

THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
COMMUNITIES WITHIN A SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

By

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To my children and grandchildren to inspire life-long learning

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By

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Reform, diversity of society, and an array of standards and guidelines challenge leaders to provide successful learning for teachers and students. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept offers a viable approach to address those challenges. Research indicates that schools need to function as learning communities where teachers and administrators collaborate in order to improve student learning. While characteristics and processes for PLCs are universal, methods and procedures for equipping educators with those skills are scarce.

This case study focused in-depth on one school and the role of the principal in implementing PLCs. It complements the extensive body of knowledge by spotlighting one school and provides a distinctive description of the organization, essential strategies that were implemented, and the challenges that were encountered in implementing PLCs. Using the qualitative paradigm, interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed to address the following research questions: 1. How is the school organized to incorporate learning communities? 2. What strategies are essential in implementing learning communities? 3. What challenges were encountered in implementing learning communities?

The principal of one school assessed the current state of the school when she first became principal and wanted to change the culture from isolationistic to collaborative in order to have a foundation for implementing learning communities. She transformed the book clubs that existed into nine school-wide learning communities with coaches as leaders. Simultaneously, she created opportunities to encourage staff interactions, leadership roles, and multiple opportunities for professional development.

Successful strategies for implementing learning communities were identified. They included building staff capacity, planning for de-privatization of practice and data collection and analyses, incorporating trust-building activities at meetings, and establishing a shared educational purpose. Challenges included selecting a goal, strengthening the coaches' leadership skills, developing strategies that would encourage staff to engage in authentic participation, and scheduling time for longer and more meetings. Areas for further research relating to the process of collaboration emerged from this study.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Demands for School Reform

Legislative actions throughout time call for higher standards, curriculum changes, meeting the needs of a diverse society, understanding broader systems, and providing resources. Such actions demand leadership that is cognizant of these dynamics in order to be effective.

Cunningham & Cordeiro, (2003) noted that school is a federal interest, a state responsibility, and a local operation. Leaders cannot be successful without understanding the broader social, political, and economic systems that shape the American education system. School leaders must be able to make informed decisions when responding to a changing and diverse society.

The Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in 1957 advanced changes in education. Multitudes of legislation were passed in each of the states, heightening awareness of education in the public domain. Different legislation increased funding, legal rights, and academic standards. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 addressed changes in the curriculum, methods, and requirements ensuring higher standards and more training in mathematics, science, and foreign languages. NDEA reforms had, in part, their origin in the progressive education philosophy (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the most significant legislation addressing the equality of education. It offered support to low-income families. Programs created under the ESEA encouraged Head Start programs, desegregation, student-centered education, and open classrooms. Legislation has stipulated that school leaders must respond to a changing and diverse society (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003).

The Goals 2000 legislation set by the U. S. Congress in the 1990s posed additional challenges for educators. They included finding and spending money wisely, increasing

standards and accountability of meeting those standards, concentrating on student learning, maintaining personal and professional focus, involving stakeholders, and integrating technology (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal legislation (“NCLB: a Toolkit for Teachers,” 2003) mandated that schools and districts need to improve student performance. Educators are held accountable for improvement in student achievement and for changes in the culture of schools in America. Each child must achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This federal legislation also gave states and districts the flexibility to find innovative ways to improve teacher quality. Effective professional development was defined as activities that are grounded in scientific research and produced a measurable effect on student achievement.

Learning Communities in Schools

Successful organizations will be learning organizations that build continuous learning into all jobs (Drucker, 1992; Senge, 1990). A learning community provides the foundation for implementing continuous learning through innovative professional development (Blasik, 2005). Scribner (1999) admonishes that multiple contexts are critical considerations for professional development. Principals and teachers should work together to prepare, implement, monitor, and evaluate a plan for students to be successful.

It is important to investigate different perspectives in order to meet the needs of a diverse community (Barth, 2001; Calderwood, 2000; Ritchhart, 2002; Rowden, 2001; Schlechty, 1990; Sparks, 2002; Speck, 1999). Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) suggests that professional learning communities promote cultural change. Sergiovanni (2000) advocates that different kinds of communities exist: learning, caring, inclusive, and inquiring communities. A learning community is a web of diverse relationships (Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Sparks (2002) defines the principal’s role as creating a learning community that involves

the larger community in achieving its vision of serving a diverse student population. Mulford and Silins (2003) add that a leader contributes to organizational learning that then translates to teaching and learning.

John Dewey, identified as leader of the progressive education movement, believed learning should be interpreted through daily living (Archambault, 1964). This thought made education accessible to all, allowing students to progress at their own speed (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003). Dewey explained that education has two main phases, each clearly distinguishable from the other that should never be separated. The first deals with organization of the school as part of a whole system. The second phase is adaptation of the school structure to meet individual needs (Archambault, 1964).

While there is no recipe for creating a learning community, the concept of community needs to be understood. A study involving two Navajo schools that were perceived as homogeneous revealed that much diversity existed: culture, conflicting values, bilingualism, and diverse goals. The process of creating and sustaining a learning community needs to be contextualized and educators must pursue the creation of democratic and inclusive communities. An adequate portrayal of community would involve complexity and be grounded in dialogue and processes. It would involve examination of structures for power and decision-making within the highly heterogeneous school contexts (Shields & Seltzer, 1997).

Murphy and Prestine (2001) recommend that elements that constitute communities of learning should be explored further. Signs of visible elements such as groups involved in collegial conversations are outer manifestations of communities of learning. The challenge may be to find what changes traditional mindsets of teachers and administrators and traditional structures of schools. Their study involved a large urban high school that attempted to implement

a professional learning community over a period of five years. Placing teachers in groups and allowing them time to discourse on teaching and learning did not contribute to building a learning community or improve student achievement. Having conversations within learning communities did not change practice. There is little evidence of what communities of practice really look like.

Leading Learning Communities

Sparks (2002), Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) admonishes that principals must see themselves as leaders of learning communities and role models for continuous learning. They must redesign the structure of schools to create cultures of ongoing high levels of adult learning. He advises principals who are instructional leaders to be focused on the learning process and school culture. Such elements are necessary to produce high levels of learning of both educators and students. Sparks warned that most professional development activities do not improve principals as instructional leaders nor do they focus on content and instructional skills. A new paradigm for professional development encompasses help for teachers to embed learning within day-to-day practice; professional learning that is directly focused on individual practice.

The new view of leadership involves designing, being stewards and teachers. Senge (1990) admonishes that “They [the leaders] are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models – that is they are responsible for learning” (p. 340). Principals are expected to build learning communities and develop the mindset of instructional leadership. They must serve as leaders for student learning (Sparks, 2002). Research studies indicate that instructional leadership has a significant impact on student achievement (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Leithwood, 1990; NBPTS, 2000;

NSDC, 2000; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001; Peale, 2003; Richardson, 2003).

Youngs and King (2002) developed a model that links principal leadership, professional development, and student achievement to school capacity. Variables for principal leadership that developed school capacity were interrelated: teachers' knowledge and skills, professional community, program coherence, and technical resources. Further, school capacity contributed to instructional quality that impacted student achievement considerably.

Wheatley (1999) states:

Many writers have offered new images of effective leaders. Each of them is trying to create imagery for the new relationships that are required, the new sensitivities needed to honor and elicit worker contributions. Here is a very partial list of the new metaphors to describe leaders: gardeners, midwives, stewards, servants, missionaries, facilitators, conveners. Although each takes a slightly different approach, they all name a new posture for leaders, a stance that relies on new relationships with their networks of employees, stakeholders, and communities. No one can hope to lead any organization by standing outside or ignoring the web of relationships through which all work is accomplished. Leaders are being called to step forward as helpmates, supported by our willingness to have them lead us. Is this a fad? Or is it the web of life insisting that leaders join in with appropriate humility? (p. 79)

Educators experience the pressure of meeting the demands of both society and a professional community of caring, reflection, and collaboration. Demands for school reform are plentiful; however, there is a scarcity of methods for equipping educators with skills to meet those demands. Organizational learning requires commitment and high levels of participation. There is a need for principals to continue the development of schools as communities where continuous learning and professional development focused on student achievement. (Richardson, 2003).

Hopkins (1990) suggests a systemic change to restructure and integrate teacher development and school improvement. He cautions that the main problem is the fragmentation of approaches that exist and treating each fragment in isolation from one another. Teacher

development refers to effective teaching, teacher as researcher, and professional development. School improvement refers to effective schools and dissemination of innovative ideas and practices.

Leithwood (1990) proposes:

Only when we have clearly conceptualized, coherent images of both teacher and principal roles and how they develop will we realize the combined contribution toward student learning of those in both roles. Much of the knowledge required for this is already in hand. Although more knowledge will be helpful, using what we already know constitutes a crucial and immediate challenge. (p. 87)

Fifteen years of research syntheses focused on the effects principals have on student achievement. Results indicated that principals have indirect effects on student achievement. Principals impact school effectiveness and improvement which in turn influenced student achievement. Over time study designs became more sophisticated, moving from measuring the direct effects to determining the variables involved in principal leadership on student achievement. Several variables including school structure and goals, social networks, and culture of the organization that linked principal leadership to student achievement were identified. It was concluded that the primary paths for principals to influence student achievement are shaping the school's direction through vision, mission, and goals. Further research needs to be done on the principal's practice in school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Mulford and Silins (2003) revealed that teachers' effectiveness and their ability to engage in organizational learning are important in determining student achievement. "Leadership contributes to organizational learning, which in turn influences what happens in the core business of the school—the teaching and learning" (p. 183). They identified three elements that impact student achievement: (a) how people are treated – the organizational structure should be one of trust, respect, facilitation and support allowing teachers to be involved in proactive decision making; (b) a professional learning community; and (c) the capacity for learning, which relates

to the quality of professional development. Aspects of a learning community were listed as valuing differences and diversity, de-privatization of practice, collaboration, and dialogue based on performance data. Future studies should explore professional community and consistency of programs as interceding variables between leadership and student achievement.

A longitudinal qualitative study of four schools found that principal leadership was the key to maintaining the foci of professional development. Leadership behaviors varied among the schools. Principals in each school responded to staff and student needs in different ways depending on the program and the school context. One principal nurtured collaborative planning and built a strong professional community by allowing teachers to be a part of the decision making process. The principal of the second school focused on establishing trust and collaboration. One school experienced a principal transition and held whole staff institutes. The fourth school also experienced a principal transition and many teacher transfers, hired staff to build commitment. The common thread of principal leadership was collaboration, but that was done in different ways: (a) in teams; (b) whole staff; (c) articulation across grade levels; and (d) whole school and grade levels (Youngs & King, 2002).

Peale (2003) connected instructional leadership and professional learning. She contends that instructional leaders form learning communities by setting structures that ensure collaboration and dialogue. Professional learning communities are formed when students, teachers, and administrators engage in conversations that focus on improving teaching and learning. The terms professional learning community and collaborative practices are sometimes used synonymously. New conceptions of schooling must be created for public school education to sustain reforms. Professional learning communities continue to be elusive in their explanations and implementation. This could be due to a lack of evidence of the value in teacher collaborative

practices as it relates to school communities. The processes of professional collaborative practice must be defined. The learning community needs to value collaborative practice and make it a priority, develop professional trust and respect, and have shared commitment (Leonard & Leonard, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Educational leaders are challenged by standards and guidelines to provide successful learning for teachers and students. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept offers a viable approach to address those challenges. Research indicates that schools need to function as learning communities where teachers and administrators collaborate in order to improve student learning. However, characteristics and processes are universal.

Educators need to be equipped with methods to meet the needs of reform in response to societal changes (Leithwood, 1990; Richardson, 2003). Hopkins (1990) proposed that the concept of integration as opposed to fragmentation needs to be explored. Organizational structures related to community, collaboration, professional development, and leadership behaviors need to be investigated (Mulford & Silins, 2003; Murphy & Prestine, 2001; Shields & Seltzer, 1997; Sparks & Hirsh, 1999; Youngs & King, 2002). PLCs are created by instructional leaders who set structures that ensure dialogue and collaboration (Peale, 2003). Case studies need to be conducted to examine leadership behaviors to provide evidence of effective leadership behaviors in different environments (Blasé & Blasé, 2001).

Principals have the potential to create organizations that will influence effective educational programs. It is important to understand how principals shape effective educational programs by working with teachers, parents, and students. Leaders can promote student achievement by articulating a clear school mission. An examination of instructional leadership and its relation to three dependent variables: instructional climate; organization, and student

achievement in reading revealed that the principal had no direct effect on student achievement (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996).

Blasé and Blasé (2001) proposed that leadership behavior has to take into account the school organization and its context. Future research should “consider the potentially instructive value of intensive case studies about the experience of implementing shared governance in varying settings” (p. 161). They added that studies such as those would provide rich and descriptive information and enable educators to analyze different leadership behaviors in varying environments.

A growing body of research indicates that teachers’ knowledge significantly impacts student achievement. In order to improve education we must improve professional development for teachers. The crucial role of teachers is often ignored when efforts to improve education involve reforming organizations. Teacher quality comes to view when test scores are unimpressive and teachers are labeled as not effective. Recommendations include holding superintendents, principals, and teachers accountable for student achievement and high quality professional development. “Improving American education requires creating an organized staff development plan to upgrade the quality of teaching by keeping all educators, and all those who support these educators, learning throughout their careers” (Sparks & Hirsh, 1999, p. 2).

Fullan (1993) cautions:

As the scale of complexity accelerates in post-modern society our ability to synthesize polar opposites where possible, and work with their co-existence where necessary, is absolutely critical to success. One starts with oneself, but by working actively to create learning organizations, both the individual and the group benefit. (p. 41)

Traditionally, legislation sets the path that educators must follow. Leaders need to be equipped to meet the demands of a diverse and changing society. There is heightened awareness of education with regards to higher standards, equity and excellence for all students. The school

principal's role is challenging and complex. It calls for principals to create learning organizations where they are instructional leaders and reformers of teacher professional development. The PLC concept offers a meaningful model and shows effectiveness of meeting societal demands. This study will compliment the extensive body of knowledge by spotlighting one school that implemented and sustained PLCs.

Statement of Significance

Research indicates that PLCs are the vehicles for success. They promote learning and collaboration among teachers and administrators (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). Their underlying culture is one of learning (Barth, 2001). The leader is key to the success of such an organization (Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Leonard & Leonard, 1999; NAESP, 2001; Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2002). However, descriptions and definitions of PLCs are extensive and the implementation process is unclear. Speck (1999) implies that a PLC has to be invented by each school. This study focused in-depth on one school and the role of its leader in implementing and sustaining PLCs.

Diversity created the need for leaders to form their communities in different ways and with different styles. Leadership styles varied, and included assertive and direct, facilitative, and being a source of knowledge. However, commonalities in the outcomes have been documented that included district commitment, student focus, strong networking, collective inquiry, collaboration, and continuous improvement. (Brown & Isaacs, 1994; Bryk & Camburn, 1999; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Joyce & Calhoun, 1995; Mullen & Kochan, 2000; Peale, 2003; Phillips, 1995; Senge, 1990; Shields & Seltzer, 1997; Stein, 1998; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Stein (1998) reported that a school district's commitment to change and leadership style proved to be irrelevant. Essential strategies and challenges, and the organization of PLCs were examined in order to validate and/or add to such studies.

Studies indicated that school leadership has to be committed to implementing a learning community and move beyond intentions to actions (Blasik, 2005; Burnett, 2002; Tanner, 2003; Yendol-Silva, 2003). The leadership role is multidimensional (Bryk & Camburn, 1999; Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hargreaves, 2002; Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Patterson, 1993; Richardson, 2003; Sparks, 2002; Speck, 1999). Leaders must lead learning and promote a culture of collaboration (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Drucker, 1992; Dufour & Berkey, 1995; Hirsh & Sparks, 1999; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; NSDC, 2001; Scribner, 1999; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; Shepherd, 1996; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987; Sparks, 2002; Speck, 1999).

Researchers established the connections among learning communities, instructional leadership, professional development, and student achievement. Leading learning communities requires being instructional leaders (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Leithwood, 1990; Peale, 2003; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993). Instructional leadership is necessary for professional growth resulting in student achievement (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Leithwood, 1990). Conditions that strengthen teaching and learning rather than leadership style impacted student learning (Burch & Spillane, 2003; Coburn, 2001; Strahan, 2004). In sum, the leader contributes to organizational learning, which translates to teaching and learning (Mulford & Silins, 2003).

Leaders have influence over organizational variables resulting in student achievement (Griffith, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Klug, 1989; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Renchler, 1992; Scheerens, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2001; Supovitz, 2002). Principal leadership impacts student learning indirectly through different paths (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996).

A variety of principals' roles are proposed, and within different contexts. Maintaining focus is critical. Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) advise that more specific models of

leadership roles are needed. This study compliments the extensive body of knowledge by spotlighting one school. It provides a description of the school's organization, essential strategies, and challenges when implementing and sustaining PLCs from the perspectives of its leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of a principal in implementing PLCs. Using the qualitative paradigm, interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed. This study adds to the body of research by conceptualizing the implementation of PLCs at Lily Elementary School. It outlines the strategies that were utilized and the challenges that were encountered. The final product offers “a rich and complex explanatory schema of the social phenomena” (Sherman & Webb, 2001, p. 126).

- **Research Question 1.** How is the school organized to incorporate learning communities?
- **Research Question 2.** What strategies are essential in implementing learning communities?
- **Research Question 2.** What challenges were encountered in implementing learning communities?

Definition of Terms

CAPACITY: the potential knowledge, skills, and disposition of each teacher that influences the quality of instruction within a school (Youngs & King, 2002).

COLLABORATION: when two or more participants voluntarily engage in shared decision making as they work towards attaining a common goal (Friend & Cook, 2006).

COMMUNITY: “a group of people conscious of a collective identity through common physical, cognitive, and affective educational relationships” (Drake & Roe, 1999, p. 46).

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: a “persistent discomfort with the status quo and a constant search for a better way” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 28).

CULTURE: the response to “persisting conditions, novel changes, challenging losses, and enduring ambiguous or paradoxical puzzles. People create culture; thereafter it shapes them” (Deal & Peterson, 2000, p. 202).

DE-PRIVATIZATION OF PRACTICE: “sharing successes and struggles of one’s own professional development” (Human Resources Development, 2003, p. 6).

FACILITATOR: a leader whose behaviors augment the ability of a group of participants to solve problems and improve performance (Conley & Goldman, 1994, p. 238).

LEADERSHIP: “the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation” (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996, p. 91).

LEARNING ORGANIZATION: “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future” (Senge, 1990, p. 14).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: a deliberate attempt to change practice in order to achieve a goal (DuFour & Berkey, 1995).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: organizing to promote learning and collaboration among teachers and administrators in order to improve teaching and learning for students and the school community at large (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995).

SHARED NORMS: “agreed upon expectations for behaving and operating” (Human Resources Development, 2003, p. 6).

WALK-THROUGH: an approach to supervisory practices that includes brief classroom observations, reflections, and collaborations with teachers. Observations are informal and focus on curriculum and instruction (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, Jr., 2004).

Limitations

The following limitations were recognized while conducting this research:

- The qualitative study was limited to one elementary school.
- No generalizations were made to other educational organizations.
- Data triangulation was limited to interviews, program observations, interactions, and documents.
- Documents may be incomplete or inaccurate.
- An assumption was made that the perspective of others is meaningful (Patton, 2002).
- Standardized open-ended interviews allowed little flexibility of wording and may limit naturalness of responses (Patton, 2002).

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

A deeper understanding of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept can be gained by investigating different perspectives. Over time, leaders in education and business defined and explained perceptions of a learning community. Schlechty (1990) described the original common schools as tribal centers, designed to teach traditions of the tribe. The curriculum at that time was citizenship and culture. The principal was the “chief priest” (p. 23). Later schools were modeled after the factory, incorporating scientific management. The principal was seen as the “manager of the industrial center” (p. 23). Later still, schools were designed as hospitals to meet the needs of children. Professional development schools were models of teaching hospitals. These organizations met the needs of their customers.

Rowden (2001) suggested that organizations take journeys that can be compared to the majestic mountain peaks that dominate the North American Rockies. The summit dominates the horizon and its endpoint can be gauged easily. Successful organizations can be compared to the majestic Rockies. They clearly see the vision, then set goals and make plans to achieve those goals. There may be clouds of resistance but the summit will be reached if momentum is maintained. Rowden writes, “Amid sometimes unpredictable, always uncertain, and highly turbulent business conditions, an organization’s capacity to learn as it goes may be the only true source of competitive advantage” (p. 11). Organizations of the twenty-first century can be compared to the Cascades mountain range. Each gradually rising peak reveals itself only after the previous one has been revealed. The summit is the final stage in the ascent. Various technological, competitive, social, economic, and political changes are clouds that hide the peaks leading to the final destination. The organization takes action to mount the first hill. Business

organizations are too complex to establish firm objectives and concrete change programs. Barth (2001) maintained:

I believe that schools can become much more than places where there are big people who are learned and little people who are learners. They can become cultures where youngsters are discovering the joy, the difficulty, and the excitement of learning and where adults are continually rediscovering the joy, the difficulty, and the excitement of learning. Places where we are all in it together learning by heart. (p. 29)

Speck (1999) offered a simplified explanation of a school learning community. It is one in which students learn to use their minds and both adults and children model that practice throughout each school day. There is no formula for developing a school learning community. It has to be invented by each school. Ritchhart (2002) described a classroom community in much the same way. He referred to continuous learning as the development of the intellectual character that should be the culture of classroom environments. A red thread is used in a variety of cultures as a metaphor for connecting and binding. Ritchhart (2002) suggested that the red thread binds the teacher's values and deeply held beliefs with his or her professional practice.

