LEADERSHIP STYLES KEY TO IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN EDUCATION: LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is an important part of developing effective PLCs; thus, school leaders must become familiar with research efforts regarding characteristics of effective educational leaders to facilitate and support of the development of learning communities. Research has shown that when the PLC model is properly implemented, it has the capacity to improve student achievement (Hunter-Boyce, 2009). The purpose of this literature review is to present evidence of the association between leadership styles and PLCs. Extant literature supports the idea that school leadership is a key factor to developing and maintaining effective PLCs (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

American education policymakers emphasize improved learning for adults and students as a key to school improvement (Schmoker, 2005). However, disappointment in a lack of visible improvements in the field of education is widespread. In response, the federal government, educational leaders, and local leaders have expressed increased interest in the professional learning community (PLC) reform effort because of its novel model of school culture, which actively supports change and improvement (Feger & Arruda, 2008).

Theories of Leadership Behavior

Although the practice of leadership has changed considerably over time, the need for leaders and leadership has not (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Effective leaders are able to choose the most appropriate leadership style for each situation when making decisions. Changing environments that are complex require leaders to adapt to a myriad of challenges in organizational leadership (Yukl, 2008).

Nahavandi (2012) asserted that interactions between leaders and followers make leadership a complex phenomenon. Furthermore, the origins of leadership can be traced as far as the beginning of civilization in both study and practice (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Galton's (1869) *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* is one of the earliest studies of leadership. This work emphasized the basic concept that wealthy and successful individuals possessed characteristics that made them different from other individuals (Zaccaro, 2007). At the time, such characteristics or traits were considered innate. However, this theory did not consider the different circumstances that leaders and followers face.

Researchers in the field have since shifted their focus to leadership behaviors and their effect on organizations. Moreover, researchers have spent more time and resources on understanding the behavioral aspects of leadership more so than other facets (Holloway, 2012). The behavioral approach attempts to identify exactly what good leaders do on the job and then draws correlations between those behaviors and leadership effectiveness (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). According to Davis and Luthans (1979), previous theories and research on leadership are built largely on normative preconceptions; however, they lack the capacity to predict or control performance. In the presence of behavioral theories, researchers can observe macro- and micro-contingencies that affect leader-subordinate behaviors. Thus, leaders' behaviors can cause specific follower behaviors. In turn, follower behaviors or actions cause the leader to interpret his or her own actions to reinforce or extinguish these behaviors.

The research supports two basic dimensions of leadership behavior: concern for the task and concern for people. Concern for the task emphasizes goal fulfillment. Task-oriented behaviors describe specific actions of the leader related to the ability to lead successfully (Yukl, O'Donnell, & Taber, 2009). Concern for people focuses on interpersonal relationships and involves a two-way method of communication to support employees and help them to feel better about their situations (Northouse, 2010).

Situational Leadership

From a teamwork perspective, situational leadership theory, developed in the late 1960s, is one of the most important (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). Four leadership styles are possible with the situational leadership model. Based on a combination of tasks and people, these styles include telling, selling/coaching, participating, and delegating (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). To determine which style to use in any given situation,

leaders must first identify their priorities and then consider the readiness level of their followers while analyzing group members' abilities and willingness.

Telling and directing are identified as the initial stage in situational leadership. Building comradery and rapport with subordinates is a key aspect of leadership. Leaders accomplish this through telling and assigning low-frequency tasks and other assignments with low focus on relationships and required level of commitment or ability (Hersey et al., 2001).

In cases where the follower is either unwilling or incapable, a more assertive role is assured with specific attention to the relationship (Hersey et al., 2001). The leader may provide a framework for task completion and controlling followers. As such, the leader may investigate a person's lack of motivation to determine if he or she has any limitations in ability to complete the task. Two related factors involve followers who are not confident or who experience denial, which could result in a lack of self-confidence.

If the leader focuses more on the relationship, followers may become confused over which tasks are required and which are optional. Therefore, the leader maintains a clear "do-this" position to make all requirements understandable and clear. Path-goal theory supports leadership through telling and presents four types of leadership: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented (Alanazi & Rasli, 2013; House & Mitchell, 1974). According to this theory, a good leader should know what type to employ in a given situation. Leaders who use this style are very directive, and they clearly explain what is expected of subordinates. These leaders also provide their followers with guidance to meet expectations and to ensure they are following proper protocol and rules for implementation.

