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

41. **41. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

42. **42. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

Supportive Conditions - Structures

43. **43. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.**
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

44. **44. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.**
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

45. **45. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.**
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

46. **46. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.**
Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Strongly Disagree
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Strongly Agree

47. **47. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

48. **48. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

49. **49. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

50. **50. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

51. **51. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

52. **52. Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.**
Mark only one oval.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Thank you! You have reached the end of the survey!

Appendix B

Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment

Teacher Leadership Self-Assessment (TLSA) by Marilyn and Bill Katzenmeyer

Please respond In terms of how frequently each statement is descriptive of your professional behavior.

1. **1. I reflect on what I do well and also how I can improve as a classroom teacher.**
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

2. **2. I understand how my strengths and needs for development will impact my new role as a leader in my school.**
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

3. **3. I am clear about what I believe about teaching and learning.**
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

4. **4. I act in ways that are congruent with my values and philosophy when dealing with students and colleagues.**
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

5. **5. I seek feedback on how I might improve in my work setting.**
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

6. **6. At work I behave in ways that are ethical and meet expectations for a high level of professional performance.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

7. **7. I invite colleagues to work toward accomplishment of the vision and mission of the school.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

8. **8. I lead others in accomplishing tasks.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

9. **9. I involve colleagues when planning for change.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

10. **10. I understand the importance of school and district culture to improving student outcomes.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

11. **11. I work toward improving the culture of the school.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

12. **12. I am willing to spend time and effort building a team to improve my school.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

13. **13. I listen carefully to others.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

14. **14. I adjust my presentations to my audience.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

15. **15. I seek perspectives of others and can reflect others' thoughts and feelings with accuracy.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

16. **16. When facilitating small groups I keep the group members on-task and on-time.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

17. **17. When leading meetings I am able to get almost everyone to participate.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

18. **18. I use electronic technology effectively to communicate with individuals and groups.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

19. **19. I understand that different points of view maybe based on an individual's culture, religion, race or socioeconomic status.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

20. **20. I respect values and beliefs that may be different from mine.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

21. **21. I enjoy working with diverse groups of colleagues at school.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

22. **22. I work effectively with non-educators and persons with special interests.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

23. **23. I make special efforts to understand the beliefs and values of others.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

24. **24. I am willing to share my beliefs even when they are different from the beliefs of others.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

25. **25. I promote a positive environment in the classroom.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

26. **26. I use research-based instructional practices.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

27. **27. I persist to assure the success of all students.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

28. **28. I have a reputation for being competent in the classroom.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

29. **29. I am approachable and open to sharing with colleagues.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

30. **30. I act with integrity and fairness when working with students or adults.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

31. **31. I seek out all pertinent information from many sources before making a decision or taking action.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

32. **32. I set goals and monitor progress towards meeting them.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

33. **33. I analyze and use assessment information when planning.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

34. **34. I participate in professional development and learning.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

35. **35. I am proactive in identifying problems and working to solve them.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

36. **36. I work side-by-side with colleagues, parents and I or others to make improvements in the school or district.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

37. **37. I plan and schedule thoroughly so that I can accomplish tasks and goals.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

38. **38. I exhibit self-confidence when under stress or in difficult situations.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

39. **39. I work effectively as a team member.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

40. **40. I show initiative and exhibit the energy needed to follow through to get desired results.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

41. **40. I show initiative and exhibit the energy needed to follow through to get desired results.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

42. **41. I prioritize so that I can assure there is time for important tasks.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

43. **42. I create a satisfactory balance between professional and personal aspects of my life.**
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Always

Thank you! You've reached the end of the survey!

Appendix D

The following guidelines, focus group, and individual interview questions were utilized by Morrow (2010) to understand "teachers' perceptions of professional learning communities as opportunities for promoting professional growth". Since my research was designed to answer similar questions, including the trajectory of teachers who seek new opportunities in administration.

Guidelines (Kruger, 1998; Morgan, 1997)

Some things that will help our discussion go more smoothly are:

1. Only one person should speak at a time.

2. Please avoid side conversations.

3. Everyone needs to participants and no one should dominate the conversation.

4. The focus group will last no longer than 2 hours, many of you have cell phones, please avoid using your cell phones during this time. If at all possible please turn off your cell phones. If you need to keep your cell phone on, please put it on vibrate and leave the room if you need to take a call.

Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion

1. Talk about the opportunities that you have experienced as a result of being a part of a professional learning community. Have these experiences helped you grow professionally?

2. What does professional development look like in your school?

3. Has being a part of a professional learning community made a difference for you as a professional? Why or why not?

4. Do you think that you would have experienced the same opportunities without the organization of the professional learning community at your school? Why or why not?

5. Talk about professional development at _____School. Has the approach to professional development changed since the implementation of professional learning communities? If so, how?

6. Talk about the opportunities for professional growth your school.

*If someone indicates collaborative relationships ask, how do staff members go about collaborating with each other?

7. Do you think the school has improved during the past two years? If so, how? What has taken place?

8. Have you grown as a professional since your involvement with professional learning community? Why or why not? *If yes…* Can you provide some examples that would support that would demonstrate that you have grown?

Thank you for your time today!!

Possible Probing Questions (Kruger, 1998; Morgan, 1997)

1. Would you explain further?

2. Can you provide an example?

3. Please describe what you mean?

4. Can you clarify? I want to make sure that I understand.

5. One thing that I have heard several people mention is _____. I am curious as to what you think about that.

6. Are there any other thoughts that have occurred to you?

Guiding Individual Interview Questions

1. How would you describe a professional learning community?

2. What are your perceptions of the professional study groups that you have participated in at

your school?

3. What have been some of the topics of your professional study groups? How were the topics determined? Were the topics beneficial to your growth as a professional? Why or why not?

4. Tell me about something that you learned from your participation in a professional learning community? Did it make a difference in your teaching? Explain your response.

5. Tell me about an “aha” moment that you experienced during your participation in your professional learning community? Why was it an "aha" moment?

6. Do you think that you have grown professionally from your participation in the professional learning community? Will you explain your response?

7. What advantages and disadvantages have you experienced from your participation in the professional learning community?

8. Has your involvement in professional learning community changed your perceptions of teaching and learning? If so, how and why?