Calderwood (2000) identified two important meanings of community: (a) it labels groups of people, and (b) these groups have specific social relations within their groups. Groups are diverse in nature and there needs to be a development of shared norms and values in order to function successfully. Barth (2001) clarified the meaning of a community of learners. "A community of learners is one whose underlying culture is one of learning. For membership into the community, one learns, continues to learn, and supports others as they learn" (p. 13). Wald and Castleberry (2000) acknowledged assumptions about a learning community: (a) a shared philosophy bonds a community, (b) a community is a web of diverse relationships, and (c) a community provides the context for the unveiling of unpredictable potential.

Sergiovanni (2000) identified several different kinds of communities that exist in schools. Learning communities are those in which members are committed to thinking, growing, and inquiring together. Learning is an attitude and a way of life as well as an activity and a process. Members are connected to each other to pursue common goals in collegial communities. In caring communities, members are totally committed to each other and moral characteristics define their relationships. Inclusive communities bring together economic, religious, cultural, ethnic, family, and other differences into a mutually respected whole. Lastly, in inquiring communities all educators commit themselves to collective inquiry, reflection on their practices, and search for solutions to problems.

Schlechty (1990) described schools as communities where learning was patterned according to the community needs. Sergiovanni (2000) suggested that different kinds of communities could exist, and for different purposes. Rowden (2001) stated that learning communities could achieve their vision in different ways. They could follow one path, overcoming obstacles by focusing on the vision. They could also attain the vision by taking different paths, constantly reviewing and revising goals based on external factors or unforeseen occurrences. Learning communities are environments where everyone learns (Barth, 2001; Speck, 1999). Everyone is connected by shared norms and values (Calderwood, 2000; Ritchhart, 2002; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Speck (1999) posited there is no formula for developing a school learning community.

Organizational Learning

The Leadership for Organizational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) project from Australia collected data from 96 Australian high schools in an effort to study the concept of organizational learning. The data included two surveys from grade 10 students and teachers and cross sectional case studies from 4 schools. Organizational learning was defined as the teacher's

voice in secondary schools in four sequential dimensions: (a) trusting and collaborative climate, (b) shared and monitored mission, (c) taking initiatives and risks, and (d) ongoing and relevant professional development (Mulford & Silins, 2003). Dufour and Eaker (1998) added similar characteristics of a professional learning community: (a) shared mission, vision, and values, (b) collective inquiry, (c) working in collaborative teams, (d) conducting experimentation, (e) continuous improvement, and (f) results orientation. Mulford & Silins (2003) determined that leadership practices that promoted organizational learning in schools were indirectly related to student outcomes; leadership contributes to organizational learning which in turn influences teaching and learning.

Senge (1990) identified five core disciplines that allow an organization to function as a system. They are personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Members of an organization should be continually clarifying and deepening their personal vision which leads to personal mastery. Mental models are deeply held beliefs or ingrained assumptions that should be realized. From each person's personal vision, a shared vision that people are truly committed to can be created. This shared vision is a picture of the future of the organization that would be created. It causes people to trust, be enrolled, and be committed. Team learning occurs when teams are interacting and thinking together. It is the sum of individual talents that evolves through dialogue rather than discussion. Senge's final core discipline is systems thinking. Understanding how the whole system operates is crucial to the success of the organization and the individual. Abu-Tineh (2003) concluded elementary teachers practice Senge's five disciplines, especially shared vision and systems thinking, more than middle school teachers.

Griffith (2003) used organizational models to describe schools and study the extent that each model was related to organizational output, including student achievement. Surveys from fifth grade students and staff on school processes as well as standardized tests and archival data were used in this study. One hundred and seventeen (117) elementary schools took part. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of students and 39% of teachers completed questionnaires. One model used had an external focus with emphasis on customer demands. A second model focused internally and promoted morale and cohesion. A third model focused on the environment and was flexible to its needs. The final model controlled internal activities. It provided for an orderly work environment.

The second model, promoting morale boosting and cohesion, provided the best fit to data obtained from schools. Characteristics of the principal for this model included job skill mastery, concern for employees, employee teamwork and cooperation, and training. Administrative support, staff training, and collegiality led to job satisfaction and school achievement. Models that focused on customer demands and the environment provided the next best fit to school data. The principal's characteristics for these two models included staff empowerment and inclusion in planning and procedure development, encouragement for innovations, sharing of expectations, and collective efficacy (Griffith, 2003).

Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) determined that two sets of conditions contribute to creating and maintaining a PLCs. The first is structural. Simple non-specialized forms of school organization, time for planning and decision-making can be effective. The second condition is human and social resources including openness to innovation, feedback on instructional performance, professional development, and supportive leadership.

The PLC concept provides a viable process for improving schools and student achievement. It engages stakeholders in collaborative dialogue and planning. Core processes were found to be the provision of a safe environment for diverse ideas and beliefs, and a democratic organization guided by positive principles, ethics, values, and conscience (Huffman and Jacobson, 2003). However, Speck (1999) added that a learning community must have evaluation policies that would measure the effectiveness and monitor the progress of their professional development program using many sources of information. Results should impact student achievement and affect future planning.

D'Agostino (2000) used Prospects, an early 1990s data set on schools and students in the United States to examine the effects of instruction and school organization on student academic achievement in reading and mathematics. A three-stage cluster sampling procedure was used to determine the participants. First chosen were districts, then schools within the districts, then students within the schools. Target grades were identified and students were followed for three years. Data allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between students' mathematics and reading over time and the classroom and school level experiences. Factors and variables representative of the school were identified from principal and teacher responses to survey items. These included basic and advanced skill instruction, disciplinary problems, staff stability, support for teacher innovation, in-service opportunities, staff influence and involvement in school policy, and principal leadership.

Significant factors in this study included high levels of collegiality, innovation, goal consensus, principal leadership and positive community relationship. D'Agostino (2000) contended that school organization did not predict teachers' levels of effective instructional practices. However, instructional variables related significantly to achievement gains. In first and

second grades, teachers who used teacher directed and basic skills orientation were most effective in both academic areas. These instructional strategies were not effective in fourth grade. Middle elementary grades need to have opportunities for critical thinking and self-directed learning. The researcher concluded that student achievement growth could be improved by modifying instructional practices and school organizational structure.

Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) developed a framework for PLCs based on their synthesis of research. Lessons from their review included:

1. Strong PLCs provide advantages to schools and districts. (p. 3)
2. PLCs promote positive cultural change. (p. 3)
3. Leadership enhances and is enhanced by PLCs. (p. 3)
4. Adult learning theory strengthens PLCs. (p. 4)
5. Interconnectedness enhances PLCs. (p. 4)
6. Key structural conditions must be in place. (p. 5)

Research indicates that organizational learning merits attention (Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004). A learning organization and a professional learning community are referred to as having similar characteristics. (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Senge, 1990). Griffith (2003) suggests that an organizational model found in schools that promote morale boosting and cohesion could increase student achievement. D'Agostino (2000) suggests that modifying instructional practices and school organizational structure also increases student achievement. Evaluation policies must be in place (Speck, 1999). An organizational climate that is open to innovation positively affects teacher growth (Hopkins, 1990). Huffman and Jacobson (2003) add the PLC concept includes the provision of a safe environment and collaboration.

Leading Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Senge (1990) asserted that leaders "are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capacities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve

shared mental models – that is they are responsible for learning” (p. 340). Leonard & Leonard (1999) identified principals as primary sources of leadership and motivation for redesigning three schools as PLCs. Teachers identified principals as the primary leadership sources. Principals were seen as important to motivation but were not always supportive of innovation. Ball (2004) acknowledged that principals gained knowledge and skills necessary to implement learning communities by participating in their own learning community. Data from the multi-site case study helped the investigator understand principals’ perceptions. This concept was a unique professional development model for principals. Principals participated in reflective thinking. They were also encouraged to implement changes and developed the ability to influence teachers.

Renchler (1992) suggested that a principal interested in academic achievement as the central focus has to consider whether the school culture is one of learning as it has a powerful effect on attitudes and achievement. He identified motivation as a key factor that influences student achievement. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2001) acknowledged strategies for leaders that include creating a culture that is learner-centered and collaborative, scheduling time for collaboration and reflections, and aligning professional development to school goals. Speck (1999) admonished that the principal must be aware of the school culture, the values and norms that are established. A culture that provides opportunities for collaboration supports risk-taking and respect is essential to nurture intellectual curiosity and growth. Supervisory policies should link professional development and improvement in curriculum and instruction. The principal should ensure that teachers share their practices and are rewarded for their efforts. Resources should be provided for training, practice, coaching, feedback, and collaboration. A principal should review the budget periodically in order to find

ways to provide resources. Speck and Knipe (2001) added that the principal should establish a collaborative culture in which there is professional networking where teachers learn from each other and they must be learners themselves.

Leithwood (1994) identified three practices common to most successful leaders: (a) setting directions, (b) redesigning the organization, and (c) developing people. Setting directions was described as identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and creating high performance expectations. Redesigning the organization involved strengthening school cultures, modifying organizational structures, and building collaborative processes. Developing people was explained as offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support, and providing appropriate models. School administrators create strong communities in schools by developing professional communities through attention to teacher development and creating sustaining networks of dialogue pertaining to issues of teaching and learning.

The principal's role is multidimensional. She is the keeper of the vision who promotes continuous learning, develops and fosters collegiality and collaboration. The principal also facilitates continuous learning (Speck, 1999). Speck's principalship model viewed the principal as educator, leader, manager, and inner person. As educator, the principal understands current research and practices, evaluates curriculum and instruction, improves school climate, improves student services, and monitors student progress. The principal as leader appraises the present, envisions the future, determines capacity and plans for change. He or she also empowers staff, builds trust, celebrates accomplishments, and monitors progress. In a managerial role, the principal organizes the system, directs and carries out plans, and finally evaluates and improves

it. The inner person model of the principalship is committed, clarifies beliefs, acts ethically and honestly, balances life, and uses inner resources for strength.

Leithwood (1990) identified four different ways that principals see their roles: (a) manager; (b) interpersonal relations or climate focus; (c) program focus; and (d) student development focus. The latter two patterns are not as common as the first two. However, they appear to be relatively effective in improving schools and student achievement. These two patterns, program focus and student development focus, are entrenched in the term instructional leadership. Instructional leadership behaviors include building trust, supporting risk-taking, being supportive, and “collaboratively constructing professional knowledge” (Blasé & Blasé, 2001, p. 160).

Richardson (2003) examined leadership styles, characteristics, and contextual factors that influence PLCs. This study included both quantitative & qualitative analyses. The quantitative statistics yielded data that categorized principals into one of three leadership styles: responder, manager, or initiator. The leadership styles were identified by principals and their faculty. Each of five dimensions measured had a strong focus on student learning. The first dimension involved administration participation and shared decision-making. Student learning and shared vision for school improvement was the second dimension. The third and fourth dimensions involved collective learning and peer review and feedback. The final dimension addressed conditions that support staff and school as a learning community.

Principals viewed themselves primarily as managers, then as initiators. Faculty viewed their principals overwhelmingly as responders. The quantitative instrument was further used to select two schools that indicated high level of school maturity and strong leadership styles for on-site visitations. The first school had approximately 280 students in pre-kindergarten through

grade six. The second school had 168 students in pre-kindergarten through grade three.

Purposeful sampling technique was used to create a focus group. Data were gathered from questionnaires and interviews. Five themes emerged from the qualitative data on principals' leadership styles and the maturity of their staff: (a) supportive leadership; (b) a small education family; (c) an open collaborative environment; (d) support for educational excellence; and (d) freedom and power (Richardson, 2003).

Both schools reported that the principals were very supportive. They were facilitators, risk-takers, open, and respectful to obligations. They pushed their faculty to do better and to embrace change. These small education families cared for and supported each other. The collaborative collegial environments were personal, interactive and included mentors. Frequent sharing meetings were held. Support for educational excellence was demonstrated in being willing and flexible to do what will benefit children. Various opportunities for professional development utilizing teacher expertise were offered. The involvement of parents and the external community also demonstrated support for excellence. There was autonomy and shared decision making in student and adult learning. School missions that were grounded in student achievement unified the two schools. The principals and staff were supportive of each other. The principals of both schools:

engage in substantial delegation of instructional leadership roles and offer autonomy and support in an effort to help teachers and students succeed. Both principals seem to exemplify transformational leadership within a learning community of dedicated, collegial faculty members, where teachers were encouraged and empowered to make needed changes. (Richardson, 2003, p. 144)

Peale (2003) studied the roles of middle school principals in providing curricular and instructional leadership and determined that each principal had a different style. *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* was first presented by the Carnegie Council and

published in 1989. *Turning Points 2000* provided a model curriculum grounded in rigorous standards & instructional methods designed to prepare students to meet higher academic standards. The Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) was the organization assisting schools in this project. Three principals implementing the *Turning Points 2000* curriculum were selected to participate in this study.

The first was passionate for curriculum and instruction, had a strong academic background, facilitated dialogue, modeled, and taught lessons. The second principal changed through the years from a direct to indirect and facilitative style. Safety and respect were important. This principal was deliberate in structuring the instructional organization for teachers to feel safe to explore. The third principal led a community that took years to develop. The extent of instructional leadership varied each year. Teachers became more and more comfortable observing each other and having conversations. A shared leadership structure was set up to provide opportunities and help others determine their roles in the vision. Each principal successfully implemented the program.

Day, Harris, & Hadfield (2001) were commissioned by The National Association of Headteachers in the United Kingdom to identify, examine and celebrate good principalship practice. They identified characteristics of effective leaders as a result of their study. Qualitative analyses revealed that various stakeholders shared similar social construction of leadership: bravery, openness, honesty, good decision-making, people skills, and vision. Honesty and openness were seen as significant. Vision and practices were underpinned by personal values such as respect, fairness, equality, caring, and honesty. The authors concluded that an effective leader: (a) maximizes potential that is beneficial to the school, classroom, and the individual; (b)

has high expectations, sets and monitors high standards, and cultivates intrinsic values; and (c) empowers staff by developing climates of collaboration.

Reitzug (1994) suggested that support, facilitation, and possibility are empowering behaviors of principals. This study documented, through several kinds of field-based data, that these elements are indicative of empowering principal behaviors. A supportive environment was provided in the form of communicating trust, encouraging risk taking, honoring teachers' opinions, developing teams, and modeling inquiry. Facilitative behaviors included stimulating critique, testing & revision, requiring justification of practice, critique by wandering around, providing alternative frameworks for thinking about teaching, and providing staff development. The provision of having tangible (money and equipment) and intangible (time and opportunity) resources empowered teachers to develop themselves as professionals.

Patterson (1993) advocated the concept of openness as he addressed effective leadership. He compared today's values with tomorrow's values and suggested that current values include doing what one is told, falling in line, group harmony, making firm decisions, and allowing no mistakes. On the other hand, tomorrow's values were explained as openness: openness to participation, diversity, conflict, reflection, and mistakes. Patterson's concept of openness is inherent in other perspectives pertaining to leadership roles in learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Joyce & Calhoun, 1995; Senge, 1990; Speck, 1999).

Hargreaves (2002) suggested that if schools are to become stronger PLCs, they must seek to establish trust and avoid causes of betrayal. Interviews were conducted with 50 Canadian teachers, elementary and secondary, to examine the interactions pertaining to trust and betrayal among colleagues. Trust was either non-existent or taken for granted. However, evidence of betrayal was significant. Strong PLCs depend on teachers' capacity to blend commitment with

doubt and share a passion for improving learning and achievement, along with healthy disagreement about and inquiry into the best ways to do it. Strong PLCs risk and sometimes relish conflict. Trust is an emotional catalyst that makes this unique chemistry possible. Betrayal is the agent that destroys it. (p. 404) Hargreaves (2002) contended that trust is an essential ingredient in organizational learning.

Various authors have identified resisters to creating a learning community. They referred to them by different names. Parson (1999) determined barriers to collaboration including fear of losing power, institutional bureaucracies, lack of collaborative skills, and lack of time. Time, old baggage, guilt because of taking time away from students, and admission of imperfection are impediments to principals' learning (Barth, 2001). DuFour and Eaker (1998) warned that principals pay too much attention to resisters. In this event, they should determine the underlying cause of resistance and focus on attitudes rather than behavior.

Leaders are responsible for building learning organizations (Leonard & Leonard, 1999; Senge, 1990; Speck, 1999). Researchers identified various styles and characteristics of principals. However, the culture of an organization should be one of learning (Renchler, 1992; Speck, 1999).

Leadership Effects on Student Achievement

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggest that, "At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence" (p. 7). Their study found that leadership effects are primarily indirect and appear to work mostly through organizational variables such as mission, goals, curriculum, and instruction. Thus, they concluded that leaders contribute indirectly to student achievement.

Coburn (2001) indicated that strong evidence for leadership efforts focus not only on leadership, but on conditions that strengthen teaching and influence learning. A series of

connections between leader effects and student achievement was established. Examples of such connection include selection and replacement of teachers, learning focus, frequent monitoring, time and energy for school improvement, support, and instructional leadership.

Pitner (1988), influenced by the research of Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, and Lee (1982), developed the models of Direct, Antecedent, and Mediated approaches to administrative effects. Direct effects referred to a direct relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. Antecedent variables impacted principal leadership that then influenced student achievement. In the Mediated approach, antecedent variables influenced principal behavior. That behavior then influenced school and classroom practices that led to student achievement.

Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis (1996) extended the research of Pitner (1988). They reported indirect effects on student achievement through actions that shape learning climate. There was a strong relation between the degree of instructional leadership provided by the principal and the existence of a clear school mission. Elementary school principals who were perceived by teachers as strong instructional leaders promoted student achievement through their influence on the school-wide learning climate. The researchers suggested that the indirect effect principals have on student achievement was unimportant. More important was to understand ways that principals shape effective programs by working with teachers, staff, parents, and students. They advised that the relation between principal and school effectiveness is best understood through the use of a model that they created.

The Basic Model of Principal Effects on Achievement (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996) is described as follows. Antecedent variables impact the principal's instructional leadership. They include school socio-economic status, parent involvement, principal gender and teaching experience. The principal's instructional leadership affects the instructional climate and

the instructional organization. The latter two variables directly impact student achievement. They concluded that the effects of principal leadership on student achievement need to be examined through intervening variables such as climate and organization as well as school outcomes (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis 1996).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) further examined 15 years of research exploring the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement. They used Pitner's (1988) conceptualization models of direct effects, antecedent and mediated variables to categorize data. The direct-effects model assumes that effects can be measured reliably apart from other related variables. Their findings indicated limited value for investigating principal leadership using this model. The mediated-effects model assumes that leaders achieve their outcomes through indirect paths. Using the reciprocal-effects model, they found that principals enact their leadership through a stream of interactions and over a period of time. The need for longitudinal data limits the use of this model. Their review indicated that several paths describe how principal leadership influences student outcomes including school goals, structure, social networks, people, and organizational culture. Hallinger and Heck (1998) concluded that such studies offer concrete indications of possible ways that leadership may achieve impact. However, they advised that more specific models of leadership roles are needed.

Klug (1989) provided a model for understanding the principal's influence on student achievement. He noted that school leaders can have a direct and indirect effect on achievement by facilitating learning, controlling situational factors in which learning occurs, shaping instructional climate, and influencing attitudes of all stakeholders towards education. Klug indicated that situational, personal, and motivational factors all have direct influences on classroom learning and achievement.

School leaders enter the achievement equation both directly and indirectly. By exercising certain behaviors that facilitate learning, they directly control situational factors in which learning occurs. By shaping the school's instructional climate, thereby influencing the attitudes of teachers, students, parents, and the community at large toward education, they increase both student and teacher motivation and indirectly impact learning gains. (p. 253)

Heck and Marcoulides (1996) examined the relationship between organizational variables and student achievement. Scheerens (1992) investigated classroom and instructional factors and organizational conditions that school leaders influence, such as parent involvement and high expectations. Inferences can be made from both of these studies that leadership has indirect effects on student achievement. Hallinger and Heck (1996) identified 40 studies incorporating contextual and leadership variables, and achievement. They concluded that the effects of school leadership on student outcomes are generally small and inconsistent. However, these effects were clearest with regard to school goals and contextual variables and thus were educationally significant. Teachers value the expertise of administrators but they are more likely to attribute leadership qualities to other teachers.

Leaders contribute to student achievement indirectly through organizational variables (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Klug, 1989; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Scheerens, 1992). Klug (1989) indicated that leaders contribute to increased student achievement by directly controlling situational factors in which learning occurs. However, more studies need to focus on school climate, organization, and outcomes (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996).

Leading Professional Development

Successful organizations of the twenty-first century will be learning organizations that build continuous learning into all jobs (Drucker, 1992). Specifically, effective practices include programs that are conducted in school settings, linked to school-wide improvement, and where

teachers help each other. The emphases are on instruction and teachers having different opportunities for professional growth (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993).