The second leadership style is selling/coaching, which is another leader-driven strategy. Leaders exemplify this style when high-level tasks are involved (Hersey et al., 2001). In this situation, followers are experienced, capable, and have a variable level of commitment. Although the followers are incapable, they are willing. When followers can do the job to some extent, but are overconfident in their abilities, simply ordering them to do specific tasks could lead to resistance and demotivation. Thus, the leader may be better served to compel followers through charisma and positive interaction. Moreover, leaders who listen and guide can help followers by providing these characteristics as a coaching method. This leadership style is focused on getting the job done.

Communication with this leadership style is very much a two-way street. Leaders who employ this style make the final decisions but are open to their followers' thoughts and suggestions. In this case, leaders are both directive and supportive. They clearly explain the expectations and the steps necessary to meet those expectations; however, leaders also perform a supportive role and pay attention to subordinates' needs. With this style, leaders maintain a directive mindset and rally the team to meet goals while supporting members to ensure that all needs are met (Alanazi & Rasli, 2013).

Hersey and Blanchard (1993) presented a third style of leadership based on participating and supporting. This style is low-task and high relationship focused. Followers who are insecure and possibly unwilling may be best served by this approach.

Using this style, the leader can address causes for inaction by listening, praising, and making followers feel good when they show the necessary commitment. In this case, the directive leadership mindset functions at a low level and the supportive mindset functions on a very high level. Further, the leader no longer exhibits directive behavior; rather, he or she ensures that the environment meets the expectations for the follower to complete the task. The leader focuses on ensuring that motivations to perform well are enhanced because the subordinate already has the necessary skills (Alanazi & Rasli, 2013).

Fourth, leadership through delegation is a style identified for leaders who have little to no relationship with followers and the requirements for an assignment are low. Usually, this approach is warranted when followers understand the necessary skills but are unwilling to perform the task (Hersey et al., 2001). In this style, the leader engages in low directive or supportive behaviors because subordinates have both the skills and motivation (Alanazi & Rasli, 2013). Here, leadership is almost unnecessary because followers can take the reins completely and apply their own ideas and decisions without help from the leader. The leader's task in this case is simply to endorse followers' accomplishments. Leadership tasks employed here are minimal, but leaders still have some sort of control over followers' behaviors (e.g., scheduling and task deadlines). For the most part, this style allows followers run the show on their own.

Hersey et al.'s (2001) situational leadership supports the concept that no single definitive approach to leadership exists. The core of situational leadership is that a good leader should be able to match one the four leadership styles to the development levels of his or her followers. Situational leadership is hinged on the idea that no singular leadership style exists; rather, the situation will determine the best style, which will vary depending on the tasks and the people involved. Of course, this means that a good situational leader is versatile; that is, he or she is able to employ any of the four types of leadership depending on the situation. Additionally, a good situational leader is very keen and observant, as he or she has to know where followers are in the four developmental levels. These two skills are very important for the leader to match leadership style with developmental level properly. Combining leadership style with developmental level also suggests an inherent

participation of followers wherein their performance and behaviors are variables considered regarding how they are led. In this leadership style, focus is on the followers, even in the most directive telling style, because it is only employed based on followers' needs and developmental levels.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership can be traced to Burns (1978), who defined this style as involving vision and leading others to share in creating and supporting that vision. Specifically, a transformational leader is "one who raises the followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of desired outcomes and the methods of reaching those outcomes" (Burns, 1978. p. 141). This style takes a holistic approach to the organization, leads organizational members in new directions, or helps members identify and attain new goals. Transformational leadership is universally applicable (Bass, 1998). Therefore, transformational leaders can inspire stakeholders to care about, share in, and work toward the betterment of the organization even without a direct reward to themselves.

Chelladurai (2007) noted, "The transformational leader influences the situation and the members as well as subordinate leaders" in an effort to achieve desired outcomes" (p. 131). This style of leadership can accurately equip educational leaders to harness change in ways that positively affect student learning and outcomes. Leithwood (1994) stated that transformational leadership influences performance by grades and individual teachers by developing interpersonal relationships that encourage organizational commitment to invite positive change. This leadership style relies on teamwork to carry out change by empowering followers (Guthrie & Schuermann, 2010).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) provided insight into transformational leadership based on research conducted over 20 years. They noted that to achieve optimal directorship in this style, credibility is very important. Inspiring and sharing a vision is almost impossible if the messenger is not perceived as trustworthy. This leadership style promotes the value of empowerment to act toward continuous change and growth (Padykula & Wexell, 2013).