A learning community provides a foundation for implementing innovative professional development programs (Blasik, 2005). The principal is the key person to determine success of teacher professional growth and therefore has a critical role in school improvement. Principals must see themselves as leaders of learning communities and models for continuous learning (Sparks, 2002). School leaders must develop a new mindset for professional growth where; (a) there is a shared vision; (b) teachers work in teams to collaborate, conduct action research, analyze data for student learning, form study groups; and (c) clinical supervision is used as a form of individualized staff development (DuFour & Berkey, 1995).

Youngs and King (2002) reviewed a multi-year study on principal leadership for professional development. They addressed three aspects of organization capacity in four schools: (a) teachers' knowledge and skills, (b) professional community, and (c) program coherence. Each of the four schools had a different focus. The first school implemented a reading program entitled Success for All. Leadership provided for sustained school-wide change, time for teaming, ongoing training, and collaboration. The strong leadership for professional development related to externally developed reform. The second school focused on standardized assessments. Principal leadership facilitated whole staff institutes, teacher empowerment, collaborative culture, maintained focus during principal transition. The reason for change was internally generated reform.

Professional development for teachers in the third school was literacy training. The leadership planned for a school-wide retreat, training, and collaboration between primary and reading teachers. The reason for change was the changed leadership style. The principal focused

on aligning professional development with school goals for student learning. The fourth school offered accelerated education. The principal encouraged diverse professional development. The focus changed with principal transition. Teachers were transferred and newly hired teachers were committed to developing a new curriculum. The reason for change occurred because of principal change and fragmented professional development (Youngs & King, 2002).

Youngs and King (2002) reported that professional development contributed to school capacity that in turn contributed to instructional quality. Instructional quality impacted student achievement. Their research recognized that principals played an important role in the professional development of teachers by maintaining focus of goals, establishing a culture of trust and providing for teacher collaboration and reflection.

Commonalities were reported from Strahan's (2004) three-year study of three elementary schools with high academic achievement. These schools had different foci that were clearly identified. The first school focused on literacy. They held collaborative planning sessions in which data were the focus of their dialog. The principal was very involved. The second school planned staff development that was embedded in daily teaching. They held collaborative work sessions and focused on instruction, differentiated instruction, and teamwork. The third school implemented a specific project. They focused on professional development, thinking maps, and self-directed reading. In all of the schools, educators collaborated to determine instructional foci within supported environments. As a result, the researcher reported that successful reform began when participants established an agenda that addressed students' needs and teachers and administrators coordinated to improve student achievement. Each school accomplished reform differently.

When teachers learned, the students learned more (Barth, 1990; Richardson 1998). High learning gains and attendance rates were commonalities among schools winning awards for quality professional development programs. Such schools recognized the relationship between adult learning and student achievement. Professional development, student achievement, and school improvement were aligned. Quality professional development was embedded in the culture of these schools. Principals and teachers talked about school improvement and professional development as being one. Understanding that each school is unique, Richardson found common characteristics that defined quality professional development. They included using data for setting goals and determining teachers' needs, and setting individual goals. Collaboration, collegiality, reflection, and developing teachers as leaders were the foundation for professional development. These schools found a variety of ways to learn and utilized outside experts and resources. Principals of the award winning schools saw professional development as one of the most important job responsibilities (Richardson 1998).

Killion and Hirsh (2001) offered recommendations for quality professional development programs. Effective programs should be focused on teachers, job-embedded, grounded in knowledge, respectful to teachers, and closely connected to classroom practices. They warn that more tests and more money are not going to improve student achievement. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) agreed that job-embedded learning and organizational learning were critical. Reeves (2006) admonished leaders to set the direction for professional development. It should take place in the classrooms where teachers implement, test their instructional impact on student achievement, and gather data. Meetings that focus on improving student achievement should replace traditional faculty meetings consisting of political agendas and announcements. Staff should share student work, collaborate in order to define effective practices, determine scoring

guidelines, and confront challenges. Leithwood (1990) recommended that time should be used wisely by incorporating activities and strategies for professional development in routine administrative activities.

Grodsky & Gamoran (2003) suggested that teachers who participate in school-level professional development benefit in two ways. They benefit from both their own participation and that of their colleagues. Shared values, collaboration, and collective control were aspects of community seen as enhancing teachers' commitment and effectiveness as well as student learning. The authors support that school-based professional development contributes to the professional community.

Other suggestions for how principals lead professional development came about from DuFour and Berkey's (1995) studies. The first step is to establish and articulate a vision. Without clear vision, principals will not be able to plot out a meaningful direction. A leader should also identify and protect shared values. Ongoing monitoring is essential to the improvement effort. A principal needs to devote time and effort to the things that are valued. By providing time for collaborative meetings and focusing on teaching and learning, the principal sends a clear message that these are valued. Wood & Anderson (2005) acknowledged that an open culture, where the senior management promotes peer evaluation, was not seen as a threat and was most successful. Principals must strive to create a culture where teachers talk about the teaching and learning process, share their learning, and observe each other teach (DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Reeves, 2006).

Blasé and Kirby (1992) advised that the principals keep abreast of new developments and be a resource for teachers. Keeping current with the trends established the principal's credibility. Professional development should be embedded in the culture of the school. This required leaders

to initiate changes that value continuous professional learning. School leaders need to support both formal and informal learning activities. Teachers and administrators need to work together to plan for optimal student learning. Some suggested activities include reorganizing the school day to create more time for groups of teachers to engage in learning activities. Valuing professional learning reveals itself in many ways. Shepherd (1996) noted that the most influential leadership behavior was to promote teacher professional development that is timely and relevant.

Effective principals encouraged coaching as a form of professional development. Teachers reported that principals encouraged coaching to recognize excellent teaching as well as improve teaching. Communication in the form of dialog both inside and outside of instructional conferences was a vital strategy. Principals made suggestions, gave feedback, modeled, used inquiry, and gave praise (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). They also allowed teachers to take risks, be creative and be reflective. Utilizing within-school expertise, protecting scheduled time for professional development activities, defending teachers' rights to learn, and providing opportunities during the school day are some ways that a school leader could make a value statement for a culture of learning. The work context of teachers greatly influences how and what teachers learn. Research findings call for the development of professional learning opportunities that consider the multiple contexts of teacher work, the type of activities that are appropriate for different contexts, and the consequences of engaging in those activities (Scribner, 1999).

A learning community provides the foundation for implementing innovative professional development (Blasik, 2005). Researchers acknowledged a link between professional development and student achievement (Richardson, 1998; Strahan, 2004; Youngs & King, 2002). Job-embedded learning was referenced as an essential component of quality professional

development (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Killion & Hirsh, 2001; Reeves, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Peer evaluation was found to be the most successful professional development activity (Wood & Anderson, 2005). Principals must embrace coaching as a form of professional development (Shepherd, 1996). Devoting time added to the quality of professional development activities (Dufour & Berkey, 1995; Leithwood, 1990).

Collaboration

Collaboration is the common element in reviews and research pertaining to professional development that positively impacts student achievement (Grotsky & Gamoran, 2003; Hopkins, 1990; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; Leithwood, 1990; Parson, 1999; Reitzug, 1994; Richardson, 1998; Shiu, 2003; Speck, 1999; Wood & Anderson, 2005; Youngs & King, 2002). Wood and Anderson (2005) conducted six case studies and revealed that forming networks and building relationships are critical to success.

Leonard and Leonard (2001) admonished that collaborative practice has three parts. First, establishment of what collaborative practice is. The second part is to make this practice a genuine priority rather than an add-on. The third part is the belief that professional learning communities can exist only in an environment that is committed to cultivating a climate of trust founded in professional regard, personal respect, and shared commitment. The authors added that credibility is a critical characteristic for a school leader. Principals need to engender trust, be facilitators of decision-making, and provide support.

Parson (1999) developed a collaboration continuum that assesses where groups are in the collaborative process. It began with a group having no relationship, then cooperation, next coordination, and the final step was collaboration. The foundation of successful collaboration includes credibility, shared concerns, trust building, celebration, being ready to fold the tent and more. Speck (1999) identified seven elements of the collaborative process: (a) learning

community vision, (b) planning, (c) evaluating, (d) reflecting, (e) involving parents, (f) professionalism, and (g) developing collegiality.

The findings of Shiu (2003) suggested that there are four phases in developing a community: (a) prescriptive, (b) participatory, (c) collaborative, and (d) self-refining. This ethnographic study drew on a three-year partnership between the California Center for Effective Schools (CCES) at the University of California, Santa Barbara and an urban school district in Southern California. It focused on one school with 750 students. First, participants became familiar with personalities, group size, roles and responsibilities, the reform process and content issues during the prescriptive phase.

The participatory phase allowed participants to learn ways to resolve issues, express their needs, develop more active roles, and voice their needs. During the collaborative phase participants developed a unit and became involved in inquiry, decision-making, and implementation. Finally, participants reflected and made improvements to the unit of study during the self-refining phase. The data confirmed that both individuality and collegiality are necessary and should exist simultaneously. Administration needs to value the Professional LC concept, be knowledgeable in how to create and sustain a PLC, and work consistently to reform the process.

Supovitz (2002) based his research on the theory that organizing schools into smaller environments will help build more collaborative and collegial communities of teachers which will lead to better pedagogical and curricular decisions which will lead to improved student learning. District leaders sought to encourage teachers to work collaboratively by creating structures for them to collaborate. A four-year evaluation of this team-based initiative was conducted. Results were varied. Collaboration and higher levels of interaction of teachers had

clear effects on culture. Teachers felt more involved in decisions. However, their collaboration did not translate into greater instructional focus when compared to non-team-based schools. One quarter of the teams practiced collaboration according to three criteria outlined. The criteria used for group dynamics were academic preparation strategies, collective teaching practices, and student grouping strategies.

Supovitz (2002) reported that levels of group practice were static for one year, indicating that teams were not deepening their practice over time. He suggested that widespread achievement effects would be more apparent if more teams were able to use group instructional practices. He proposed that effective communities of instructional practice are related to student performance. Structures that encourage collaborative instruction, peer teaching and observation of other teachers are needed. He also suggested continuous monitoring of skills and strategies for professional development need to be developed. Communities need to be flexible and take into account the strengths of individual team members.

Koehler and Baxter (1997) asserted that changes from autonomy to dependency increased the empowerment of everyone and success for the learner. Autonomy was explained as withholding information, not recognizing individual differences, conditioned thinking, and depersonalizing the environment. Dependency, on the other hand, enhanced the sharing of information, thinking and reflecting, promoting individual differences, and creating a more personalized environment. They suggested a paradigm shift from traditional individualized planning to collaborations with peers. Sharing information, encouraging thinking, promoting individual differences and personalizing the environment should replace withholding information, conditioned thinking, hiding individual differences, and depersonalizing the

environment. The authors were led to believe that collaboration lead to increased power for all educators and more importantly for the learner.

Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) supports the development of PLCs. They recognize that creating overlapping collaborative communities of practice increases interactions, ensures content-based outcomes, and maintains focus. Other areas essential for supporting communities are building internal capacity for leaders and documenting evidence of improvement. The institute also reported several stumbling blocks to successful development of PLCs that included:

1. Conversations tended to focus on structural issues rather than instruction and content.
2. Informal sharing of individual work was easily done. However in-depth analysis and feedback were limited.
3. Collaborations were limited to building up the group. They do not feel comfortable to address issues of trust or equity.
4. Systems were often not in place to develop school capacity and teacher leadership.
5. Collaborations did not lead to data analyses identifying agents of change. Reports were informal anecdotal records.
6. Identifying clear and specific practices for improvement as well as appropriate structures were essential to creating and maintaining PLCs.

Collaboration had clear effects on culture but it did not translate to greater instructional focus (Supovitz, 2002). Collaboration was limited to building up the group (Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004). A research review indicated that there are processes for collaboration that could lead to increased student achievement (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Parson, 1999; Speck, 1999; Shiu, 2003; Supovitz, 2002). Koehler and Baxter (1997) believed that dependency among educators lead to more power for all learners.

How Communities are Formed

The West Alabama Learning Coalition is a multi-institutional organization. It includes schools, universities, community colleges, businesses and social services. A qualitative research study by Mullen & Kochan (2000) identified factors that made people join and remain in this collaborative network. People desired to be in a supportive and collaborative community. They remained in such a community because it was goal oriented, it strengthened their own organization, and it yielded personal benefits. The coalition is a dynamic, organic, and creative organization that fosters empowerment, shared leadership, personal & organizational transformation. The authors compared the network to a spider's web where its attributes, elements, and motivators are connected and integrated. Like a spider, the coalition continues to weave new webs.

Chicago Elementary Schools were the subject of a study by Bryk and Camburn (1999). Their study focused on three areas: adult behavior, organizational factors, and school compositional factors. Three core practices that characterized adult behavior in a professional learning community were examined. These practices were reflective dialog, de-privatization of practice, and peer collaboration. The findings indicated that teachers who were committed and spent considerable time out of class on school affairs had a more positive outlook on the professional learning community than those who did not.

Organizational factors of school size, principal leadership style, and trust were the focus of a study by Bryk and Camburn (1999). They concluded that professional communities were found in elementary schools that had less than 350 students. However, small school sizes did not cause the professional communities. Trust was the strongest facilitator and facilitative leadership was an important variable. School compositional factors examined were racial diversity of faculty,

gender, turnover, and neighborhood context. This part of their study revealed that African American and veteran teachers had higher levels of professional community.

Stein (1998) demonstrated how three elementary schools developed professional learning communities using different processes. The Community School District #2 in Pittsburgh made a commitment to dramatically change the schools. Stein studied how the changes occurred and found that each was different. Her case study explained strategies used to create and maintain professional learning communities. All three principals were newly appointed and had unique style. The first was assertive and direct, the second was a facilitator, and the third was knowledgeable and well accepted by staff and community. Although going about the task in different ways, these three principals achieved the same goal of creating learning communities. The following commonalities were documented (Stein, 1998).

1. This project was a multi-year commitment.
2. There was student focus on instruction and learning issues.
3. De-privatizing the work of principals and practice of teaching using innovative strategies such as coaching, implementing multi-grade classes, and cross grade groups were incorporated.
4. Principals knew their teachers.
5. Teachers were empowered and supported by the schools and districts.
6. Community learning must be for all community members.

A longitudinal study was done by Shields and Seltzer (1997) on two schools where the majority of the population was Navajo. Issues of language, community goals and culture, and values were raised. The community was divided on whether to have bilingual studies. In trying to integrate the Navaho culture into the curriculum, educators were faced with issues of witchcraft, religion, and cultural ceremonies. What appeared to be a homogeneous community,

proved to be one that is very diverse in nature; “unity within diversity instead of unity from diversity” (p. 426).

“The principal’s challenge is not persuading the staff of benefits, but helping them experience those benefits” (Burnett, 2002, p. 51). Burnett reflected on how her school formed their community. The first step included interviewing small groups of teachers to find out their needs. They wanted more time to work collaboratively. She created a master schedule that allowed more time for teachers. Meetings were scheduled once a month. The next step was to provide a purpose. Team norms and protocols were established. Team learning was based on student data and student achievement. Burnett established a feedback system that ensured communication. The plan for developing a professional learning community was embedded in the school improvement plan. Integration allowed for working smarter, not harder. A principal must be committed to change and therefore be prepared to move beyond intentions to actions.

As a principal, Tanner (2003) saw her leadership behaviors as the key to progress. She provided opportunity for growth, empowerment, modeled learning, refocused teachers on benefits of student learning, and helped build relationships. She also fostered reflective thinking, encouraged changes in thinking and practice, and developed her ability to influence teachers. Tanner transformed her school guided by a synthesis of research. The best practices that evolved included focus on student learning, building faculty capacity, professional learning and development. She conceptualized that professional development was key to the progress of a professional learning community. Effective professional development met students’ needs, allowed teachers to experiment, provided time for transfer into classroom practice, and provided the context for dialog. Teachers worked to develop collective understanding and student outcomes.

A study by Phillips (1995) analyzed and reflected on a timeline for creating a learning community in a kindergarten through grade eight school. During the first three months of school, research topics were identified, focus groups were formed, and recommendations were made to the school board. The middle school teachers did not want to be involved. A solution to this problem was to add more members to the group. This solution was not successful. It was then decided to implement a school-wide philosophy. The faculty revisited the previous philosophy and a committee was set up to facilitate creation of a new philosophy. Staff members were involved in activities that revealed personality types and core beliefs.

Toward the end of the school year, a school-wide philosophy was adopted. A large matrix of teams and their belief statements was created and placed centrally to ensure visibility. This gave an organized representation of plans that lead to concrete actions. One concrete plan to use portfolios for parent, student, and teacher conferences was very successful. The middle school group acknowledged its success and became more involved. They planned to attend a summer institute at the University of Maine. The summer was a time for reflections examination of the gap between expectations and outcomes (Phillips, 1995).

The need to be supported and collaborative practices were commonalities were found in multi-institutional organizations and individual schools that implemented learning communities (Bryk & Camburn, 1999; Burnett, 2002; Mullen & Kochan, 2000). Deprivatization of practice was reported to be a core practice (Bryk & Camburn, 1999; Stein, 1998). Three principals developed schedules, timelines, and protocols in order to implement learning communities (Burnett, 2002; Phillips, 1995; Tanner, 2003). Shields and Seltzer (1997) cautioned what appeared to be a homogenous community proved to be very diverse. The assumption should be made that in any community, there is diversity.

Lucent Learning Community (LLC) Project

In 2000-2001, Lucent Technologies Foundation awarded a grant to a southeastern school district in the United States for the implementation of adult learning communities within its schools that would transform each school into a PLC. In 2004-05, 16 schools were involved in the project. Participation of staff members in the Lucent Learning Community (LLC) project rose by 78% from 2003-04 to 2004-05 (Blasik, 2005). Earlier research on this project was conducted by Yendol-Silva (2003) who examined how PLCs were implemented and developed for five schools over a period of three years. She reported that the learning community offered teachers a safe, comfortable, and morale-building learning environment. Yendol-Silva contended that focusing on procedure and missing the richness of experiences were hurdles to building a learning community. She inferred that: (a) school leadership has to actively support LLC implementation, (b) LLC can lead to collaboration, (c) effective coaches need to be utilized, and (d) there needs to be an understanding that other initiatives will be conflicting.

LLCs were implemented in various ways. Some schools formed small groups while other schools had school-wide implementation. Generally, LLC groups consisted of 6 to 10 teachers and administrators. Blasik (2005) described the implementation of three types of learning communities. The first type included a small group of teachers and the principal. This group or learning community collaborated to focus on one question and proceeded to answer it through the inquiry model. A school may have more than one of these learning communities. Type two communities consisted of several groups where each group is a community and led by teacher facilitators. These groups also had a focus question and utilized the inquiry process to examine it. Type three communities included teacher leaders who were knowledgeable in learning community strategies and initiated activities including reviewing student work and discussions. The entire faculty was involved and met regularly over a period of time. There was sustained

inquiring and action planning. There were often one or more type one communities within a type three community.

The school district's Human Resource Development (HRD) (2003) identified critical elements of adult learning communities as: (a) collective responsibility of staff; (b) focus on a shared educational purpose; and (c) collaboration among staff to achieve purpose. When adults participate in learning communities, they gain the skills needed to transform their school into a professional learning community. A rubric was developed as a guide and evaluative tool for transforming schools into professional learning communities. It included six criteria and was used as an ongoing planning, monitoring, and evaluative tool: (a) shared norms; (b) focus/goals; (c) collaboration; (d) data collection and analysis; (e) de-privatization of practice; and (f) reflective practice (Human Resources Development, 2003). Each criterion was defined, explained, and included a continuum to indicate the level of accomplishment. The rubric was utilized in this study to guide interview questions and compare and contrast responses with the standards set forth in the rubric (see Appendix A).

Blasik (2005) evaluated the project across the district and recommended that the district continue funding after the grant period ended in 2005-06. Participants were positive on the impact of PLCs on professional development, collaboration, and student learning. Learning communities functioned as open, collaborative environments. Participants met regularly to critique teachers' work, analyze students' performance, address issues in inquiry format, assess students' work based on predetermined criteria, and reflect on their practices. The principal's role was reviewed. A recommendation was made to strengthen principal participation, leadership and commitment to LLC. New principals either neglected to continue the LLC project or delegated the responsibility to assistant principals.

In interviews, the grant coordinator emphasized a need for a strong administrative commitment to LLC and the importance of the principal's role throughout the implementation process for understanding the model and its purpose, learning best practices, and networking and collaborating with other principals. (Blasik, 2005, p. 10)

The LLC project impacted professional development greatly. Participants responded to survey items in three categories: support, collaboration, and school climate. Prior and current implementation of professional development was compared. Teachers agreed that administrative support was stronger, more collaboration occurred between teachers and administrators, and the school climate encouraged more trust among peers in the LLC model as compared to prior professional development models. Results from an open-ended survey item revealed the main impact of LLC was the collaboration that occurred among peers. Surveys also indicated the impact of the LLC model on instructional skills. More participants agreed that their instructional skills improved in the LLC model compared to prior professional development models. LLC research findings indicated that an environment of support, collaboration, and a learning community greatly impacted teachers' classroom practices (Blasik, 2005). Teachers viewed this professional development to be more effective in support, collaboration, and school climate than previous models. However, lack of time was cited as a disadvantage to the LLC model.

A southeastern district in the United States implemented adult learning communities in 16 of its schools funded by a grant. Learning communities offered a safe, comfortable, and morale-building learning environment for teachers (Yendol-Silva, 2003). Three types of communities were implemented: a small group lead by the principal; several small groups lead by facilitators; and one group with the entire faculty. The school district's Human Resource Development (HRD) (2003) developed a rubric with criteria to monitor and evaluate the learning communities. Research studies indicated that principals needed to be actively involved in the implementation of learning communities (Blasik, 2005; Yendol-Silva, 2003). Blasik

(2005) recommended that funding continue after the grant period ended because the project had a positive impact on professional development, collaborations, and student learning.

Summary of Research Findings

Schlechty (1990) described schools as communities where learning was patterned according to the community needs. Sergiovanni (2000) suggested that different kinds of communities could exist, and for different purposes. Rowden (2001) stated that learning communities could achieve their vision in different ways. They could follow one path, overcoming obstacles by focusing on the vision. They could also attain the vision by taking different paths, constantly reviewing and revising goals based on external factors or unforeseen occurrences. Learning communities are environments where everyone learns (Barth, 2001; Speck, 1999). Everyone is connected by shared norms and values (Calderwood, 2000; Ritchhart, 2002; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Speck (1999) posited there is no formula for developing a school learning community.

Research indicates that organizational learning merits attention (Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004). A learning organization and a professional learning community are referred to as having similar characteristics. (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Senge, 1990). Griffith (2003) suggests that an organizational model found in schools that promote morale boosting and cohesion could increase student achievement. D'Agostino (2000) suggests that modifying instructional practices and school organizational structure also increases student achievement. Evaluation policies must be in place (Speck, 1999). An organizational climate that is open to innovation positively affects teacher growth (Hopkins, 1990). Huffman and Jacobson (2003) add the PLC concept includes the provision of a safe environment and collaboration.

Leaders are responsible for building learning organizations (Leonard & Leonard, 1999; Senge, 1990; Speck, 1999). Researchers identified various styles and characteristics of principals. However, the culture of an organization should be one of learning (Renchler, 1992; Speck, 1999). Leaders contribute to student achievement indirectly through organizational variables (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Klug, 1989; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Scheerens, 1992). Klug (1989) indicated that leaders contribute to increased student achievement by directly controlling situational factors in which learning occurs. However, more studies need to focus on school climate, organization, and outcomes (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996).

Learning organizations provide the foundation for implementing innovative professional development (Blasik, 2005). Researchers acknowledged a link between professional development and student achievement (Richardson, 1998; Strahan, 2004; Youngs & King, 2002). Job-embedded learning was referenced as an essential component of quality professional development (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Killion & Hirsh, 2001; Reeves, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Peer evaluation was found to be the most successful professional development activity (Wood & Anderson, 2005). Principals must embrace coaching as a form of professional development (Shepherd, 1996). Devoting time added to the quality of professional development activities (Dufour & Berkey, 1995; Leithwood, 1990).

Collaboration is the common element in reviews and research pertaining to professional development that positively impacts student achievement (Grotsky & Gamoran, 2003; Hopkins, 1990; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; Leithwood, 1990; Parson, 1999; Reitzug, 1994; Richardson, 1998; Shiu, 2003; Speck, 1999; Wood & Anderson, 2005; Youngs & King, 2002). One study revealed that collaboration had clear effects on culture but it did not translate to greater

instructional focus (Supovitz, 2002). Brown University Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) indicated that collaboration was limited to building up the group. Research indicates that there are processes for collaboration that could lead to increased student achievement (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Parson, 1999; Speck, 1999; Shiu, 2003; Supovitz, 2002). Koehler and Baxter (1997) believed that dependency among educators lead to more power for all learners.

Collaborative practice was a commonality found in multi-institutional organizations and individual schools that implemented learning communities (Bryk & Camburn, 1999; Burnett, 2002; Mullen & Kochan, 2000). De-privatization of practice was also a common practice (Bryk & Camburn, 1999; Stein, 1998). Three principals developed schedules, timelines, and protocols in order to implement learning communities (Burnett, 2002; Phillips, 1995; Tanner, 2003). Shields and Seltzer (1997) cautioned what appeared to be a homogenous community proved to be very diverse. The assumption should be made that in any community, there is diversity.

The case in this study was involved in the Lucent Learning Community (LLC) project. Other studies completed on the same project indicated that teachers benefitted from being involved in communities. However, principals needed to be actively involved in the implementation of learning communities (Blasik, 2005; Yendol-Silva, 2003). Blasik (2005) recommended that funding continue after the grant period ended because the project had a positive impact on professional development, collaborations, and student learning.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of a principal in implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Using the qualitative paradigm, interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed. This study adds to the body of research by conceptualizing the implementation of PLCs at Lily Elementary School. It outlines the strategies that were utilized and the challenges that were encountered. The final product offers “a rich and complex explanatory schema of the social phenomena” (Sherman & Webb, 2001, p. 126).

Theoretical Perspective

This qualitative study was designed to be exploratory and descriptive. The researcher was involved in discovering critical aspects of the phenomenon (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2002). The research design was flexible and open in order to explore the phenomenon in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative data added depth, detail, and understanding to the concept of learning communities. Processes and descriptions in implementing learning communities were analyzed in order to understand and explain the phenomenon. (Patton 2002). The theoretical perspective of this study incorporated an interpretive case study.

Interpretivist Mode of Inquiry

An interpretivist mode of inquiry assumes that reality is socially constructed and variables are interrelated and multifaceted. The purpose of such a study is to understand and interpret the phenomenon being studied. This study involved the researcher as the instrument, the search for patterns, and descriptive reporting (Glesne, 1999). Literature findings in Chapter 2 revealed the complexity of a learning community and the interrelatedness of diversity, leadership effects, collaboration, professional development, and organizational models within learning

communities. This study sought to understand how the principal of one elementary school implemented PLCs and maintained them for five years.

Case Study Approach

A well-built case study is “holistic and context sensitive” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). It may incorporate one organization or unit of analysis. Its purpose is to gather comprehensive information about a phenomenon, focusing on the process. The process of building a case study involves three steps. The first step is to gather data about the organization and participants. The second step is to organize and edit the data into a manageable file. The third step is to write a narrative that tells a story about the organization (Patton, 2002). The case in this study was an elementary school. The researcher interviewed the principal and three learning community coaches, observed meetings, and reviewed documents. Analyses and interpretation of these data present a description of how this school implemented professional learning communities for five years. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained that a qualitative study “calls for sensitivity to the nuances in data, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility in design, and a large dose of creativity” (p. 34).

Research Questions

- **Research Question 1.** How is the school organized to incorporate learning communities?
- **Research Question 2.** What strategies are essential in implementing learning communities?
- **Research Question 3.** What challenges were encountered in implementing learning communities?

Context of the Study

Lucent Technologies Foundation awarded a grant to a southeastern school district in the United States to implement innovative professional development programs in 2000-01. Learning communities were created in schools selected by the district. Principals and teachers received

district-level and in-school training and assistance. In 2004-05, 16 schools were involved in the project. The focus of this study was Lily Elementary School that began participating in LLC project in 2003-2004.

Lily Elementary School had 1108 students from pre-kindergarten to fifth grade and 112 staff members. The ethnic breakdown of students was: 53% White non-Hispanic; 27% Hispanic; 9% Black non-Hispanic; 6% Multiracial; and 5% Asian or Pacific Islander. There were 512 girls and 596 boys. The school implemented nine school-wide learning communities and sustained them for five years; during the final two years of the LLC grant period and for three years after the grant period ended, which was the time of this study. This school maintained the highest grade for state accountability during the five years of this study. According to the federal accountability plan, adequate progress was made for three years. There was significant growth in reading and mathematics for all students. Students reading at or above grade level increased from 70% in 2003-04 to 75% in 2007-08. Students at or above grade level in mathematics increased from 69% in 2003-04 to 79% in 2007-08. Students' writing scores increased from 77% in 2003-04 to 87% in 2007-08.

Participants

The primary participants in this study included the principal and three teachers who were coaches of learning communities. Other participants were 18 coaches that lead nine school-wide learning communities and participated in their own learning communities. Two of their meetings were observed.

Susan was an elementary school principal for 13 years and at Lily Elementary for five years. Her previous career opportunities included being a classroom teacher, reading and instructional technology teacher, and assistant principal. As a new assistant principal, Susan became involved in a statewide initiative to bring about changes via the school improvement

process. She had the opportunity to attend trainings with her principal and network with other administrative teams across the county. She collaborated with peers, learned how to implement change, became familiar with adult learning theory, and developed an appreciation for teamwork and shared leadership. During that time, Susan identified herself as a servant leader and recognized that she did not have to be the manager or supervisor in order to be a leader. Participating in the statewide initiative for school improvement had the most impact on her professional growth. She developed skills that impacted her leadership as a principal and enabled her to value the concept of learning communities. Susan presented a unique perspective of her school before, during, and after the LLC grant period.

Jill was a teacher in the same county for 13 years. This was her fifth year at Lily Elementary School. She had experience in teaching most grade levels and was currently a classroom teacher for fourth grade. Jill became a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) while teaching at Lily Elementary and credited the process as having the most influence on her professional growth. It taught her how to reflect, evaluate her practice, and consider whether each lesson was accomplishing its purpose of impacting student achievement positively. She was encouraged by Susan to attend the summer training in her first year at Lily Elementary School and was involved in learning communities for five years. Jill was first appointed coach for a learning community, and later became the lead coach. As the lead coach, she planned and facilitated coaches learning community meetings with Susan.

Pearl was a classroom teacher for 14 years and at Lily Elementary School since its conception, 11 years ago. She taught kindergarten, grades two, three, four, and five and was a fourth grade teacher at the time of this study. Pearl also went through the NBCT process while at Lily Elementary and recognized Jill as her mentor. The intense NBCT process gave her a deeper

desire to change her approach to instruction. She was challenged to take a closer look at her teaching and think of creative ways to reach all students.

Claudia received her physical education degree from Brazil. After she came to the United States of America, she added elementary education to her certificate. She was a substitute teacher at Lily Elementary School for two years before becoming certified, and seven years after receiving her elementary certificate. She continuously participated in professional development activities and is certified in English as a Second Language and Gifted Education. She was a cultural education specialist at the time of this study and taught all grade levels on a rotational schedule. Both Claudia and Pearl were on staff at Lily Elementary before and after learning communities were implemented.

Methodology

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) contend, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding people’s experience in context. The natural setting is the place where the researcher is most likely to discover, or uncover, what is to be known about the phenomenon of interest” (p. 45).

Purposeful Sampling

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) advise that the methodology of a qualitative study should include a “sampling strategy and the people or settings that will make up the sample, data collection process and procedures for data analysis” (p. 65). Patton (2002) suggests that people and organizations should be selected based on their richness of information. He writes, “they are information rich and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (p. 40). Patton adds that the sampling strategy should support the purpose of the study and should be judged in context.

Purposeful sampling was the strategy selected for this study. Lily Elementary School was one of three schools recommended by the district's LLC grant coordinator and selected because of the principal's openness to this study and the school's continuous implementation of learning communities. The principal and three learning community coaches were selected because they were passionate, committed, and believed that professional learning communities can improve teacher growth and student achievement. Their school implemented and sustained learning communities for a total of five years; during the LLC grant period and after the grant ended. The researcher and the principal selected the coaches. They were all involved in learning communities from the first year of implementation at their school. Their leadership roles in learning communities, diverse backgrounds, training, and commitment were also criteria for selection.

Researcher as Instrument

The human element in qualitative inquiry is both its strength and weakness—its strength in allowing human insight and experience to blossom into new understandings and ways of seeing the world, its potential weakness in being so heavily dependent on the inquirer's skills, training, intellect, discipline, and creativity. (Patton, 2002, p. 513)

The researcher was the instrument and brought her experience, training, and perspective to the study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2002). Her prior knowledge of learning communities was limited. University degree programs offered many opportunities to participate in groups. Each group was considered a learning community. Working in groups with peers proved to be beneficial for personal motivation, retention, and academic growth. It helped in strengthening listening skills and being open to understanding different perspectives. As an assistant principal, developing a learning community involved making plans for teachers' professional development that included book studies and curriculum planning. The National Board Certification process allowed the researcher to experience diversity of students'

contributions. Her experiences as a student, assistant principal, National Board Certified Teacher, and doctoral student gave limited knowledge of the concept of a learning community.

A broader perspective was developed after the literature review of this study. A learning community must embrace diversity. It requires systemic planning, process monitoring, and sustained commitment. The learning community is not defined as a single process and therefore remains elusive. Literature is positive about its impact on education. This study enabled the researcher to examine and experience this concept from educators who are impassioned about teaching and learning.

Initial investigation on school districts that implemented learning communities was conducted via the Internet. The district selected for this research received a substantial grant to implement learning communities in its schools over a period of five years. The researcher received contact information from a professor who was a member of her doctoral committee and subsequently visited the district, had a tour of the central office and was encouraged to pursue this research.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) propose the characteristics of a qualitative researcher included an ability to analyze situations, recognize her biases, think abstractly, listen intently, and be flexible and open to varying perspectives. The researcher's education, professional experiences, and passion for expanding her knowledge of a learning community made this study a valuable addition to educational literature and personal professional development.

Data Collection

Useful ways of gathering data include: making observations, conducting interviews, and examining documents. (Glaser, 1978; Glesne, 1999; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Patton, 2002; Sherman & Webb, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher was the "collector of data" and the "culler of meaning from that data" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994 p. 46). Data were

collected from observations, interviews, and documents for this study from March 2008 to May 2008 and organized by the description of important processes, key issues, and answers to the interview questions (Patton, 2002).

Sherman and Webb (2001) admonish the researcher to be immersed in the social environment and experience the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives in order to understand and make new discoveries. Once the site was approved, the researcher began engaging herself in the social environment in order to observe and be aware of her own behaviors as well as those of the participants. Glesne (1999) adds that the researcher needs to be attentive to situations and interactions. The researcher was guided by the knowledge and findings of credible qualitative researchers that were referenced in this dissertation. Their recommendations are embedded in this study.

Observations

Patton (2002) advised that the world is viewed through open-minded observation. Direct observations in the setting help in understanding the context and allow the researcher to be open, allowing discoveries to emerge. When followed by interviews, observations help to develop a broad understanding of the setting and participants. Glesne (1999) suggested that observations occur before the interview question. Two Coaches Learning Community meetings were observed for this study. Seven coaches were in attendance at the first meeting and six in the second meeting. Susan and Jill were also present for and facilitated both meetings. Observations occurred after the first interviews were conducted, but before the last interviews. A total of six hours of the meetings were audio-taped and 25 pages of transcripts were reviewed. Observations helped in understanding the perspectives of coaches, Susan's interaction with them, and the issues they faced in their learning community meetings. See Table 3-1 for the Schedule of observations.

Table 3-1. Schedule of observations

| Month | Meeting Observed |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| April | Principal and coaches meeting #1 |
| April | Principal and coaches meeting #2 |

Interviews

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that interview questions and observations should be based on literature findings and from fieldwork. Questions need to be open-ended to allow participants the opportunity to share important information. Questions are knowledge based, asking who, what, where, when, and why? Theoretical questions address relationships, comparisons, and judgments. They help the researcher make connections among concepts.

Patton (2002) recommended the use of different types of questions that relate to behaviors, opinions, feelings, knowledge, senses, and demographics. Time adds another dimension to questions: past, present, and future. Two types of interviews were incorporated into this study: (a) informal or open conversational interview; and (b) standardized or structured open-ended interview (Patton, 2002; Glesne, 1999). Standardized questions were prepared in advance and all participants were asked the same questions. Questions also emerged while interviewing. In-depth interviews allow clarification and verification on experiences (Glesne, 1999; Sherman & Webb, 2001). See Appendix A for three interview protocols that illustrate the use of the above mentioned recommendations of researchers.

A total of 12 interviews were conducted, audio-taped and transcribed. The principal and three coaches were interviewed three times each. All interview transcripts were given to the participants after each interview for the purpose of member checking. Unstructured periodic feedback for clarification also took place via email. The purpose of the first interview was to gather background information and educational experiences. Research questions from the second

interview were designed based upon the literature findings in Chapter 2 of this study. They solicited information on skills necessary, collaborative practices, professional development, roles and responsibilities of leaders, and learning community impact on student learning. The third interview allowed participants to reflect on their learning, the meaning of learning communities, and what worked best for them. A total of 470 minutes of audio-tapes and 124 pages of transcripts were collected. See Table 3-2 for the Schedule of interviews.

Table 3-2. Schedule of interviews

| Interviewee | | Month | Type | Purpose |
|-------------|---|-------|-------------------------|---|
| Principal | | March | Structured and Informal | To document past experiences and to document implementation and sustenance on LLC project |
| Coach | 1 | March | Structured | To document past experiences |
| Coach | 2 | March | Structured | To document past experiences |
| Coach | 3 | March | Structured | To document past experiences |
| Principal | | May | Informal | To follow up on first interviews and observation of meeting in March |
| Coach | 1 | May | Informal | To document implementation and sustenance on LLC project |
| Coach | 2 | May | Informal | To document implementation and sustenance on LLC project |
| Coach | 3 | May | Informal | To document implementation and sustenance on LLC project |
| Principal | | May | Informal | To solicit clarification and/or reflections if needed |
| Coach | 1 | May | Informal | To solicit clarification and/or reflections if needed |
| Coach | 2 | May | Informal | To solicit clarification and/or reflections if needed |
| Coach | 3 | May | Informal | To solicit clarification and/or reflections if needed |

Documents

Examining documents add to the understanding of the phenomenon. They give direction prior to observations and interviews (Patton, 2002). Archival data from the time this school began participating in the LLC project were examined. They included two binders kept by the

principal with notes from the initial district training, agendas, teachers' participatory responses at meetings, reflections, and survey responses from 16 participants that represented Lily Elementary.

Other documents reviewed included Susan's end of year surveys, 34 pages of notes from previous coaches' meetings, and the researcher's journal. Susan had her staff completed a survey each year for the purpose of monitoring their perceptions of learning communities. The surveys from 2007 and 2008 included a total of 74 member responses that were reviewed. Responses were summarized in 11 pages.

Data References

Data sources from interviews, meetings, and documents as cited in this study could be identified in the following ways. From the interviews, each participant's first initial was used followed by the interview number, then the question number. For example: S1-10 represents Susan's response in Interview 1, Question 10. Data from coaches learning community meetings were identified as follows:

- CM1-S: Community Meeting 1, Susan's comment
- CM2-J: Community Meeting 2, Jill's comment
- CM1-P: Community Meeting 1, Pearl's comment
- CM2-C: Community Meeting 2, Claudia's comment

Other coaches whose comments were stated were given numbers. For example: CM1-Coach2 represents Community Meeting 1, Coach 2. Documents were identified as their data were cited in the text.

Data Analysis

To move from data organization to meaning, three stages were considered: description, analysis, and interpretation. Description relied on notes and transcripts. Analysis involved a

search for broad meanings and patterns. Interpretation highlighted pertinent details of the findings (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2000; Walcott, 1994).

The constant comparative method involves continuously comparing, reviewing, and revising units of meaning. Categories, rules for inclusion, and a reasonable reconstruction were developed (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The researcher looked for patterns and compared incident to incident, incident to category, and, finally, category to category. In addition, the researcher compared different groups of participants (Glesne, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Coding was utilized to organize, classify, find patterns, and make connections in data (Glesne, 1999). Glaser (1978) advises the researcher to do her own coding since codes and categories are not preset and are generated continuously. “The code gives the researcher a condensed, abstract view with scope of the data that includes otherwise seemingly disparate phenomenon” (p. 55).

Three levels of coding were essential in moving from organization to finding meaning in the data (Sherman & Webb, 2001). The first level codes broke down the data into small pieces and gave direction and focus for developing categories (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each participant’s interview response was broken into small pieces of data and compared. The second level of codes was categories. Spradley (1979) explains “a category is an array of distinct things that we treat as if they were equivalent” (p. 98). Categories were identified from the first level coding of the data. Concepts from the literature review of this study also helped in identifying categories.

The third level of coding is identified as domains (Spradley, 1979), abstract constructs (Sherman & Webb, 2001), or dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Rules for inclusion established a relationship among the categories (Spradley, 1979). The researcher was solely

responsible for coding, analyzing, and interpreting the data from this study. Comparisons and cross case analyses between the principal and coaches were completed. See Appendix C for an example of the data analyses that are described in this section.

Data Interpretation

“Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found” (Patton, 2002 p. 480).

Findings must offer explanations and attach meaning to data that may otherwise seem disordered. Glesne (1999) states that, in order to make interpretations,

The researchers must gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants. Their qualitative study designs, therefore, generally focus on in-depth, long-term interaction with relevant people in one or several sites. The researcher becomes the main research instrument as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants. (p. 5)

The data collected for this study allowed the researcher to understand how the principal implemented learning communities, the processes involved, strategies used, and the challenges that were encountered. The documents that were analyzed gave the perspective of all staff members in the school. The principal’s interviews helped in understanding her role as the leader and main decision-maker. The coaches’ interviews allowed cross case analyses and gave a broader understanding of the implementation of learning communities. Finally, the principal and coaches learning community meetings that were observed gave insight into the principal’s role and her interactions with the coaches who were leaders of nine school-wide learning communities.