McCloskey (2009) stated that this leadership style is virtue-based because the virtue of the leader is a main factor in making the directorship effective and because the moral worthiness of the leader and his or her ideas are true driving forces. Consistent behaviors and high ethical and moral standards are important in transformational leadership because subordinates perceive leaders with these characteristics as better able to do the right thing in a given situation (Moorman & Grover, 2009). According to Bass (1990), this leadership style inspires more effort from constituents because better relationships are formed through a shared of vision and espoused values. A cornerstone of transformational leadership is altruism because true leaders who can inspire change must demonstrate that they do not use their power to assert control or for personal advancement. Rather, these leaders use their positions for the general good and gain of others. Moreover, sincere compassion for others and genuine interest in their well-being increases the effectiveness of transformational leaders (Engelbrecht, van Aswegen, & Theron 2005).

True transformational leaders must act as a stimulus for their followers to come up with new ideas, share knowledge, and take pride in their work (Fauji & Utami, 2013). Yıldız and Özcan (2014) indicated a close relationship between creativity and transformational leadership. Specifically, effective transformational leaders inspire followers to be innovative and to think outside the box. These leaders also increase their followers' intrinsic motivations through intellectual stimulation and encouragement. Good transformational leaders have the capacity for individual consideration, which is the ability to identify subordinates' needs to provide the proper support to and feedback for the team to meet organizational goals (Shadraconis, 2013).

Transformational leadership can be used in most situations. Followers in high-pressure and sensitive jobs call for transformational leaders who motivate and engage them individually (Hayati, Charkhabi, & Naami, 2014). According to Raja (2012), transformational leadership usually leads to higher levels of employee engagement. Genuine transformational leadership implies that the leader treats his or her employees fairly and fosters an ideal environment for change and improvement. Employees who are treated fairly, stimulated intellectually, and given proper individual attention engage in their jobs and are willing to exert more effort to help the organization meet its objectives.

Transformational leadership has become more important as technological advances arise. Aydogdu and Asikgil (2011) noted that organizations could only move forward with the full involvement of its members. True transformational leaders are good influences, advocate good virtues, and stimulate their followers intellectually. Therefore, they are good harbingers of change and growth.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leaders are influential through goal setting, clarification, and providing feedback in exchange of accomplishments (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). These leaders use a negotiation process to motivate followers. The transactional model takes a more methodical approach to supervision (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2004).

Goal-oriented individuals are drawn toward the transactional style of leadership as it supports a give-and-take relationship between leaders and followers where the end goal is motivation for the leader, while the recompense for achieving the goal is motivation for followers (Pastor & Mayo, 2008). Transactional leadership is sharp and clear-cut; followers have clear expectations and they understand the consequential rewards when requirements and expectations are met (Groves & LaRocca, 2011). The transactional leadership style is also very rational and it is goal and rewards oriented. Using this style, the leader's control over followers mainly hinges on his or her capacity to give incentives and payments continuously for the work performed (Naidu & van der Walt, 2005). Highly transactional leaders derive satisfaction from achieving goals well, and they continually move from one transaction to the next to achieve objectives (McCleskey, 2014).

Transformational leadership is also very closely related to transactional leadership. Many researchers have posited that transformational leadership theories augment transactional leadership theories, whereas others believe that transactional leadership is a subset of transformational leadership (Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013). Naidu and van der Walt (2005) supported this relationship, as they found that transactional leadership, wherein followers received rewards for their work, is necessary to mediate true transformation. Another aspect of transactional management, setting clear goals, empowers followers as it boosts their feelings of identification with their roles in the organization and their importance within the group (Zhu, Sosik, Riggio, & Yang, 2012). This identification again asserts its close ties to transformational management.

Aside from the fundamental factor of being rewards based, transactional leadership is also active in observing followers to ascertain mistakes and deviations from standards and taking corrective measures if necessary. This can also mean that the management style is somewhat docile as amendments and adjustments are applied only when followers fail to meet expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1997). Tengilimoğlu (2005) proposed that transactional leadership works as a conveyer belt that moves work onward, continues existing work, and pulls it toward the future. Transactional leadership is an effect model when a desire exists to hold fast to the traditional values and standards of an organization. This leadership style does not call for innovations or major adjustments; rather, it relies on external motivations (e.g., financial rewards) rather than on an intrinsic change to fulfill followers' most basic needs (Aarons, 2006).

Groves and LaRocca (2011) stated that transactional leadership is pragmatic and practical. The ethos enveloping this leadership style is very utilitarian with the belief that the best actions are those that benefit the most people. In a way, pragmatic transactional leaders judge the means of their followers by the ends—predicated upon the assumption that if the end results benefit the most number of people (i.e., organization, leaders, and followers), then the action must be morally upstanding and worthy of reward and commendation. In this sense, transactional leadership also focuses on an individualistic type of ideology wherein leaders and followers look out for their own self-interests and actively carry out tasks that help achieve their goals (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

Authentic Leadership

Luthans and Avolio (2003) defined authentic leadership as "a process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (p. 243). Authentic leadership is generally related to positive ethos. Proponents point to authentic leadership as a founding concept for most forms of leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Transformational leadership, for one, is closely tied to the idea of authentic leadership. According to Shamir and Eilam (2005), authentic leaders are authentic and true to themselves, they are motivated by their own personal beliefs, they do not pursue things that are incongruent to their convictions even if doing so would lead to status and honor, and they do not conform to others' expectations. Most other types of leadership relate to these factors in the sense that the leader has to be credible and trustworthy to be effective.

Authentic leadership also proposes a concept of authentic followership wherein the developmental paths of the leader and followers are very similar to each other in achieving authenticity (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Core characteristics of authentic followers include authentic bonds with the leader and authentic motivations to follow (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). The relationship between leaders and followers is very important in authentic governance. Kellett, Humphrey, and Sleeth (2006) stated that an effective authentic leader fosters an accessible and truthful relationship with his or her followers.

Sustainability

Researchers have defined sustainability in a variety of ways. Birney and Reed (2009) highlighted the characteristics of sustainable reforms in schools as follows:

Sustainability is about the relationship between people, their purpose and their place. It is about engaging, learning and leading to create a positive, empowering future for our children and their children. Sustainability as both a goal and practical activity is by its nature life-giving for communities,

educators and the children and young people in their care; it brings life to learning and learning to life. (p. 3)

Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) suggested most educational change efforts do not exceed more than 4 or 5 years. However, PLCs are different from other change efforts because they create sustainability. RMC Research (2009) outlined the following key characteristics of sustainability:

1. Sustainability is possible when full implementation of an initiative has been achieved.
2. Sustainability is based in the right organizational culture and leadership.
3. Sustainability always includes identification of critical elements of the education reform in question.
4. Sustainability requires continuing adaptation—not freezing a program in time.
5. Sustainability must be approached from a systems perspective.
6. Sustainability can and should be planned for and evaluated, and this should begin as early in the program life as possible.
7. Sustainability is only partly contingent on replacing funding. (p. 4)

Professional Learning Communities

In the 1980s, research began to move away from focusing on individual workers to examining learning environments as corporate endeavors. The evolution of professional development continued in the following decades. The new focus of continuous learning became a requirement to produce a competitive and productive workplace. As an upshot, both educational and corporate leaders began fostering and sustaining learning communities to reform organizations and improve outcomes (Sergiovanni, 1996). For example, Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) promoted the idea of employees working collaboratively, developing a shared vision, and engaging as teams to improve corporate outcomes.

The intellectual origins of PLCs emerged in the early 1990s based on Peter Senge's (1990) publication, *The Fifth Discipline*. Senge's restructuring involved changing business management strategies as a way to transform corporations into learning organizations. Researchers eventually changed the term *learning organization* to *learning community*. DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) popularized the term *professional learning communities*. Today, PLCs are used in K-12 education as well as higher education.

The broad usage of the term PLCs allows it to encompass various circumstances across the educational spectrum. Wong, Britton, and Ganser (2005) insisted that global attention on collaboration predated the growing enthusiasm in the United States. Furthermore, a common complaint from school teachers is isolation. These teachers want to be more involved and be a part of a group.

According to Hamos et al. (2009), PLCs exist as an operational approach to professional development to serve as a possible remedy for isolation among teachers. Professional leaning communities have various definitions; however, broad consensus suggests that a PLC is a group of individuals who continually collaborate to ensure constant improvement in how they meet organizational goals through supportive and shared leadership, shared curricular vision, collective innovation, and supportive conditions (Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006; Reichstetter, 2006). Each individual in a PLC collaborates with other group members to improve practice. Essentially, members of PLCs are dedicated to working toward improvement (DuFour, 2004). The research presented here on PLC is divided into the following sections: characteristics of PLCs, development of PLCs, and sustainability of PLCs. The examination of the research considers the purpose, question, information, concepts, assumptions, inferences, perspectives, and implications.