Validity

“The validity, meaningfulness, and insights from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size” (Patton, 2002, p. 245). This study examined how one school implemented professional learning communities. The commitment of the principal,

available documents, and the researcher's skills added to the information richness of this study. This study cannot be replicated since the purpose was to present a unique perspective on the phenomenon being studied (Sherman & Webb, 2001).

Researchers recommend several criteria for ensuring validity of a qualitative study including triangulation of data, member checking, and peer review (Creswell, 1998; Glaser, 1978; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Data collection included the examination of documents accumulated over a period of five years, observation of meetings, and the responses of three interviews from four participants. Member checks were conducted after each interview. The participants involved in the interviews and at least one member of the researcher's committee reviewed a condensed data file.

Patton (2002) suggests cross-case analysis, attention to details when discovering patterns and relationships, examining context, and understanding the whole system are central to a valid qualitative study. The constant comparative method that was used to analyze data incorporated cross-case analysis. Patton (2002) admonishes the researcher to maintain a balance between the authenticity of data interpretation and an awareness of her biases. The researcher reviewed transcripts of interviews and observations continually to ensure accuracy of data and to identify possible biases. She was also trained to recognize her biases in preparation for scoring National Board Certified Teacher entries.

Credibility

Triangulation increases credibility and validates data. Each data source has limitations and personal bias can influence the recording of interview responses (Patton, 2002). This study included the use of multiple sources of data that allowed for triangulation. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were examined and crosschecked.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that trustworthiness is synonymous to believability. The researcher was trained to be descriptive, analytical, and reflective in her writings in order to achieve her National Board Certified Teacher status. The researcher has knowledge of different types of writing and kept them separate in order to maintain authenticity. Subsequently, they were integrated to create new insights. Glesne (1999) cautions that it is essential to build trust as it helps establish rapport. Responses vary according the level of trust the researcher is able to establish. “As researcher, you want to learn the respondents’ beliefs, experiences, and views rather than to persuade them of your perspective” (Glesne, 1999, p. 83). The researcher invested time for preliminary conversations, observations, and interviews to ensure trustworthiness.

Conclusion

This research is an interpretive case study with findings that contribute to the body of research concerning the implementation of professional learning communities. Purposeful sampling allowed the selection of the school and its participants based on the richness of information they offered. Units of meaning, categories, and coding organized data and were gathered from several sources. The constant comparative method permitted triangulation of data, continuous comparisons, cross-case analyses, and revisions.

The outcome “is not a generalization of results, but a deeper understanding of experience from the perspectives of the participants” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 44). A balance between objectivity and sensitivity when interpreting data was maintained. Objectivity refers to the accuracy of data; sensitivity refers to creative analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The conclusion of this study confirmed what we know, gave insights on misconceptions, and highlighted new findings (Patton, 2002)

CHAPTER 4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data for this study included observations of two coaches learning community meetings, three interviews with each of three participants, and examination of documents. Interview questions were based on literature findings in Chapter 2. To move from data organization to meaning, a three tier coding system was developed. The first level of coding identified small units of meaning. The second level codes identified categories and the third level revealed abstract constructs (Sherman & Webb, 2001). The constant comparative method and cross-case analyses were continually utilized while developing categories and identifying concepts.

Data collection, analyses, and the organization of this chapter were guided by the following research questions designed for this study.

- **Research Question 1.** How is the school organized to incorporate learning communities?
- **Research Question 2.** What strategies are essential in implementing learning communities?
- **Research Question 3.** What challenges were encountered in implementing learning communities?

The first part of this chapter, *Five Years Earlier*, provides an overview of Susan's first impressions and perception of Lily Elementary when she became principal. It was evident to her that she needed to overcome the barriers of communication that existed; thus, she decided to participate in the Lucent Learning Community (LLC) project that the district implemented. This chapter is further divided into three major sections that illustrate processes, strategies, and challenges that occurred. The first section, *Changing School Culture*, includes the steps that Susan took to change the culture of Lily Elementary from isolationistic to congenial, collegial communities. The second section, *Building Staff Capacity*, illustrates how she built capacity of her staff in order to increase school improvement. It also illustrates the value that Susan placed

on professional development and describes opportunities she provided for her staff to be leaders and learners. The third section, *Challenges Encountered*, outlines the complexities in progressing toward a collaborative culture. The chapter concludes with a summary entitled *Five Years Later*.

Five Years Earlier

Susan arrived as principal of Lily Elementary to find that the members of her staff still identified primarily with the three schools that has been combined to form Lily Elementary almost four years ago. Despite their four years together, the staff was still segregated by their previous schools and interacted little across those prior boundaries. Susan identified the need for changes in the culture and climate of the school. She described the first impression of the school.

There were teachers from three distinct schools that came to create this school A few teachers were new and within two hours of being here, I could tell you who were from this school and who were from that school. There was a need to try to break down some of that. Considering that the school had been in existence for four years before I came and that was still evident, was interesting. [S2-6]

Susan gave several examples of the lack of communication and collaboration that existed among staff.

The kids weren't taught reading. If you were an ESE [exceptional student education] student, I was hearing regular education teachers saying, 'Oh they get reading in [their ESE classes] and the [ESE] teacher would be saying, 'I just help them with the reading they get in class.' I wasn't happy with that. Now every child gets reading in the regular class and then the VE teacher does an additional dose of reading. [S2-6]

There was also lack of communication among the combination grade level teams that existed.

Susan explained that she created specific grade level teams after her first year at Lily Elementary to help people interact.

Instead of having a kindergarten team, a first grade team, and a second grade team, there were two K-1 teams, two 2-3 teams, and two 4-5 teams, who couldn't get along with one another. After that first year, we were able to make grade level teams. It seems to have worked for us. So trying to get over that hump for people to talk to one another, trying to find a valuable way, I could allot the time. [S1-6]

In addition, although some structures existed that encouraged and supported collaborative teacher learning, these structures were not organized in ways that maximized teacher learning. For example, professional learning communities (PLCs) existed but operated as book clubs rather than PLCs.

The previous principal might select eight professional books, and have [teachers] sign up by book. They met all year, once a month, and then at the end of the year, [were asked] ‘tell us about your book.’ It was a nice process but other than having people sign up for [and read a book] I wasn’t really sure that we were getting a whole lot out them. I heard a lot of frustration. If you were a person who was serious about this, you were reading your book and wanted to go and discuss it. You might be in a room with somebody who would not have read the book, who could care less, and who was always off task. There was no facilitator for the group. It was just show up and do it. [S2-9]

Jill, the coaches’ coach gave insight from her perspective. “When I first came here learning communities were just getting off the ground. Before that, I guess they had them but it was read the book and discuss the book. There wasn’t a lot of collaboration.” [J2-17]

After experiencing the problems and frustrations with the book clubs, Susan “thought about getting involved with LLC.” [S2-9] She heard about the LLC project from an area director who was originally selected to participate in it. Subsequently, she contacted its director to ask if Lily Elementary could also participate. The director “saw that we were dedicated, and decided to bring us in on the last two years” of the project. [S1-4]

The first year Lily Elementary participated in the LLC project, 16 teachers from the school received training by the district. Training included establishing the roles of school leadership and identifying norms for meetings. The teachers that attended the initial training completed district surveys. The intent of the survey was to determine participants’ skills and school practices prior to implementing learning communities at their school. It included three parts: participants’ levels of experience, current school practices, and current learning. Survey responses offered a starting point in the evolution of learning communities at the school. Results suggested that more than

50% of teachers had first hand experiences participating in learning communities but had little experience facilitating communities (see Table 4-1). However, it is important to note that in the narrative section of the survey, participants referred to the book clubs and learning communities synonymously.

Table 4-1. Participants' levels of experience in learning community practices

| Experience In: | Facilitated Groups | Had First Hand Experience | Had No Experience |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Learning communities | 5 | 9 | 2 |
| Using data to change practices | 4 | 10 | 2 |
| Collegial conversations | 4 | 10 | 2 |
| Peer observations | 3 | 5 | 8 |

The survey also gave an indication of the teachers' perspectives of current practices at their school. It utilized a scale of one to five, where five was strongly agree and one was strongly disagree. Items elicited responses concerning support, peer observations, data, risk-taking, trust, and respect. Thirteen (13) of 16 participants strongly agreed that administrative support for learning communities was strong. Eleven (11) of 16 participants somewhat agreed that teachers had opportunities for peer observations and feedback. This item received the weakest score. There were no responses that indicated teachers perceived any element was missing.

In the final part of the survey, participants were asked to identify current learning community practices at their school. Several learning community activities were described. As previously mentioned, book clubs were one key activity. Book club activities centered on professional books, selected by teachers. Teachers met monthly and prepared presentations for the entire staff at the end of the year. A second activity was an effort to implement teams such as Child Study and Leadership Teams. Third, three groups at school focused on improving student achievement, behavior, and new educator support. Finally, other groups addressed getting along with each other, improving reading and mathematics scores, and team and staff meetings.

Susan's past professional development experiences and district training seemed to be an asset in developing learning communities. She "learned a lot about designing, how you mix groups up, or how you can use certain techniques to gain information in a short period of time." [S1-3] Susan created teams for each grade level to encourage more communication among her staff. She identified the need for the book clubs to have leaders and took the opportunity of participating in the LLC project to implement learning communities. Susan and Jill worked together to develop learning communities. Jill was committed to collaboration instead of isolation.

You learn from [past experiences]. You try to take what has worked and what has not worked. In the past, I worked as an island, and I will not do that anymore. So in that sense, that's where I'm headed. [J1-7]

The staff at Lily Elementary was segregated and did not communicate much with each other. Susan wanted to encourage collaboration. "I've always felt that collaboration among us brings out the better product. We learn from one another, even if we learn what not to do... so I wanted that climate of collaboration." [S1-6] They had the experience of participating in book clubs and referred to them as learning communities. Susan wanted the book clubs to function as school-wide learning communities but had to begin the process of moving away from an isolationist culture, and developing congenial interactions among staff, toward a collaborative and collegial culture.

Changing School Culture

Huffman and Jacobson (2003) ascertained that the purpose of principal leadership was to provide a safe environment and a democratic organization. Peale (2003) added that a principal's leadership affected climate, instruction, and instructional organization. Susan's plan for Lily Elementary included reorganizing the school in order to create an open climate that would

encourage collaborative collegiality and ultimately impact instructional practices and student achievement.

Susan began the process by implementing changes to encourage more communication and interactions among all staff members “because if you never come in contact with someone you would never build a relationship with them.” [S2-11] Activities that appeared to be fundamental were necessary because of the segregation that existed at the school. It was important for everyone to know about their colleagues on a personal and professional level in order to begin developing collegial relationships. Susan created a network of connections that included opportunities for members of the staff to get to know each other via newsletters, whole school activities, creating grade level teams, and transforming book clubs into learning communities. Susan stated, “I do a lot of that with conscious thought.” [S2-11]

Building Respect and Personal Connections

Susan believed that respect and personal connections would be achieved by attention to fundamental processes that existed. Her belief is evidenced in the ways she utilized the staff newsletter and extra curricula activities. The newsletter included personal and professional items. Susan believed that sharing news about colleagues helped to create a caring community. It also helped colleagues to make personal connections with each other.

People have gone through some tough times. Someone’s son passed away and people really rallied [for her] a number of years ago. That loss doesn’t just go away. So we try to highlight some of those things. Maybe somebody’s dog died [or] somebody has a child getting married. [We put] any of those kinds of things that happen [in the newsletter] so that there is a personal connection. [S2-11]

Susan wanted to extend the caring community by including news about family and friends in the newsletters.

We put it all in there because these are our people and we hear about them. I had someone say one time, ‘It’s just so much bad news.’ I said I know but think about what we put in there. [We] have a staff of about 120 to 130 people and put in [the news about]

their family, extended family, anybody who has ever worked here. If we hear about them we put them in. They are a tremendous circle of people. [S3-4]

One newsletter article allowed two teachers to realize that they had something in common. That connection would not have been made otherwise.

I was talking with one of my second grade teachers. She was talking about a teacher she admired but didn't really talk to too much. That teacher's child was getting married this year and this teacher got married this year. She said, 'You know we had something common to talk about.' [S2-11]

Susan stepped out of her comfort zone and encouraged others to have fun and be creative in writing articles for the newsletters because she believed it enabled her staff to make personal connections.

There's a section in the staff memo that, initially I was uncomfortable about adding. The secretary who types it up gives a fashion award. You know it's not educational. I'll see people parading back and forth in front of her desk so she notices what they're wearing. It gets people to laugh and talk about things. She and Jill are big American Idol fans. So they put their little paragraphs in there about American Idol. If you don't want to read it you don't have to read it. The following that we get on those little jokes or things, I think are good. [S2-11]

She explained that in a large school, planning and organizing were necessary in order to communicate respect. It was important that she communicated respect by keeping her staff regularly informed of current events and activities via the newsletters.

I think that's the respect to show to professional people, to say as a teacher, that in three weeks on Friday, there is an assembly for this. You can make your plans. Or Tuesday afternoons are reserved for staff meetings or learning communities depending what's coming up. Many times I don't have a staff meeting. But that way, you know not to schedule conferences on Tuesdays [or when] teams meet on Wednesdays. You know when those things happen. So it's not all of a sudden there's some meeting and you have a parent for a conference and you have to cancel. I like things to be organized. But I don't think that I'm not flexible as opportunities come up. We can change but you don't have to keep changing and be pulling the rug out [from under] people all the time. [S1-7]

In addition to the staff newsletter, Susan planned whole school activities that enabled more staff interactions. A cook out, staff appreciation activities, creative training events and a

staff kickball contest were all essential in changing the school culture from segregation to collaboration. She believed that people could have fun doing work.

We did a cook out just to get people to be silly. We [also] did some neat things for staff appreciation. Tracy and I worked on a Building Our Children's Future theme. People came in and had hardhats and breakfast. The next day we took the *roach coach* around and delivered refreshments to the classrooms and joked with them about imaginary safety issues [in their classrooms]. We [then] brought them in for an in-service safety training. We had "problems with electricians" so we did the Electric Slide. We gave certificates. People just laughed and really had a good time. There were some raffles. Monday is our fifth grade versus the staff kickball game. I'm very competitive. We've won every year. I really counted on my staff to make that happen. So although the work is hard I think that people are starting to see that they can have fun doing the work. [S3-4]

An interactive bulletin board in the front office generated conversation among all staff. It was kept current by a teacher.

One year she might have people bring in their fifth grade pictures or wedding pictures. She has been having people sign up by Class Best. Who was in the honor society? Who is a twin? It's just funny [to see] how much interest those boards generate. It gives people things that they talk about. I do think our school has a relatively warm kind of feel to it. People know each other and know a little bit about each other. [S2-11]

Pearl appreciated being kept informed. She explained that gaining information about the whole school helped her gain credibility.

You need to know what is going on at your school site. You need to know [the] administration expectations. You need to know what parents want [and] be involved with basically every aspect of the school. People and members of a group respect you when you are knowledgeable of what is going on at school. [P2-10]

Getting to know each other, learning about each other, and laughing together was an important first step in moving beyond an isolationist culture. Susan expected that such interactions would lead to professional connections.

Building a Professional Network

Susan built a professional network by creating grade level teams, a structure for bringing new hires into the network, and by implementing learning communities school-wide. Grade level teams were empowered to plan creatively and make decisions. She believed that they made

tremendous progress from not being able to get along to coordinating activities. One team coordinated a mathematics day where students rotated from class to class to do special activities. The fifth grade team collaborated on a team project, the parade of states. Susan was thrilled at their progress. Teachers and students worked together to complete a project. Teachers collaborated on curriculum, instruction, and coordinated their schedules.

Our fifth-grade had a parade of states. The kids built floats; they used skateboards, wagons, carts, and we had 50 floats, one for each state. Kids researched within their own classroom. Then they were put in teams of four to five, one child from each class. They had to work together with people they never worked with before. A grade level with eight teachers got together to coordinate their schedules and try to make all of that happen. I think that's real progress. [S2-3]

Susan was confident that the talents of her staff would become visible when they worked together instead of working in isolation. The fifth grade team not only planned and executed the parade of states but also involved the whole school in the project.

I felt like I had good teachers when I came here, but it was very much, a lot of isolation. 'I do my own thing in my own classroom.' Then to have eight teachers coordinate this! All classes came out in the hallways and the fifth graders paraded around. Then the floats remained in the commons area for a couple of days so all the kids in the school could look them over. [S2-3]

The activities listed above seemed to increase congeniality among team members. There was also collaborative planning involved. However, coordination rather than the development of professional knowledge was the focus and the measure of progress.

Susan continued to build her network by considering new hires. She intentionally selected people whose uniqueness would be beneficial to the whole school and had a structure for bringing them into the professional network.

I try and hire the best people that I possibly can. I spend a lot of time interviewing. I really check references because people know how to dazzle you sometimes in an interview. I try to probe references. I try and be very upfront in an interview about what are the non-negotiables, what are the expectations, as well as trying to tap out what that

person would bring. I'm looking for people who are not only great classroom teachers but will want to be involved in school as a whole. [S2-7]

Assigning buddies allowed new staff members to make connections with others.

I try to get buddies who are not people on their team. Sometimes I will try and get them somebody close in their age or interest. Maybe I have several teachers who are from Buffalo, New York who can buddy with them. The other teacher (buddy) may be somebody who they wouldn't necessarily have a connection with, but then they start to make that connection. [S2-11]

Susan also found creative ways to get people together so that they began to build professional relationships. Susan believed that relationships are built by

giving people the opportunities. If I know you really would like to learn from so-and-so, I might think about looking at the schedule and putting your planning times at the same time or putting your lunches together, to try to build some of those relationships. I think people do need time. They need a reason. [S2-11]

Susan believed that learning communities had the potential to encourage professional connections across all grade levels and offer an organized and meaningful structure to examine ways of improving student work and also break down the barriers that existed in communication.

Everything I read talks about the importance of collaboration and valuable conversation among school people. I think in elementary schools in particular, just by design, it is very easy for a teacher to come and sign in the morning, go to their classroom, never speak to another adult in the building, and go home at the end of the day. No matter how good that teacher is, and no matter how hard they work, if they work in that isolation, we're never going to have the best school that we can. So I really want to de-privatize practice. [S2-2]

Susan focused internally and promoted teamwork, cooperation, training, and concern for employees (Griffith, 2003). She encouraged cohesion of all members of staff (Griffith, 2003). Furthermore, she worked to develop a professional network by promoting strategies that built collegiality among staff. Such strategies included creating grade level teams and providing a structure to assimilate new members of staff into the network. She was beginning to see progress in grade level teams coordinating activities instead of teaching in isolation.

Moving from Book Clubs to Learning Communities

Susan believed that transforming book clubs into learning communities would promote cross grade level collaborative practices. She revised the focus of previously dysfunctional book clubs by requiring participation of all staff, providing training for leaders who were committed to the project, and resources to guide communities towards achieving specific goals. She explained that book clubs provided the platform for implementing learning communities.

I could sort of require people to meet in the communities but if there wasn't some sort of valuable activity to do while you were meeting, it became a waste of time. I felt like we needed to have some good ideas. I heard about the protocols they were [using in the] Lucent [project], and that's really what I wanted to do. If there's some sort of structured approach to the discussion, later it may grow into something else. At least the discussion will be started and that's what's valuable. [S1-6]

Commitment of coaches

Susan was encouraged by the leaders of her staff that came forward as they were offered the opportunity to receive training by the district for the LLC project. Subsequently, they became coaches and were involved in making decisions about implementation of learning communities at Lily Elementary.

It turned out that I had 16 people volunteer to attend the training. I didn't have a vision that they were going to become the coaches. It just sort of happened, and it has really worked to get us off the ground. That's when I asked [the coaches] who they would like to be in their community and is there anyone they preferred not to be in their community? We divided the staff into the cross grade level groups [and] we are doing that for four to five years. [S1-4]

Susan believed that she had the commitment of her coaches that was critical to the success of the learning communities. The three coaches acknowledged their willingness to participate in the project and believed that it benefited their school. Jill explained that she had no idea that she would be made a coach but liked the idea of having learning communities because it was an opportunity to build personal and professional relationships.

You went to the training. Therefore, you were coach. I didn't know I was getting into that. However, half of me wanted to do it even if I had never been asked to because it's just a really great way to, not only share best practices, but meet with people that I wouldn't meet in a normal day. I don't get down the other hallway, ever! The school has almost 1200 kids in it. If I make my way to the primary wing, it's a miracle. So the fact that I have interaction with staff members that I would not have on a daily basis is fabulous. [J1-6]

Pearl also participated because she wanted to collaborate with others.

I think the thing that most influenced me was other teachers. Just collaborating with them and peeping outside of my classroom [and] seeing what [they] were doing, easily guided me out to classroom. It wasn't just that I jumped on the bandwagon, but once I got on the bandwagon, I saw what I was missing. [P1-6]

She added.

It was also helpful to me to collaborate with teachers with the same interests and see an LC in operation itself. Because I saw how other teachers were being benefited within the LC, I was able to transfer that information here at my school. [P1-6]

Claudia also explained why she decided to participate.