Cranston (2009) examined the perspectives of 12 Manitoba principals regarding attributes that influence PLCs. While Cranston found variances and limitations in their understandings of what constituted PLCs, the data revealed eight observable and dominant themes central to principals' conceptions of PLCs. The themes included in PLCs are processes with structural supports that enable development, trust, and relationships.

The first theme was that PLCs are a process, a journey, or a continuum. Participants indicated that the process did not have a specific destination and was not something one arrived at, but rather, was a transformation. Cranston (2009) stated that if schools were to be PLCs, they had to have a requirement for transformational change. The second theme was that structural supports enabled the development of PLCs. These structural supports required preconditions that supported the development of schools as PLCs. Cranston (2009) maintained, "As a result of providing structural supports in the form of formal organizational structures for engaging teachers in their work and engaging them with others, professional learning communities will grow and mature" (p. 10).

The third theme was that trust is the strongest facilitating feature for schools developing as PLCs. According to Cranston (2009), "Trust was seen as the social condition that acts as the foundation for the mature adult relationships necessary in professional learning communities" (p. 11). In other words, trust is the foundation of PLCs as it allows teachers to grow, develop, and feel less threatened by other teachers who enter their classrooms to offer support.

The fourth theme was that congenial relationships dominate conceptions of community. Participants reported that friendly relationships made it easier for everyone involved. Cranston (2009) indicated, "Participants illustrated teacher connections with examples in which collegiality was seen as a sharing and supporting of individual practice, but one in which very limited professional advice was offered, and only when specifically requested" (p. 12). In other words, teachers shared ideas of what they were doing successfully in their classes but did not attempt to tell other teachers what to do in their class. If other teachers liked an idea, then they could use it in their classes.

The fifth theme was learning is an individual activity. Cranston (2009) stated, "Principals regarded teacher learning as an individual activity and disposition in which individuals master new techniques, change behaviors, and display a commitment to learn throughout her/his career. Participants often referred to this as 'life-long learning'" (p. 13). Life-long learning, in brief, is the ongoing individual pursuit of knowledge to learn and become better. The sixth theme was that professional teaching is derived from attitudinal attributes. According to Cranston (2009), "Teachers were described as professionals in terms of their attitudinal attributes. The participants identified teachers as professionals based on individual knowledge about curriculum, instruction and pedagogy, appropriate dress, and respectful language" (p. 14).

The seventh theme was that teacher evaluation affects is how principals view learning in professional communities. Cranston (2009) stated, "Classroom visits, as part of the teacher evaluation procedures, were best seen as processes that provided principals with opportunities to identify common areas of teacher weaknesses for collective professional growth" (p. 15). The eighth theme was that teacher evaluations effect principal and teacher collaboration in PLCs. According to Cranston, "Teacher evaluation was regarded as a means to build relationships with, and between, teachers" (p. 16). Principals interacted with teachers during evaluations, which helped build a positive school climate and ensured that the PLC achieved district goals.

An important element in the characteristics of an effective PLC is the existence of a competent leader. According to Wallace Foundation (2012), the following five practices are critical to effective school leadership:

- Constructing a vision of student achievement for all students based on high standards;
- Developing an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning;
- Cultivating leadership in the faculty to develop skills;
- Improving instruction to empower teachers to teach effectively allowing students the opportunity to learn;
- Data driven decision making to encourage school improvement. (p. 55)

A positive difference is created for students when school leaders employ these elements harmoniously (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Whether forming a vision or encouraging teachers, an effective principal is a conductor of progressive change for the welfare of the school and its students (Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Developing Professional Learning Communities

Ferguson (2013) reported struggles associated with starting a PLC without additional funds earmarked for implementation. The school administration that Ferguson observed created a Buddy Day system that allowed teachers common planning time to meet for PLCs. However, tensions among stakeholders, and unions arose because of the implementation.

The school administration believed that a PLC would benefit all teachers. The first decision administrators made toward implementing the PLC involved dividing teachers into two groups by grade level: primary (Kindergarten to Grade 3) and junior and intermediate (Grades 4 to 8). Next, the school administrators targeted the same improvement goals that the school board had encouraged, which focused on literacy. Administrators then developed two different types of PLCs (assessment and instructional) to address their dual purposes of teacher learning and improved student achievement.

The assessment PLCs were scheduled to meet every 2 weeks after school for 30 minutes. Each teacher was assigned dates to present student cases to the PLC group. Teachers were asked to identify a student or students who struggled with literacy in their classes and share concerns and student achievement data with the group. The group responded with ideas and suggestions to help improve achievement for the student presented. Ferguson (2013) indicated, "At the next assessment PLC two weeks later, the teacher shares how the student is doing, which strategies worked or did not work, and any further assessment data on that student" (p. 52).

While the PLCs appeared well planned, the district struggled to implement the assessment PLCs. Administrators were too busy with other work-related duties to attend all of the scheduled PLCs. Additionally, some teachers found that attending assessment PLCs after school was a burden because of their existing and extensive to-do lists. According to Ferguson (2013),

> As soon as the allotted time for the PLC is up, these teachers leave immediately. Other teachers stay behind and chat about student concerns and teaching issues after the formal PLC is over. A number of teachers feel that the assessment PLCs are too structured and forced, while others find it helpful for their teaching. (p. 52)

The instructional PLCs were scheduled once a month during the school day. These meetings were usually one and a half hours and were held during the last teaching block. The administrators worked together to create the PLC agenda. Ferguson (2013) noted that the primary purpose of the instructional PLC was to increase teacher knowledge. The campus literacy coach presented teachers with information, which was followed by group discussion on how they could use the information while teaching.

In a fashion similar to the assessment PLCs, the administrators struggled to attend all meetings because of other work-related duties. Additionally, the teachers in the instructional PLCs felt that part of their planning period was being taken away. Ferguson (2013) also found, "Some parents feel that it is a waste of time, believe that no curriculum is being taught, and have thus decided to keep their children home on Buddy Days" (Ferguson, 2013, p. 55). The union communicated concerns about the amount of teacher work and responsibility involved with Buddy Days. The administrators also become "frustrated with the union because the union wants all professional development to occur during the school day and the Buddy Day system, despite its flaws, does that" (Ferguson, 2013, pp. 54-55).

Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2010) supported the use of PLC as outlet for professional development that centered on specific components of professional development. Learning communities seek to solve common problems by interacting in ongoing professional development to strengthen members' knowledge and expertise. Professional learning communities serve as contexts that are ripe for members to engage in transformation (Servage, 2008). In short, transformation is a process that occurs when change takes place regarding how people view the world.

According to Mezirow (1990), transformative learning requires a particular level of critical reflection because one's reassessment of previous suppositions on which beliefs and insights are based can transform his or her perspectives. Such transformation may involve corrections in previously distorted assumptions or support exploring alternative perspectives. Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2010) studied PLC transformation and its key elements in the case of three field supervisors. They found that transformation occurred either abruptly after a major event or gradually over time.

Participants from the college of education at a southeastern research university were scheduled to supervise teachers during the semester and were asked attend eight 2-hour sessions over a 5-month period where they engaged in dialogue and built knowledge and skills related to equity issues and supervision (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). Six supervisors agreed to participate; one was a retired teacher and adjunct professor and the other five were graduate students. The researchers focused only on three participants and their experiences within the learning community to illustrate the process of transformation (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010).

The three selected participants demonstrated different experiences and knowledge before the study, which changed throughout the study. During the first four 2-hour sessions, the participants engaged in activities that included role-play scenarios and reflective writing. After each activity and reading, the group engaged in discussion (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). The facilitator continuously posed questions to push participants to think deeper. The supervisors also learned about the coaching for equity cycle (Jacobs, 2007), and used this cycle with one of their prospective teachers.

During the last four 2-hour sessions, supervisors focused on sharing their experiences and challenges related to working with prospective teachers. The facilitator's role also changed, as she did not need to dictate content while also providing structure and support for these discussions. This limited role allowed the facilitator to act as a participant, ask questions, and share advice (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). The key elements that supported the transformation of each supervisor were the eight planned 2-hour sessions over the 5-month period wherein participants worked together, solved dilemmas, focused on prospective teacher learning, and developed trusting relationships.

Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) insisted that schools work to develop PLCs in the hope of enhancing student learning based on collaboration among adults collectively conversing about teaching, learning, and improving student learning. Thompson et al. believed that a school should practice five elements of a learning organization to be a true PLC. Additionally, leadership plays a significant role in the overall success of a PLC.

The five disciplines of a learning organization are systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning (Senge et al., 2000). Systems thinking refers to a body of knowledge and tools that help one uncover patterns and determine how they can be changed (Thompson et al., 2004). Personal mastery is an individual's dedication to lifelong learning. Mental models are deep assumptions and general concepts that influence how one understands the world and takes action (Senge, 1990). Shared vision includes common goals that a group or organization want to accomplish. Team learning focuses on group interaction through dialogue and skillful discussion (Senge et al., 2000). Thompson et al. (2004) noted that to be a genuine PLC a school must understand and practice each of the aforementioned disciplines.

Hellner (2008) discussed the accelerating rate of change taking place in education over the previous 2 decades and noted multiple aspects of PLCs. With traditionally professional development, individual teacher

experience and growth cannot keep up with change. A PLC can help schools take advantage of change to secure benefits for teachers, and most importantly, students (Hellner, 2008). Further, collaboration and collegiality form the foundation to support interactive professionalism.

Hord (1997; 1998) suggested five characteristics of PLCs that supported Hipp and Huffman's (2010) components: (a) supportive and shared leadership; (b) shared values and vision; (c) collective learning and application; (d) shared personal practice; (e) supportive conditions. The first characteristic of a PLC is shared and supportive leadership, which can improve campus culture. Through an extensive analysis of interviews, Hipp and Huffman found that nurturing leadership among workers and shared power and responsibility are required attributes of shared leadership. The shared vision should be created collaboratively with emphasis placed on improving instruction and student learning. Professional learning communities are effective because they entail the integration of individual visions into one vision that all member embrace as the vision reflects a firm commitment to student growth (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). The dimension of shared values and vision constitutes championed values and standards, emphasis on student learning, high expectation, and a shared aim that drives student achievement (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). The next critical attribute is the practice of collective learning and collaboration in which teachers work together to solve problems. Collective learning and collaboration is an essential component of PLC because it creates opportunities for discussion and sharing (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Inquiry developed through reflective conversation creates community, meaningful debates, and appreciation of others' work (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Learning together also drives members of a PLC to build trusting relationships, which eventually forms an integral part of the school culture (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

The fourth attribute emphasizes that teachers share personal practice. Individual and community improvement can be made when teachers observe classroom practices and offer feedback. Personal practice is a norm of PLCs and it includes continuous peer observations and constructive reflections as well as conversations about teaching. Interactions among colleagues provides opportunities for instructors to use best practices learned from peers, stay updated on the most recent research, and help one another (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Moreover, shared personal practice offers coaching, mentoring, and feedback discussions that positively affect a teacher's performance (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Specific to the first four attributes of a PLC is the fifth attribute of supportive conditions, which includes several key components (Hellner, 2008). Additionally, PLCs need good physical and human pools of support. Physical attributes include place, schedule, policies, and procedures, among others (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Supportive human conditions pertain to good attitudes and abilities to acquire knowledge and skills essential to providing students with high-quality teaching (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Hord (2009) suggested that the following six conditions must be met for PLCs to be successful:

- Community membership. Regular meetings must be scheduled so teachers can discuss learning experience. Instructors can use these meetings to define goals and determine training needs to achieve these goals.
- Leadership. The principal's leadership is pivotal in defining the purpose of PLC meetings and their success with respect to attaining productive collaborative dialogue.
- Time for learning. Teachers' cooperation must be secured and time for meetings should be set aside. A school should explore various ways to make time for meetings.
- Space for learning. A space for learning should accommodate all faculty.
- Data use support. A foundation of PLCs is in reviewing and interpreting data and results, which helps school leaders make informed decisions.
- Distributed Leadership. When a principal willingly shares power and authority, teachers learn to use appropriate conversation and decision-making models, which increases professional growth.

Professional learning communities are well suited for the nature of adult learners. A PLC exposes learners to new knowledge and encourages teamwork where people share prior experiences (Hellner, 2008). The benefits of PLCs for teachers include better attendance at work and more responsibility for students. Measurable evaluations can help validate PLCs. Improving PLCs through evaluations is supported by indicators of strengths and weaknesses for administrators. The goal of evaluations should be to contribute to PLC development.