I like to learn different things and I believe that teamwork is the best choice. If you are an educator, to be able to reach different students, you have to collaborate with other teachers. So when I saw the opportunity, I was curious about it. I didn't know much about it. So I decided to participate. [C1-6]

School-wide implementation

Susan was encouraged by the responses of leaders in her school who wanted to be involved and she believed that school-wide implementation of learning communities was the only way to move towards a collaborative culture. "It doesn't work school-wide to make it totally optional because there is always something else to do. By making it part of our staff development plan where everybody goes, tying it in that way has helped." [S3-7] She added, "I feel like if I said come if you want to, I wouldn't get the same response because there's always something else that will take that time. I think that I do have some people that would continue anyway." [S1-8] Claudia concurred that Susan wanted to make opportunities for communication available because the school was so large. Implementing learning communities school-wide

would make sure that “we would have the connection not only within the grade but across the grades, including the specials teachers. So that’s how we started.” [C2-9]

Susan believed that school-wide implementation made collegial interactions throughout the school possible. The diverse make up of each learning community set the foundation for collegial interactions throughout the school. It set the tone for building trust and professional respect. She described the membership of each community. “Most of them are about 8 to 10 people. They are typically representative of everything we have, each grade level, specials person, an ESE person. It is a mini spectrum of the school. Each group is really different” [S2-12] She added that they seemed to reflect “the personalities of the coaches.”

[S2-12]

Susan’s description of some learning communities clarified that they offered a supportive environment and a structure for collegial connections. One was a cozy place with decorations and coffee brewing. “There’s always going to be an icebreaker in their group or a trust builder. It’s always going to be cute. Then they’ll get into talking about the substance.” In another community the coach “may have a note for every person and be very strong on that touchy-feely piece of it.” Another community, however, got down to business. You would not show up unprepared. “They are going to get down to talking about what it is that we’re doing and sharing.” [S2-12]

Pearl explained that the ambiance in her community made it work. She described her community as a small family with “an atmosphere of camaraderie.” [P3-5]

At our learning communities we play soft music. Somehow different people would bring in snacks, and we would do the trust builder [or] icebreaker. All of that was included in our agenda. That’s what makes our learning community work. We are small families as opposed to just teachers performing as teachers. [P2-9]

Claudia described her learning community as “a group of people that sometimes can get discouraged when things get hard and you have too many different things going on. Overall we try our best to help one another and stay together and enjoy each other.” [C2-12] She added that her learning community was a place where a small group of people got to know each other more personally than they would have in a large group. Claudia continued:

I think it keeps us, a large school, with the feeling of a small school. We all know one another. We all learn from each other. So it gives the big community the feeling of a small one. We don't [normally] have time to know what's going on with the first grade. This way we know what they are going through and they know what we're going through. [C2-14]

Not everyone agreed about the importance of requiring school-wide participation in learning communities. Jill did not feel that it was beneficial to require that all teachers participate in learning communities, but acknowledged that teachers who participated in learning communities improved their own practice and student achievement.

I think there are some successful PLCs at our school. Because PLCs are mandatory, some teachers resent being in them, maybe not seeing their importance. This resentment or idea that they are a 'waste of time' or 'one more thing to do' prohibits the communities from reaching their fullest potential. Naysayers are difficult to deal with, and they make the coaches' job difficult. I do believe, however, that even with these particular teachers, we have had success with improving our own practice as well as increasing student achievement. [J3-5]

School-wide implementation of learning communities allowed different staff to connect with each other. However, more collegial interactions needed to take place in order to change practice in ways that benefited student learning. Jill explained that there would be a greater opportunity for collegial interaction within learning communities in the next school year, with new standards being implemented. Across grade level communication was going to be critical.

Once we move to the new standards, vertical alignment will be crucial because I am counting on other grades to make sure these kids are coming to me prepared. It's going to be an enormous change for us. Our whole vision of how we teach math is going to have

to change. It's not going to stop at math. I think learning communities would be the place for this to happen. [CM1-J]

Susan concurred that learning communities were the place for collegial interactions that would facilitate cross grade level articulation about the new standards. She made the point that work in learning communities would enable teachers to develop a deeper understanding of standards and how they are linked to student learning.

A lot of people still do not know what standards are. They are still teaching things that are in the book rather than what kids need to know. Going back and reflecting why we teach kids what we teach them and what is the scope and sequence or the hierarchy of the standards . . . learning communities is a perfect forum for that. [CM1-S]

Susan believed that moving from book clubs to learning communities made progress toward a collaborative culture. The real benefit was that learning communities helped in creating an open, supportive, and communicative climate.

When they start to say that it makes the job—I don't want to say easier—but when it makes the burden a little lighter, either because you shared it with somebody or you didn't have to invent this whole idea from scratch, that I think helps to sustain it. You have somebody to talk to even though they can't help you, they listen to you whether it was to complain or hear your frustration of a child you can't reach, a parent you can't seem to satisfy, [or] a dilemma that you don't know which way to turn. Breaking down the barriers, I think that's the real benefit. [S2-14]

Opening up communication among staff was not enough to change practices and impact student achievement. The learning communities needed to have a goal and ways of monitoring progress towards the goal.

Providing a Shared Educational Purpose

Susan acknowledged, "I think overall we certainly want to improve student achievement and an underlying piece of that is the teaching and learning." [S2-2] Jill concurred that the common goal was "student achievement." [J2-2] However, Susan contended that everything they did was for student achievement and it was important for learning communities to have a specific purpose for their meetings. [S3-3]

Susan decided to utilize the resource books suggested by the district. They provided a shared educational purpose with direction and guidance for learning communities in working toward specific outcomes (HRD, 2003). *Working on the Work* (Schlechty, 2002) was utilized the first year of the LLC project training by the district. Learning communities at Lily Elementary studied the book and worked on developing congeniality and looking at protocols for examining student work. Susan utilized other resources that were suggested by the district. Each learning community member had *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increased Student Achievement* (Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. E., 2001). The book included nine instructional strategies. Learning communities had the flexibility to select which strategy they would like to study. In addition, the coaches utilized *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, R. J., Norford, J. S., Paynter, D. E., Pickering, D. J., & Gaddy, B. B., 2001). Susan explained by “Looking at WOW (*Working on the Work*) and looking at student work, helped us have a bit of the commonality, a common theme, and yet allowed some time for personal groups to go one way or another.” [S2-9]

The books provided a focus for learning community members to improve their instructional strategies. Communities had the flexibility of selecting a specific strategy. “You want to let people fly off in the direction that their community wants to go or how a discussion leads them, but it has helped us to have some common thread that unites the communities.” [S3-7] Challenges in selecting and implementing specific topics of study in learning communities will be discussed later.

Moving Toward Collaborative Collegiality in Learning Communities

Colleagues were beginning to connect and move toward collegial knowledge of each other. They had very little knowledge of each other’s professional expertise prior to interacting in learning communities. This was evident in the following comments from Pearl and Claudia.

I've learned that I can call upon my colleagues for basically anything that I need. I feel like I have an internal directory now. So if I need something, let's say regarding science projects or regarding the environmental club, I just know just who to go to. If we had not met and if the teachers had not shared their expertise I would not have known. So I feel like I have access to a directory of talents. [P3-8]

Claudia explained that learning communities gave her access to what other grades did which ultimately impacted her classroom practices.

I've learned a lot of new things about my co-workers that I didn't know. They are very knowledgeable and are willing to share. Through the experience of sharing I became more aware of who they are and what they do. [C3-8]

As a result of participating in learning communities, Claudia was able to coordinate activities for her students with colleagues.

I have access to what different grades do to prepare their students; I think it made me aware of how I can implement the strategy or the skill they are working [on in their classrooms] with their students, and transfer to my [physical education class]. [C2-17]

Claudia gave an example of how accessibility to other grade level colleagues and curricula, impacted her instruction.

It's one of those things that the learning community helps you do because [you are] always talking with different grade levels. [For example] if the kids are having a hard time to incorporate place value, you could use some activity in the physical education [class] outside. We could do some games to revisit [place values]. So they kind of see one subject is part of their daily lives [and] they learn to use it in the classroom, at PE, [and] in the cafeteria. [C1-10]

An indication of collaborative collegiality was being able to share student work that allowed others to critique. Jill implied that her learning community shared work that was not perfect and was excited about learning from her peers.

I enjoy learning communities [and] learning through other people. One of the most powerful tools is sharing best practices or things that don't necessarily work for you, maybe a difficult situation that you're having. What better resources to have than your peers? [J1-5]

Jill commented that colleagues helped her to see different perspectives. She stated that her learning community “opens the door to a richer, deeper exchange of ideas because you’re not teaching the same thing. It gives you a different view, a new perspective as to what you are teaching and how you are teaching.” She appreciated the feedback she got from the music teacher and recognized the depth of collaboration as compared to cooperation. “That’s cooperative learning in a whole other light.” [J1-7] Jill painted an overall picture of the progress that was made.

When we first started learning communities, I felt like it took a lot of time for trust to build. In the beginning we were bringing our best work to showcase and now, because it has become that de-privatization of practice, you are more apt to bring something different that maybe didn’t work for you. We’ve talked in our groups about students that have had trouble or lessons that could be improved. I think where we are headed to next is gearing our instruction to the [state] standards [and] making sure that lessons are really geared toward the standards. [J1-5]

Susan believed that professional respect and trust were developing in learning communities. She inferred that they seemed to determine the level of collaboration among members.

I think it’s an asset if they can have fun and have some real congenial relationships and people feel the professional respect and trust. There is no one-ups-man-ship. I bring my stuff and I have respect. I can put it out there, wanting your critique, getting in the spirit that this is how you make it better. Not, I’m a better teacher than you. I think weaker teachers have some of the jockeying for a position or the one-ups-man-ship. Some of them are congenial without having any real substance. We’ll bring our stuff, but the discussions aren’t as rich or as deep, and the questions aren’t necessarily thought provoking. [S3-9]

Collaborative interactions were occurring in some communities. Such practices included colleagues connecting professionally with each other, helping each other to improve practice by critiquing student work, and being willing to share work that is not perfect. Susan credited the progress to first building congeniality. She stated “those kinds of things are starting to happen because we work on the congeniality, the rapport building, so much as a school, that people know each other. They’re starting to do more of those things.” [S2-3]

Moving Toward Collaborative Collegiality in Other Groups

Several other groups at Lily Elementary functioned simultaneously with learning communities to achieve the goal of establishing a collaborative culture. There were indications of collaborative practices in the reading group, the Leadership Team, and grade level teams. The most significant collaborative practice that occurred was teachers were involved in examining the writing responses of each other's students. Teachers examined and critiqued student work from their own and other grade levels. Susan was excited about the progress that was made in scoring writing prompts. Teachers saw different perspectives, became more knowledgeable, and appreciated each other. Susan explained how several grade levels interacted.

The first time we had people score [students' writing responses to] prompts within their own teams. We did a little debriefing with that. The second time we scored a grade below. So, fifth grade teachers scored a fourth grade and so forth. Actually the kindergarten teachers scored the fifth grade, which was an eye opener because they needed to see how far kids could go. [S2-6]

Susan believed that every grade level needed to be responsible for teaching writing and it wasn't only the responsibility of the fourth grade that took the state writing assessment.

The teachers [in the grade level] above needed to see that teachers below them really do teach writing and they could also see if there is something that they could help them with. The last time we did it we did a grade above or the opposite direction. Third grade teachers scored fourth grade teachers and so on. It was neat because fifth grade teachers were scoring kindergarten. We were shocked at how much kindergartners could do. [S2-6]

Teachers who looped up one grade level with their students or taught two grade levels consecutively, interacted with teachers who were two grades above and two grades below to examine writing prompts. Susan added teachers had a genuine interest in what others were doing in writing.

Tuesday, we are doing it with our looping divisions, so that the kindergarten teachers' classes are being scored by the second grade teachers, because when we complete the loop, those will be their students. The first grade teachers and third grade teachers are

doing the same and so on. They have a vested interest in what those teachers are doing. You never know when things are working sometimes. [S2-6]

Susan was pleased at the increase in fourth grade writing scores on the state test.

In relation to student achievement, we just got our writing scores yesterday. Last year we had 78% of students who had 3.5 or higher, this year we have 87%. So I'm really pleased with the gains and I think that next year we'll be better. [S2-6]

A second significant practice in collaborative collegiality was the work of a Leadership Team that Susan created. She stated that the Leadership Team did classroom walk-throughs which "has been a really good experience" [S3-4]. The Leadership Team and all teachers were trained in doing walk-throughs. So that everyone knew what was expected and no one would be intimidated.

We took one of our Leadership Team days so that everyone had a chance to be trained in classroom walk-throughs, not a two-day training, but to come in and say, this is a classroom walk-through. Here's the form. Here's what we're looking for. We are only in the room for four or five minutes. Then we give them a chance to go visit four classrooms and bring back some data. We do the inside outside circle, kind of debriefing protocol. We have questions that we ask: What did you see through the eyes of a parent? An administrator? A student? [S2-6]

The team reflected on what they saw in the classrooms and followed up with feedback to the classroom teachers they visited.

They reflect on those things and then we have them write little notes to the people who they visited. [For example] I loved questions you are asking [or] your bulletin board was super [or] I'm going to steal your idea for something. Then we put those in the mailboxes of the people we visited. They know what's being looked at, and the people who are visiting can take away ideas. I think that has helped so much to demystify what it is. I do think that they were all so surprised what you can see when you go into a room for four to five minutes. [S2-6]

Susan added that it gave everyone a chance to glimpse into other classrooms.

We asked for no names in the debriefing because our goal was not to send out little mini spies to find out what's going on in the school. That's not what we wanted them to do. Overall they were really impressed with the things they saw going on in other classrooms. As a teacher you think that everybody teaches like you do. You don't visit other classrooms as much. That I think has been a really good experience.

[S3-4]

Susan explained that a reading comprehension group started to do peer observations and gave feedback in their meetings. She was encouraged that some had started to do peer observations within their learning communities.

One of the things that they've been doing is poetry and using inference to see how children are using those skills. They have kindergarten through fourth [teachers in the group]. I'm not sure if they have a fifth-grade teacher. A few of them actually watch one another doing a lesson and give feedback. So we're just starting a little bit there. Some of them have carried that idea over into their learning communities. So we've got pieces going there. [S2-3]

Susan predicted that in a year or two her staff might be at the stage where they were confident in sharing their practices.

You know, I still think that we're not at the stage where people are jumping in to say, 'Bring your kids and I'll show you how I do my writing,' or 'I'll come up my planning time and model this lesson for you.' We're not there yet. I think we're going to get there in a year or two. I could force it but I don't think that would be necessary. They might be resentful if they think that 'She thinks that I'm deficient.' I don't want it to be that way. [S2-6]

It is important to note that while learning communities were the primary strategy for moving from congenial to collegial connections; they were not the only means of increasing collegial interactions. All groups, including the book clubs that were transformed into learning communities, served to support each other as one professional network. The collaborative practices that occurred were few but indicated progress toward a collaborative culture.

Building Trust

Trust-building activities were utilized for building collegial interactions and seemed to be the strongest facilitator in developing learning communities at Lily Elementary (Bryk & Camburn, 1999). Furthermore, the level of trust seemed to determine the level of collaborative practice (Hargreaves, 2002; Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Parson, 1999; Youngs & King, 2002). Susan inferred that trust determined the nature of student work shared in

learning communities. Her inference was based on feedback notes that she received from communities.

Just looking at some notes, some groups have started to bring [student] work that is not perfect. I think that speaks to the level of trust and camaraderie they're starting to build because if they don't trust, they probably are not going to bring something that they weren't necessarily proud of. [CM1-S]

Coaches' comments were evidence that trust-building activities were effective. Jill indicated that the best strategy that she used in her community was the trust builder activities that "are always powerful." [J3-7] Claudia concurred. "We have the trust builders so people can feel comfortable that we're there to help one another, not to be critical, always trying to be positive and encouraging, pointing out the positive things from each other." [C2-11]

One coach indicated that they were so successful that they did not need to spend a lot of time on them. She stated that the activities "used to take very long but now we just do them and move on. That's definitely something that is working." [CM2-Coach7] Another coach commented, "We started to allow our host to do them also, so it's not just us. That worked for us." [CM2-Coach8] Trust helped people feel comfortable in turning to their peers for help and support. One coach shared that a member of her community brought a problem she was having in the classroom to ask others what she should do.

I thought that this was a positive thing. It wasn't necessarily rubrics or nonlinguistic, though we helped this teacher who was not on our team on a totally different level and she obviously felt comfortable enough to bring that to our group. [CM2-Coach5]

However, another coach indicated that people were not yet willing to volunteer to do the trust-building activities. [CM2-Coach9]

Hargreaves (2002) suggested that trust was essential for the success of learning communities and warned that communication betrayal could destroy trust. Coaches recognized that trust was a very delicate issue. They showed respect for members of their communities by

acknowledging that there will be times when people need to share their feelings and allow time for such sharing. Jill shared her perception of the level of trust among community members.

Yesterday, for example, was a learning community [meeting] day and every community met. I don't ever get that privilege of going to other meetings. Besides, they are very private. What happens in that community stays in that community and it's not really right for another member to be there. A lot of times, things are sensitive. Trust within that community could easily be broken if another member attends. [J1-8]

Pearl explained that allowing members to share personal or unrelated events without repercussions helped in building relationships. She admitted that times were set aside when members of learning communities shared personal or unrelated problems which were indicative of the level of trust among them.

We have the saying that I hear some communities have. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. We agreed that some things that are said at our learning community [meetings] would remain there. There were sometimes, not too often, we allowed members to vent and in that process they saw that it wasn't something that we were going to take to administration or use it against them. I know that made them feel comfortable because there were no repercussions. It was very, very important, even though you may hear negative comments [to allow people to vent]. When we refocus on student achievement and student improvement, then whoever is venting or whoever has anything negative to say, they just simmer down. That has helped to build our relationship. [P2-11]

Results from Susan's end-of-year survey indicated that the majority of people wanted to stay in their community instead of changing to another one. This was an indication for Susan that they were building trusting relationships. She explained that time and frequency of meetings were variables that affected trust-building.

I think [it takes] time in terms of longevity, and being in contact with each other more than once, to build a relationship. I ask people whether they want to stay or change or have no preference on their learning communities. Almost all the people want to stay. I think that's a part of building that relationship. They do start to build some trust. They do look forward to seeing each other. Even though they can stay in their rooms and get something done, they do look forward to doing things together. [S2-11]

One coach measured progress in her community by the level of trust that was built. She stated, "It takes longer because in our group, sharing and the trust has increased more than it has in the

past. More people brought in work.” [CM2-Coach8] Another coach believed that her community members had developed a level of trust. However, to get to the next level of a deeper exchange of ideas would require more time.

Progress is being made but it goes slower. I guess I would like to go to the next level where it goes more in-depth. I think we’re still touching the surface. I do think trust has been built because people didn’t bring in [student work to share] before. [At the last meeting] everybody wanted to share and time was running out. They wanted what they brought to be part of the group. [CM2-Coach8]

Trust-building activities were the primary strategy for building trust. Coaches were positive about their advantages and indicated that they made members feel comfortable in confidential sharing. Pearl inferred that it was a critical part of the collaborative process that members share unrelated but troublesome experiences. Statements taken from Susan’s end-of-year survey that was given to all staff indicated that members felt comfortable sharing both successes and failures. People built cohesive relationships, felt comfortable, were listened to, and trusted each other. They supported and respected each other. One statement suggested that trust was built because the members were together in the same group for some time. Others commented that trust-building activities were too lengthy. It appeared that the more trust was built; the less time was spent on trust-building activities. It was suggested that progress was slow because it took time to build trust. Jill added that trust was delicate and could easily be broken. Susan believed that time and opportunities allowed members to build trusting relationships. She stated, “It does take time to be trustworthy.” [S2-4]

Data Collection and Analyses

Collecting, analyzing, and making decisions based on data were indications of collaborative practices. Evidence of data collection and analyses were utilized for the purpose of improving practices in learning communities and across grade levels (HRD, 2003). Susan explained that one topic of study in a learning community was homework practices. She stated,

“Several people have changed their homework and are doing some things differently. They find that it’s working better for them.” [S2-2]

Susan commented that another community investigated the amount of nonfiction and fiction books students were reading. The community members went back to their grade level teams and “collected some data to see what they were reading, collected from their teams to get some impressions.” Yet another community examined why students didn’t follow directions the first time they were given. Susan explained, “they actually developed a questionnaire and analyzed their data and made some changes in the way they gave directions, which was really insightful.” [S2-2] She added.

That was one of the high points in Pearl’s learning community. That [community] at that time seemed to embody what we were trying to do. It’s hard to be up here all the time and when you are up here, you like it and it feels good and you want to be there. [CM1-S]

Data from state testing were analyzed mostly in grade level groups and at staff meetings. Susan acknowledged. “We’ve typically done that more in staff meetings, divided up by committees rather than within the [learning] community itself. We [also analyze data] in grade groups.” [S3-3] She explained they did not do a lot with data provided by the state for their lowest achieving students. Since those students were already identified, they are given individualized assessments and are placed in programs that best meet their needs. They also examined data from different groups of students (e.g., example students with disabilities and the non English-speaking students) to determine if their needs were being met. [S3-3]

Susan and her staff collected and analyzed data in order to determine appropriate assessments for curriculum standards. They examined student work, their relationship to the standards, and developed rubrics for assessments.