Hinman (2007) advised that leaders acknowledge rather than ignore initiative fatigue. He also recommended that leaders make long-term commitments to collect and use data to drive decisions for improvement. According to Hinman, leading educational researchers endorse the concept that PLCs are the best hope for school improvement. This leads to several questions such as "Now what? How do we take this concept and put it into practice?" and "How can we use this model in schools when change is so difficult?" While all school leaders must find their own solutions to these challenges and address them within the unique contexts of their schools, the experiences of others can shine light on these efforts.

Veteran educators are often skeptical of any proposed change. Therefore, educational leaders should acknowledge initiative fatigue, research the history of educational reform, and share their findings. Hinman (2007) maintained that four critical questions drive PLCs: (a) What is it we want students to learn?, (b) How will

we know students have learned?, (c) What will we do if students have not learned?, and (d) How can we enhance learning for students who have already mastered the basics?

One example of applying these questions can be found at San Clemente High School, located in Orange County, California. The teachers at this school could not find any fault with the four critical questions that drive a PLC. As a result, when they received a proposal to engage into collective inquiry, and they agreed to commit to using Hinman's (2007) questions as a foundation for the school improvement plan. The staff supported the proposal and, because the decision came from within rather than from an outside entity (e.g., district, state, federal); the initiative began with a modicum of good will (Hinman, 2007). The administrators maintained focus on these questions as a part of the multi-year effort to use the questions. This focus helped alleviated some skepticism among staff. While it took time to establish credibility, the skepticism of implementing the PLC transformed into passion, purpose, and commitment.

Collaboration and collective investigation are essential to the PLC concept when teachers remain concentrated on the right issues (Hinman, 2007). The principal at San Clemente began the collective inquiry process by presenting staff with data on how many students had failed one or more classes over the course of multiple years. This presentation upset the staff and caused several teachers to become angry for multiple reasons. The teachers responded with a barrage of questions that could not be answered immediately. Eventually, the principal redirected the staff's attention to the third question driving the PLC: What will we do if our students have not learned? A watershed moment occurred when the staff acknowledged that the failure rate was unacceptable and that they could and should take steps to reduce it.

The principal then organized groups according to subject area and made time during school for teachers to work together. First, each team created group expectations to guide their work. Next, the teachers created common assessments to monitor student learning regularly. Then, the teams stayed focused on the critical questions because of the structure and processes provided. The last step involved implementing a school-wide intervention to offer additional support for struggling students. Following this process and using the four critical questions to drive the PLC allowed the teachers to address the student failure issue effectively. These steps developed teachers' capacities to work in collaborative teams.

It is vital for leaders to recognize that significant change is difficult. The initial effort to implement PLCs can be challenging. However, once the process begins, it becomes less challenging over time. Success breeds success, and with success comes sustainability. The PLC process may start as an administrative initiative, but as the benefits become evident for teachers and students, it can become a school initiative.

Hamos et al. (2009) provided examples of PLCs engaged in projects funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) through its Math and Science Partnership (MSP) program. The MSP considered the benefits of different aspects of the teaching and learning environment and offered professional development for teachers that had a direct effect on student achievement (Hamos et al., 2009). The MSP project regularly collected data to help investigators determine whether creating PLCs resulted in meaningful change among teachers or classroom practices to benefit students.

Explicated assessment of the effect of professional development on teachers and students requires well-developed tools that include piloting, revision, and field testing. These instruments are used to observe PLCs. The North Cascades and Olympic Science Partnership (NCOSP) developed a system with a PLC Observation Protocol that provided key elements of an effective PLC, including shared vision and ways of working, collaboration, and reflective dialogue (Hamos et al., 2009, p. 16). The protocol allowed members to develop a shared understanding and work effectively as a PLC to provide a meaningful tool to self-monitor the development of the PLC.

The Partnership for Reform in Science and Mathematics (PRISM), led by the University System of Georgia, identified a need to improve science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) achievement for P-12 pupils and improve readiness for college and the workforce. One strategy to accomplish these goals is engaging educators in PLCs. PRISM leaders reported a positive effect of PLCs on teaching and learning practices. To provide evidence concerning the impact of PLCs, "PRISM employed Inventory of Teaching and Learning (ITAL), which is a self-report survey that evaluators use to assess teachers' reported emphasis on reformed teaching and learning practices" (Ellett & Monsaas, 2007, p. 2).

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