We looked at state standards this year [and examined] what it is we want kids to know. What is the standard? Why are we doing it? [We tried to] develop a rubric to say, ‘Did this piece of work meet the standard or not?’ I think there is some need to go there. [S3-6]

Grade level teams organized and analyzed the skills needed for students to accomplish in each grade level. They were able to eliminate skills that were repeated in several different grade levels. Susan clarified.

We also got a chance to look at math and our math books. We found over a hundred pages of the second grade math book has exactly the same [skills] but different problems as the first grade book. Then we talked about third grade being so packed with so much material and said ‘what can we do about that?’ K and one books are also similar. [S3-6]

Susan and the teams worked together to identify the skills that were repeated in the each grade level so that teachers would make informed decisions about instruction. For example at the beginning of the year, “second grade teachers can zero in on second grade skills and then start on the third [grade skills]”. Susan questioned the purpose of repeating the same skills at different grade levels. “Do we really need to spend two and a half years on those kinds of things?” [S3-6]

Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) acknowledged that the levels of collaboration and trust affected the quality and extent of data analyses. The institute concluded that in-depth analyses and feedback were limited. Such was the case in learning communities at Lily Elementary. Learning communities experienced some success in collecting and analyzing data on specific topics that changed classroom practices. It seemed that more in-depth analyses took place in other groups. Colleagues collaborated in collecting and analyzing data, and making educational decisions in other groups throughout the school. Standardized scores were analyzed with a whole school focus. Standards, appropriate assessments, and curricula were examined at grade levels. Researchers reiterated the importance of data for setting goals (Burnett, 2002; DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 1998; Strahan, 2004).

Summary of Changing Culture

Collaboration was defined as colleagues working together to develop a shared understanding while working toward a common goal (BCPS, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2006; Shiu 2003). Jill recognized the need for colleagues to work together: “Being able to collaborate with other professionals is vital to the success of our school. We cannot teach in isolation. We need the help of others.” [J3-8]

It was necessary to begin the process of changing the isolationist culture of Lily Elementary to a collaborative culture by providing opportunities for congenial connections. Personal connections were made by encouraging the staff to participate in non-academic activities. The next step was to build a professional network. Strategies included creating grade level teams, having a structure for assimilating new hires, and transforming book clubs into learning communities. Requiring participation in learning communities, providing training for their leaders, and establishing a school-wide focus moved congenial interactions toward collegial collaborations. Learning communities opened the door for members to have professional conversations with each other. Susan stated, “I like the idea of talking to other people as being part of our culture.” [S3-2] She added.

As there are so many challenges for teachers today [and] accountability, people are feeling more pressure. Even if they’re not really doing more, I think they feel more pressure. This gives the chance for an outlet in understanding that fifth-grade teachers or fourth grade teachers doing Florida Writes (FCAT Writing) don’t need to feel like it’s only their responsibility. By being able to talk across learning communities, people can start to understand why things are in a certain manner. [S1-5]

There was indication that the culture of Lily Elementary was changing. Colleagues were involved in working together to improve practices. Activities included scoring each other’s students writing responses and doing peer observations. The Leadership Team did classroom walk-throughs, observed teachers’ instruction in their classrooms and provided feedback. There

was some indication that collaborations occurred in learning communities. Colleagues gained knowledge about each other's expertise and began sharing work that was open for critiquing by peers. Trust-building activities took less time in some communities indicating that members felt comfortable sharing student work. Data collection and analyses were also indications that collaborative interactions were occurring. However, researchers advised that more structures that encouraged peer teaching and observations are needed (Hopkins, 1990; Supovitz, 2002).

Building Staff Capacity

Susan's professional development perspective had a strong impact on her leadership decisions. She valued learning and as such, wanted the same for her staff. She provided different kinds of opportunities for teacher to be learners and leaders. Activities were relevant and linked to personal, professional, and school-wide goals.

Susan's Professional Development Perspective

Susan believed that an effective leader maximizes the potential of her staff (Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2001).

Sometimes if you don't spread [opportunities to learn and lead] around you have some people that are always the leader and never the learner. That doesn't put their professional growth further. Also, I think it doesn't do good things for school when there is the appointed one who gets to do everything. [S2-8]

Youngs and King (2002) explained that professional development contributed to school capacity and in turn to instructional quality. Grodsky and Gamoran (2003) further suggested that school-based professional development contributed to professional community. Susan developed her leadership style from a past learning experience where she realized the importance of professional development and teamwork. She believed that her staff needed to develop their own leadership skills. Susan provided many opportunities for her staff to grow professionally. She

created a Leadership Team that set the direction of the school and developed coaches as leaders for nine school-based learning communities.

Susan explained that as an assistant principal, her principal impacted her perspective of leadership by allowing her to participate in a statewide initiative. The experience helped her appreciate the importance of teamwork and seemed to determine her style of leadership.

The first year that I got the job [as assistant principal], an application came out for a program called Accept the Challenge: Taking Charge of Change. It was just when school improvement was starting to become big in the state of Florida—the whole school improvement teams. They were going to pick 40 educators from five South Florida counties to be part of an in-depth training program, and it sounded fabulous. But I wasn't going to apply because I knew that my boss was going to apply. I didn't think that we could possibly both go. She [encouraged me to apply and] said, 'How are we going to lead school, if we're not a team?' [S1-3]

This professional development experience also helped her appreciate a shared leadership philosophy and had the biggest impact on her professional life. She wanted the same experience for her staff.

That has always stuck with me, and so I applied and was chosen. I think that was probably the thing that had the biggest impact. It made me look at how I look at education. It made me look at how you are a leader, being in charge. You don't necessarily have to be the boss. I came in contact with remarkable people from five counties. I learned so much. [S1-3]

This perspective was evidenced when Susan became a principal. She admitted that the image of being boss did not fit her personality. She intended to encourage her staff to be leaders.

I think that I was a new leader in terms of administration, but I had been a teacher and I wasn't sure how administrators lead. I'd worked for some people who were the boss and that didn't fit for me. I don't think that's my personality. I know that things need to be done right. I don't see myself as the boss. Some people on my staff may not see it that way. [S1-5]

Susan indicated that her perspective on leadership was broadened as she participated in the LLC project. Although she valued collaborative leadership before beginning the project, through

participation she came to believe that involving more people in the process of decision-making was more important than it was to producing a product.

I think (my perspective before participating in the LLC project) was more focused on the product than the process and getting the task done and bringing everybody along with it. The older I get the more I see that those things take time. Sometimes, the idea that you involve more people and get that communication out really is much more valuable. I think that I've seen that over time. [S1-5]

By participating in the LLC project and accepting the challenge of implementing learning communities, Susan was able to develop leaders. However, after the project ended, she no longer had the support and struggled with how to develop leadership in her team without the structure of the project.

I am not sure that the project itself with Lucent made the big change. I think when I participated in Accept the Challenge; it made more of the change. I got the chance to see, in shared leadership, that you don't have to be the person in charge of learning to enable other people. I think participating in the Lucent Learning Community project reminds you of the power of your leadership and it's a shame there's not more out there to help you grow your team through leadership. [S1-5]

Susan expressed the importance of providing opportunities for innovative training. She made reference to the benefits of the statewide initiative mentioned earlier that impacted her professional growth significantly.

We had cutting edge speakers and facilitators and I really miss that, because I don't get that now. I always felt like when I was part of that program, I was five or 10 years ahead of the curve. I was starting to learn and figure out how I was going to roll it out into my school. It's much harder to do that now. That kind of professional development doesn't seem to be around for us. I'm sure it's somewhere. [S1-5]

Fostering Teacher Learning

Susan appreciated the benefits of her own professional development and as a result wanted her staff to have the same experiences. It was important for her to build the capacity of her staff by providing a variety of opportunities simultaneously and encouraging them to be

continuous learners. She is assured that her staff knows that she values professional development.

I have a tremendously talented staff. I have people who are bright and creative, and really have ways to help each other, and overall are pretty good lifelong learners that do have a curiosity and an interest in learning and trying other things. They know that I think staff development is important. [S3-8]

Involvement in learning communities that was addressed earlier was one opportunity that Susan fostered for her teachers. Her own professional development experience allowed her to experience “a little learning community within the big learning community.” She described her experience as “fun as well as hard work.” [S1-3] She explained, “Just by putting teachers in situations to be involved in learning communities is a piece of their professional growth because without being put in that situation, some people would never talk to another person.” [S2-8]

In addition to participating in learning communities, Susan encouraged her staff to participate in several other activities including attending traditional workshops, going through the process of becoming a National Board Certified Teacher, hosting a mini convention, and administration.

I like to support teachers by giving them freedom to teach and the best training that there is. So I'd say that our teachers are probably the best trained teachers in our district or maybe anywhere. There are lots of opportunities for them. [S2-7]

Claudia appreciated the opportunities to grow professionally. “We have support from the administration. They always try to come up with any new information on strategies; new thoughts of how we can better implement them in the classroom. They encourage us to go to workshops.” [C2-13]

Susan gave an example of how different opportunities for learning were connected and therefore necessary.

This year they've (one learning community) been looking at technology, and they learn things. But I think it's been more of a presentation. I don't know that they spend as much time working on how they are using it. It may be part of the evolution. We are in the information mode. We have to know more about this. Then we experiment. [S3-9]

Susan set up workshops in the summer for her staff to gain information about new curriculum standards and how to use technology effectively. She explained the relevance of the workshops.

I think I'm certainly putting the opportunity out there for professional growth. This summer I have set up some workshops looking at the new math standards, looking at ways to do hands-on math, looking at curriculum mapping for next year to be able to take a little pressure off assessments, and also some technology training. How do you use technology to best enhance student learning? Because it's a neat technology thing doesn't mean it helps students. When computers and word processors came in, there were publishing labs. When we had one (lab) at my other school, we actually had volunteers come in and type because one little first-grader sitting and typing was spending hours and hours typing two sentences. [S2-8]

Jill recognized that she needed to attend a workshop where she learned how to use new technology that she would later use in her classroom and share in her learning community.

Well, things are constantly changing in education. Nothing ever stays the same. So in order for you to be up with the times and get kids moving in the right direction you have to constantly be learning. I know I mentioned my technology. The other night I had to go to the training to learn how to use my Smart Board to better help my students with it and have more options. It's a constant improvement of yourself if you want to make a difference in kids. [J2-15]

Jill appreciated the opportunity for continuous learning that was available to her because it motivated her to keep learning and growing (Speck, 1999).

I'm never satisfied with the status quo ever. I'm always searching for something new and people are always asking, 'How do you do this? How do you get your kids so motivated? How do you find out about these projects?' This year I had my own intrinsic motivation. I wanted to improve my own learning of technology. [J2-8]

Attending workshops would be unproductive if resources to implement new learning were not provided. Susan provided resources for Jill and Pearl to implement their new technology learning in their classrooms. She explained.

I had one of the teachers see another teacher model a Smart Board lesson. She was so excited, marched her kids into my office, and asked, ‘Can we get a Smart Board for our classroom?’ I said, ‘How would you use it? You’re fifth-graders. You’re learning about persuasive writing. Persuade me now why I would want to do that.’ [S2-15]

Pearl gave an example of how having the technology in her classroom gave her a healthy attitude toward learning and impacted her students.

I love learning. So I share my learning with my students. They see that I am excited about learning so therefore I impact their learning. This year I showed my excitement about learning with the Smart Board, the technological approach to learning. My students are enamored with the idea of see a big computer-generated visual, the white board, being able to write the answers with the touch of their fingers. I couldn’t wait to share with them some of the things that I am learning. They are just as excited as I am. [P2-7]

Susan encouraged teachers to go through the process to become National Board Certified

Teachers. She recognized this process offered tremendous professional growth for her teachers.

Out of 137 elementary schools in the district, only six schools had more National Board Certified teachers than Lily Elementary.

I meet with people and really encourage some of them to go for their National Boards. I believe we have a dozen National Board teachers now and we have more that have submitted and some that are going to do it next year. I think that piece is there. [S2-8]

Pearl commented that when she did her National Boards, she grew more professionally than she had through any prior learning experience.

I would say last year, when I did my National Boards I grew and grew professionally. Just going through the process and taking a closer look at my teaching style and thinking of creative ways to reach my children. Not that I have not done that before, but it was just more intense last year. [P1-3]

Jill explained how her experiences going through the National Board process and in her learning community were connected. She stated, “I became a National Board Certified Teacher. It gave me some time to reflect on practice, and I definitely grew that year.” [J1-3] She added, “It just

reinforces my thoughts to read professional journals.” [J1-5] She admitted that learning communities continued her “thirst for research-based practice.” [J1-7]

I think to myself if I had learning communities then while I was doing National Boards I would have been in good shape. I’ll give you one example. One of the high yielding strategies [from Marzano, 2001] is testing and generating hypotheses and I never thought of that outside of the realm of science. Ever! Learning communities have given me a different view of testing and generating hypotheses to improve my instruction. I guess I do a lot more than I thought. It goes beyond science. That wasn’t from my Boards. That was completely research-based learning. Another [example] was systems. That was my big idea [in National Boards]. I didn’t get the idea until learning communities. One of the things in the testing and generating hypotheses chapter is how you can teach systems. I think National Boards changed me as an educator. But [participating in a learning community] has even brought me to a greater depth. [J1-7]

Susan helped teachers create more formal ways for them to demonstrate their expertise and learn from one another when, for example, they participated in a mini convention. Susan explained.

We did our staff development this year with a model like a mini convention with breakout sessions, so that people chose strands that they were particularly interested in. They did three different rounds that each included about 12 to 14 strands. The groups were small. There were 6 to 10 people and they were facilitated by a staff member who had expertise in that area. So teachers got a chance to lead and also to be learners. [S2-9]

Another opportunity that Susan provided was to teachers who wanted to become administrators. She saw this as a benefit to them personally, professionally, and the whole school. They participated in interviews and gained a broad perspective in different types of personalities.

I have a few teachers who are interested in becoming assistant principals so I give them [administrative] things to do. I have them serve on interview committees. We just had district hiring, and I brought four teachers with me so they could have that experience.... There are lots of opportunities to make it easier for people to stretch. [S2-8]

It was important for Susan to provide professional development activities that were meaningful, connected, and had personal and professional benefits to her staff. She stated that she liked “to try and tie multiple pieces together.” [S3-6] Susan’s plan for the next school year was an example of how she intended to make meaningful connections among professional

development activities. She envisioned activities that would offer direction, widespread knowledge and support for her staff. Professional development activities included a coaches' retreat, training in the new standards, training for the Leadership Team, and direction for learning communities. She explained.

That's what I want to spend a little time talking about (the focus for the next school year) when we go to the retreat when we have all the coaches. If I have four of them there at least I'm getting a good start on what might work for us. I would have those people trained. We would come back and do the training for the rest of the coaches. Then I have five other teachers who have served on the standards team. So there's a little bit of a familiarity with this and a little bit of training on the protocol with our Leadership Team. So that when the coaches went back to try to do this in their communities, they wouldn't be the only ones who had any idea of how we're doing it. I'm trying to get them the support [and] to know that it's going to be difficult at first; that will be okay. The discussions will come out. [S3-6]

Susan believed that her main role was to provide quality staff development because it led to student achievement (Shepherd, 1996; Richardson, 1998).

If we're teaching, we're going to improve student achievement. Good professional development does help to feed teachers and I hope it is making them a bit more curious. How does somebody else take care of this problem? What's another way to present it? How do I make this more interesting and engaging for students? How can I do this in a way that is not overly cumbersome for me? I think it's really to provide quality staff development. How do I make the teachers the best that they could be? [S2-2]

Pearl explained, "Without the professional development and the collaboration we would not have student achievement." [P2-4] Susan added, "If my staff is not learning and growing there is no way that I can expect them to see what kids are learning." [S2-16]

Creating Opportunities for Teacher Leadership

Susan created a Leadership Team by combining her Child Study Team, Grade Level Team Leaders, and some Learning Community Coaches. "I think taking our Leadership Team and changing the role of the team leader to actually be a leader, is a way to impact professional growth." [S2-8] She went on to explain.

Our Child Study team members (the assistant principal, the reading resource teacher, ESE specialist, autism coach, guidance counselor, a half-time cultural connections teacher and me) serve on the Leadership Team with the grade level chairs, and specials chair and the School Advisory Council chairs. So it is a big Leadership Team. But with a staff as large as ours . . . I think if we made a small Leadership Team, the word wouldn't get out as much to people. [S2-6]

The Leadership Team met once a week to address specific issues that occurred. They also met once a month for a longer period time to address their leadership role, team building, and staff support. Susan gave some insight into how meetings were scheduled.

Our Leadership Team has worked very hard this year on looking at leadership in itself, in that just because you're team leader doesn't mean you're the doormat and are responsible for everything. How do we build our teams and make our teams better? I really see a difference in devoting the year to working on that. We reserve meeting times on Tuesday mornings at 7:15 a.m. to 7:55 a.m. Those meetings are specifically to address a particular item or when necessary, quickie kinds of things. We meet approximately once a month for a full day. We've shifted some of them (meetings) so that we might meet two times together. That's the time where we look at leadership itself using a lot of the things from *High Five*, Blanchard's book, this year. [S2-6]

Susan gave some insight as to her schema for the Leadership Team. She explained that their role was to provide direction for the school. Their meetings did not address management issues.

I don't want to spend 10 minutes talking about that at the leadership meeting. So we talk about things like: How do we set a direction for school? How do we keep people's enthusiasm up in an age where it is high-pressure accountability, not necessarily coming from me, but the structure of the nation? How do we do more with less, when there are more and more budget cuts? How do we support each other? How can we have fun doing it? The Leadership Team is something I think people wouldn't mind being on. [S2-6]

Susan acknowledged that she and her assistant principal worked to help the Leadership Team grow in understanding their role as leaders.

We've done a lot of work with them on what is a team. What is your role as a leader in this school? Is it really just sitting in a Leadership Team meeting and taking down information such as – report cards are due on Tuesday and those kinds of things. I've seen real growth in them. [S3-9]

Susan gave an example of how the Leadership Team identified a need and took action. Her example involved the need to recognize staff as part of building connections and helping teachers

to recognize expertise in each other. Members of the Leadership Team wrote acknowledgments on little cards the shape of megaphones and put them in mailboxes.

This year we centered a lot of our activities on the book *High Five* and really spent a lot of time looking at what we are doing to recognize people, not just the assistant principal or me. But what are we, as the Leadership Team, doing to recognize people? So we've done some things to recognize people with high fives or putting little megaphones with praise notes written on them in mailboxes. We were doing teamwork as our theme this year. [S3-4]

The Child Study Team provides an example of a leadership focus on student learning.

This team functioned separately and had their meetings on different days and times from the Leadership Team. Susan explained why she considered the Child Study Team to be a model of a strong learning community.

Our Child Study Team is a real strong learning community. Its function is looking at all of our students for any reason. We look at kids' attendance issues, tardy issues, achievement issues, and homelessness. That team is so strong that any one of us can pick up the ball for the others. I think there is a really high level of respect. We all have our own area of expertise. I don't think that there is anything anybody wouldn't do for one another on the team. I think that is the kind of community that I love to see. [S3-4]

The team also interacted with teachers by having conversations with them about specific students and comparing their assessments and observations. Susan explained.

We do chats with teachers sometimes in small groups, sometimes in pairs, sometimes individually. We follow up on specific kids. Members of that team may meet with a particular teacher. We're looking at Tracy today: How is her reading going? What diagnostics do you have? What is that telling you? Sometimes we'll do some assessments so we can compare with a lot of what we're seeing in the classroom. What I find, sometimes when we do some follow-up diagnostics, teachers are really excited at what they're doing that is working. But sometimes when you're so close to it you (the teacher) don't see the small steps of progress. [S2-5]

Susan believed that by involving more people in leadership roles, she built the capacity of her staff. She and her assistant principal took active parts in developing leaders.

We tried hard not to have all of the leadership centered in a few people. I have a Leadership Team, and I also have Learning Community Coaches. A few of the coaches are members of the Leadership Team but not all of them. I think that gives people a

chance to lead and have them to see how to organize training for adults and see that it's a little bit different organizing an activity. [S3-8]

Susan planned different kinds of professional development activities and encouraged her staff to be continuous learners. She embraced the concept of shared leadership and provided opportunities for her staff to be leaders as well as learners. Developing coaches as leaders of learning communities was another leadership opportunity that Susan initiated. She created two coaches learning communities for the purpose of developing the leadership skills of coaches. "When I work on trying to prepare for coaches meetings it gives me an opportunity to read, thinking about how we're designing those trainings. I feel like we've learned another way to build capacity in the school." [S3-8] However, developing coaches appeared to be challenging and will be discussed in the section that follows.

Challenges Encountered

Susan faced several challenges in implementing learning communities at Lily Elementary. She acknowledged that for the first two years of implementing learning communities she received training and support from the district as a result of participating in the LLC project. After the project ended, she struggled to find support and training for her staff. She faced the challenge of continuing to build her own network that would lead toward a collaborative culture. Developing coaches as leaders of learning communities was one challenge. Coaches needed guidance in how to facilitate meetings and identify their roles and responsibilities as leaders of learning communities.

Another challenge in working toward collaborative collegiality was the amount of authentic participation from members during learning community meetings. Coaches utilized the district-recommended resource books to identify instructional strategies as their learning community foci. However, they struggled with selecting and implementing a topic of interest

within learning communities. Finding time for more meetings was a final challenge that Susan encountered.

Developing Coaches as Leaders of Learning Communities

Susan believed that it was critical for coaches to interact with other coaches in order to improve their leadership skills and maintain a learning focus within their own learning communities. Eighteen (18) coaches were divided into two communities; each had their own meetings. She appointed Jill as the coaches' coach. Susan and Jill planned and facilitated the meetings. She described how the coaches' meetings helped in building a support system and preparing for challenges they experienced.

You also have to have something that helps you over the bumps when times are tough. I think when we gather our coaches together they can talk about the frustrations that they experience. Sometimes there's a person who is not participating or may be negative. I know that as coaches they take it very seriously. [S3-2]

She added, "Being able to let it out, that we encounter difficulties with a negative person and to hear another coach say, "Oh yes, I had that problem too." It makes them feel like they are not alone." [S3-2] Coaches learning communities offered support, and seemed to help them in becoming confident in leading their own communities. They needed to have their professional development needs recognized and to identify their roles as leaders of learning communities.

Identifying the Roles and Responsibilities of Coaches

Coaches appeared to struggle in leading their communities in facilitative dialog that lead to changes in instructional practices. The three coaches interviewed acknowledged that they were facilitators but described their roles and responsibilities differently. Jill identified her role as a facilitator of the coaches' learning community meetings. She explained a typical meeting.

We meet to plan and I sort of facilitate that. Sometimes I'll preview or share things that are going on in my community. I'll research some trust-builders. Basically, I facilitate the coaches meetings so that they have direction. A lot of times they may meet with a naysayer. Whatever kinds of things that are going on in their community, I try to help

them through those. We share successes. Then we will take time to plan their meetings and share. So, before you do the next meeting, (learning community meeting for teachers) you'll be prepared. So I am more of a facilitator rather than a coach. [J1-4]

Jill believed that it was her responsibility as the coaches' coach, to keep other coaches motivated and assist other coaches in implementing new ideas.

[My responsibility has] grown because now I'm not only coach of my own learning community, but I became the coaches' coach and I do trainings for the coaches to keep them motivated. I try out something first, then provide them with ideas. It gives them a direction. I helped them out; to try something new. [J1-4]

Jill seemed somewhat uncomfortable in her role as the coaches' coach, but appreciated the support from her colleagues.

In a way I feel like I am on an equal playing field. I am a coach. I have my own struggles and successes. I tell myself that I am just a facilitator, and I am just putting this meeting together but I feel very stressed out for those meetings because I want to provide them with something they are able to use. I have one person that [challenges me about how much I do as opposed to what others should be doing]. She'll say, 'Why are you doing all the research? Why aren't we researching together?' I tend to put a lot more on myself. [J1-8]

Jill also found it difficult in facilitating and dealing with situations that arose in her own learning community.

I help people give more or collaborate more. We're trying new things. It's not up to me to have all the answers. I think as the leader of the community it's up to me to motivate them and to encourage them. I have two new educators in my group. One in particular is so super quiet sometimes I feel like she doesn't think she has anything to contribute. On the flip side, she's probably got more than any of us because she is so fresh and she's just out of school. I think she's got a lot to contribute. As a leader you have to find ways to include everybody and make everybody feel worthy of participating. You really have to be a facilitator and that is hard for me sometimes because I get upset. I am just a teacher too. I don't really know any more than anybody else. I'm just one of the group. Sometimes I have to retrain my thinking. I'm a leader, but I'm a facilitator. [J2-16]

Pearl identified her role as the facilitator of her learning community included being knowledgeable of current practices and equipped with different strategies to provide solutions to problems.

First I do have to know about what's happening, changes in education. I meet with other coaches to discuss and share our experience, that's one of my roles. I make the agendas. I secure a comfortable place. I make sure it's in my classroom. I facilitate the meetings. I either provide snacks or encourage someone else to bring snacks. I listen to my peers. I search for viable solutions to a problem or a creative approach to handling challenges. I guess they expect that from colleagues. [P2-16]

Pearl added:

We always try to be refreshed and not continue with [doing] the same [things]. So research is very important, in terms of finding new ways of doing old things. Sometimes it sounds like you're talking in circles but that keeps a learning community refreshed. [P3-2]

Claudia described her role as facilitator of her learning community meetings involved sharing information from the coaches meetings and researching different strategies for addressing students' needs.

We are responsible for coming to the coaches meetings and then going back to the group, disseminating the information, and facilitating the work of the group. We try to research ways to implement different things to meet our students' needs. You always come back to what the group needs and what their students need, and what they want to work on. We try to facilitate that. [C2-16]

Jill, Pearl, and Claudia seemed to view their roles differently. However, having coaches' learning community meetings was beneficial because it "Gives us the opportunity to all be on the same page." [J2-14] Susan stated that it also helped them to be better prepared for their learning community meetings.

It helps to be prepared. I think that made a big difference when we started training coaches so that when the meeting was taking place, there was something that was going to happen. Rather than thinking, 'Oh well, we'll gather together and it'll just automatically occur.' [S3-3]

Claudia also explained that the meetings helped her in presenting fresh ideas to her learning community. She stated that it could be challenging. She needed the support of other coaches to help her lead her own learning community.

Sometimes you try one approach and it gets very stale. I remember the last time we had the coaches meeting, I was not very happy with the way things were going. I got a bunch of feedback and I implemented (those ideas) in my group, and it was great. I was so happy. [C3-2]

Identifying the Needs of Coaches

Susan expressed that her coaches needed to be trained in how to coach and be effective in offering professional support to others. She participated in coaches meetings and offered ideas and suggestions. Interactions of the coaches in their meetings strengthened their leadership skills somewhat. However, coaches needed more guidance in developing their leadership skills in order to serve their learning communities effectively. They also need to be able to recognize their own needs and develop ways to meet those needs. Susan explained.

I think the support is more how to coach, how to keep the momentum going, how to build on excitement, how to deal with the negative person or the saboteur, and how to be a better coach in and of yourself. Jill and some of my coaches are very hard on themselves in the sense that they allow one negative person in the group to have them feel unsuccessful in what they're doing, rather than saying, "I've got eight or nine people that have really come together." [S2-1]

Susan recognized that coaches were not sure how to deal with issues and recognize legitimate concerns. Consequently discussions sometimes focused on complaints. Susan gave an example.

At one time we dealt a lot with griping, where people were putting a lot of gripes on the agenda. You know it only takes two or three to keep the gripes going. The coach was really frustrated, and I said, 'Well, put the gripes at the end. Then if it's three o'clock and people need to leave, if you're willing, stay and listen to everything they have to say.' The coach reported that griping decreased significantly. [S2-12]

Coaches need to be more confident in their roles as leaders. In this example, Claudia questioned her leadership skills:

I really feel like because I didn't come from a classroom point of view, I was the one just trying to do everything. Maybe it's because I'm not in the classroom. They need to have somebody else presenting this. I think teamwork is the biggest thing to me and I think you have to inspire people to do it. I am not doing that and I'm failing to inspire people. Maybe they need to see another person talking to another point of view. [CM2-C]

Jill shared her perspective that maybe Claudia's community did not need a new leader and offered a suggestion.

What you're saying is that it hasn't changed very much even though you have a classroom teacher now sharing the leadership. To me, that says that it's not really you. I think the pair sharing might be a good idea. Have people work together so they don't have to do the whole group at once. It might motivate them a little bit more and take more responsibility. [CM2-J]

Susan wanted coaches to recognize legitimate concerns and be able to address them.

I don't hear overall quite as much griping but it is being conscious of the few people that do complain. I'm trying to give the coaches ability to say, 'Is this a legitimate complaint?' The fact that it's a complaint, it's legitimate because they're complaining. But is it something that's real? Is it something that we can do anything about? Do they complain about everything? If you fix that, will they just complain about something else? [S2-12]

Susan added that coaches need to be able to identify their own needs and possible ways to address them.

I'm not sure that they know what to ask for when we say on our little debriefing forms, 'What assistance do you need?' It is so rare that the community will ask for assistance. On one hand it's great that they don't need assistance. On the other hand, sometimes I think that they would go further if they think to ask, 'Could we get an expert in on this?' [S3-7]

Susan admitted that she needs training for coaches that would help them move toward collaborations that would impact student achievement. She indicated that such training was hard to find.

I want the coaches to have that kind of tool in their tool bag to say, 'Let's look at this piece, it's got some real depth to it.' I would like more of that kind of training for my coaches and I'm having a hard time finding it. Jill and I have been working to try and design what we can. We know that there are better experts than us in this area. We read and we try, but it would be really wonderful if we could find that. [S2-9]

Susan acknowledged that she and her coaches need the inspiration to continue to work toward a collaborative culture by continuing to grow the learning communities.

I think that we've had to reach in. I worked particularly with Jill to try to bring something to the coaches and I think she's done a really good job to try to keep the coaches a little bit pumped up and encouraged. I don't know that we have something that does that for her or even for me. I think it's the strong belief in it that keeps me going. But we've been missing that spark that just inspires you to get to the next step. I think trying to find things to support the coaches themselves has been a challenge. Not everything we tried has worked. So I miss the support of the LLC grant. [S2-1]

Susan made some progress in maintaining learning communities after the LLC project ended. She encouraged coaching as a form of professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Shepherd, 1996; Showers, Joyce & Bennett, 1987). In order to utilize the coaches effectively, she created coaches learning communities (Yendol-Silva, 2003). She appointed Jill as the coaches' coach. The meetings helped the coaches see commonalities among all of their learning communities. However, in order to move to more collaborative collegiality that would impact student achievement, coaches needed to strengthen their leadership skills. They needed to be able to identify legitimate concerns and develop skills in coaching their peers and facilitating learning community meetings.

Encouraging Authentic Engagement

Participation was a concern among coaches and the focus of the two coaches learning community meetings that were observed for this study. The topic of participation was determined based on feedback that Susan and Jill received from the coaches' previous reflections. At the meetings Susan and the coaches discussed specific problems, brainstormed reasons why members did not share, and shared ideas that would encourage more participation by more members during community meetings. Susan believed that members needed to see the value of learning communities and understood that not all members contributed. Her end-of-year survey gave some insight into reasons members did not value the experience.

First, it is important to note that participants in this study seemed to agree on the meaning and importance of participation. Susan agreed that participation involved colleagues taking an

active role and sharing ideas and resources (Shiu, 2003). She stated, “You can’t have a learning community if people aren’t participating. That means actually being there, and doing something.” [S3-9] Pearl added “A strong one is a community that shares.” [P3-9] She indicated that allowing every member to make contributions to the group is critical to improving her own practice. “I learn from my peers.” [P2-5] Claudia explained, “A strong one (learning community) is when everybody is involved, bringing ideas, and sharing. A weak one would be when the team would gather because they have no other option.” [C3-9] Claudia stated that it did not work when members of the communities did not participate but mainly listened to the coaches giving out information. She stated that, “hands-on of the group was most successful as opposed to the lecturing stuff.”[C3-7]

Valuing the experience of participating in learning communities

Susan wanted to ensure that members were honest and sincere in their sharing and valued the experience of participating in learning communities.

It’s important to me that people are honest and sincere about what they’re doing. I participated in some different principal groups and I’ve started a learning community of a few principals. I feel that there is that sincerity and honesty instead of saying, ‘That’s never a problem at my school,’ or ‘my school is the best.’ Sometimes that happens and spoils it for people who really want to work on practice. If we have a member who knows everything and is the best at everything, few people want to reveal their, I hate to call them deficiencies, because I don’t see them as deficiencies, as much as a desire to know more. [S2-4]

She added.

I don’t want to have people feeling like, ‘I show up because I have to.’ I know I had some of that. But if we’re doing things that are real, and worth the time, and that I left with some nugget that I would be able to use in my classroom over the next month – yes, I had to be there, but I didn’t waste my time. [S2-4]

Susan also wanted people to understand that active participation was relevant to school improvement. She explained the urgency of cross grade level communication and reminded the coaches of the importance of sharing between community members and grade level teams.

Part of the way we are structured is pretty much somebody from every grade level is in the community. So it is hoped that you are bringing some things back from your team that are really good ideas when you are meeting. When we look at these new standards that are coming in, we're not teaching certain strands at certain levels. That communication across those grade levels is really important. [CM2-S]

It seemed that people did not always see the value or relevance of learning communities.

Jill identified the different kinds of participants in her community.

I'm having a very, very tough time in both motivation and sharing. We have some that are sharing wholeheartedly. We have some that don't share at all and are mainly naysayers and giving us a tough time. We have those fence sitters, just being compliant. [CM1-J]

Comments from the end-of-year survey could explain why some members did not see the value in learning communities. Some found learning communities interesting and informative, while others were disinterested. Their needs were not met or it was too difficult to adapt ideas from different grade levels. They would have preferred primary, intermediate, and/or grade level communities. Susan was realistic about reactions from her staff about participating in the LLC project. She stated that, "you know you have to deal with people who don't necessarily see its (learning community) value and still go on in light of complaints, but really believing it's the right thing to do for kids. [S2-10]

Reasons for not sharing

It was important for Susan to hear different perspectives on why members were not actively participating in their communities. It helped her to understand the problems coaches were facing and to offer suggestions. She inferred that one obstacle might be that coaches did not always recognize the different ways that members participated.

One of the things I'm trying to work on with coaches and teams is that, not everyone participates in the same way. Somebody who might be a quiet person is a listener. That doesn't mean they're not getting anything out of it. But I also understand, to get there, they are going to share things. You need people that will bring forth things to share. [S2-4]

One coach suggested that the reason that her members were not sharing might be that she needed to give more time for them to think about their responses.

This is part of my personality. I'll pose a question and right away I'll throw out my answer without giving anybody else that opportunity to think about their answer. Maybe I just need to feel more comfortable with some silence and allow that to happen. [CM1-Coach3]

Susan probed, "Was their silence indicating nonparticipation, or was their silence saying that they're taking things in and they just don't feel they have something to share?" [CM1-S] She admitted that members share only when they are asked to share and added, "It's not like they are really defiant." [CM1-Coach3]

Another coach offered a different reason for not sharing was because her group had many new members. [CM2-Coach6] Yet another coach shared that members may be shy.

I think with any group dynamics especially that some people are so energy filled, they can speak in front of people and it doesn't seem to be a hardship. Maybe there's the factor of intimidation, a shyness of sorts but I do think there is a responsibility that everyone should share." [CM2-Coach4]

Another coach suggested that lack of confidence affected how much members shared. "I think that trust is there, but I also think that it could be not much confidence in what it is that they are teaching." She added that members were "not really comfortable and don't really want to share. It's not that they don't trust us. They don't trust themselves enough." [CM2-Coach6] Still another coach also believed that the changing dynamics of the group impacted the amount of participation among its members.

I have different people in my group this year. Everyone is getting along and getting a lot out of it. A lot of people are holding back. I guess it's because they're brand new and they don't feel like sharing. Maybe we should make it more fun. I don't know, as leaders we're not making it fun enough. [CM1-Coach1]

Jill stated, “There are two members in my community that really don’t see any benefit to learning communities. They’ve come out and said that this does not pertain to their students. How can they take any suggestions anyone has?” [CM1-J]

Jill and Claudia believed that people should be open and willing to accept ideas from others (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Joyce & Calhoun, 1995; Patterson, 1993; Senge, 1990; Speck, 1999). Jill stated that they needed to “be open to new ideas because sometimes we think we have it right, and maybe we don’t”. [J2-5] Claudia added:

I think you have to have the ability to listen and adapt to new strategies, to new concepts, ways to work with the kids. You need to be willing to learn. You can’t be, ‘I’ve been teaching for 20 years. I’ve been successful this way. I don’t need another strategy.’ You need to be open. [C2-10]

Susan concurred that members needed to “Recognize that we don’t know everything and having some desire to look and say, “Yes, we can get better.” [S2-5]

Coaches acknowledged that eliciting participation was a major problem. The coaches meeting seemed to start the conversation addressing this issue. They shared their perspectives and experiences. However, creating and implementing a tangible plan of action might be a way of moving past this issue.

Encouraging sharing

The discussion that follows depicts how Susan and the coaches interacted and the benefits of the coaches’ meetings. They exchanged thoughts and ideas that may elicit more participation. “I like it when you go around the table and ask everybody what they think because then everybody is more or less duty-bound to say something and everyone has a chance to speak.” [CM2-Coach4] Round robin sharing was also another coach’s suggestion.

I’ve been in enough meetings to know. I’ll raise my hand and be polite, but that sometimes doesn’t work. It’s better just to speak out. I like it when you go around the table and ask everybody what they think because then everybody is more or less duty-bound to say something and everyone has a chance to speak. It may be that people feel

that their idea is not as good as what they've heard. Even though there's trust built, as a teacher you might not be as willing to divulge something that is not terrific. I really think the round robin kind of thing works. [CM1-Coach1]

Susan suggested some ideas to increase participation among group members. "You need strategies to try to draw some people in." Or "just acknowledge when somebody shares, just say thanks to someone sharing." She added, "If you have a person who doesn't speak, ask them to read the questions." She offered another suggestion.

Sometimes when sharing, if I don't feel my answers are as good as the other answers, I don't say anything. Here is an activity to help that. Everybody puts the answer to Question 1 in the center of the table and then you just read them as a whole group. It takes that, 'Oh I had a stupid answer' away because nobody knows really who had which answer. [CM1-S]

One coach remembered that Susan's strategy mentioned above helped her in an earlier meeting.

I remember that because when I was in your learning community, not because it was you or anything, I wasn't one of the ones who would come up and share right away. I would sit back and be a little bit more reserved to make sure. I think that would be non-threatening for those two teachers who won't automatically share. [CM1-Coach3]

Susan suggested making a connection to real life in order to draw more members in.

Maybe you could choose some pop-culture. Everybody can do their characteristics of their favorite actor. Everybody's looking at the strategy but doing it in a more fun way. It sounds like you're being very serious. [CM2-S]

One coach shared that she was going to incorporate Susan's idea of making connections to real life into her next trust-building activity.

Our topic will be similarities and differences. So I have this matrix as an icebreaker and they're going to identify different movies and hot actors and identify what makes them hot to you. Then we're going to share and they'll work with a partner to come up with an idea of how they can use that in the classroom. [CM2-Coach6]

Pearl commented that her members were sharing work that was not authentic. Her solution was to add another norm to the list she used during community meetings for everyone to know that they were expected to share.

What we're focusing on now is to have students make their own nonlinguistic representation regarding something that they learned or want to learn and you know what helped us? Believe it or not the norms. Usually we have the norms. This is added to the norms that we generated here. 'Everyone shares.' [CM1-P]

Susan encouraged coaches to review their ground rules. "Sometimes we're not firm about going back to our ground rules. One of our ground rules is respect each other's opinion and be open to new ideas. It's hard to remind people sometimes to keep an open mind." [CM2-S] Two coaches voiced their agreement that they should have general guidelines. [CM2-Coach6; CM2-Coach9] Shields & Seltzer (1997) determined that shared norms offered a structure for creating "unity within diversity" (p. 426).

Jill planned to combine Susan's idea of making real life connections and Pearl's idea of reviewing the norms in her next meeting. Jill thought that she may "review the norms by connecting them to a current event. [CM2-J] She explained, "For the trust builder, we're going to give marital advice." She explained that one person in their community was getting married. Everyone would give this person some marital advice. She planned to make the connection between giving advice for a successful marriage and ground rules for learning communities. "The core of our meeting will be reflecting on current beliefs and practices on cooperative learning. Then we are going to make sure that we have enough time at the end to do the reflection." [CM2-J]

Susan indicated the importance of members having the opportunity to reflect on their roles as members of learning communities. She shared some questions that coaches could incorporate during meetings.

What have you contributed to this learning community this year and what could you contribute in the future? I don't think it needs to be threatening. It could be, 'I contributed my presence. I didn't contribute. Maybe I could bring more work samples next year, or maybe I could bring refreshments, or I could contribute my attendance next year.' [CM1-S]

Although coaches were experiencing difficulty in eliciting participation in their communities, Susan offered some encouragement. “If you think about your community, most of you have 8 to 10 people in your community. For the most part you’re talking of two naysayers and we’re talking about 20%. Are we focusing on the wrong side?” [CM1-S] Jill agreed, “It’s an unrealistic expectation to think that everybody’s got the buy in.” [CM2-J]

Susan was confident that members who were actively participating in their learning communities were impacting instruction in their classrooms.

I think that we’re doing a better job instructing students because I think that people are getting ideas from one another. ‘I used Jamie’s homework packet and it really worked for me,’ or ‘I loved using the inference in poems,’ or ‘Robin had this really neat thing she was doing with writing and I tried it with my class and I broke it down even further.’ When they know they’re getting something, they can walk away with something useful; they don’t feel like they are wasting their time. I think that helps to sustain them. [S2-14]

Selecting and Implementing a Focus of Study

Careful selection of the topic of study in communities was critical. Coaches gave insights that seemed to suggest that topic selection needed more attention. At the beginning of the LLC project, the district recommended that learning communities needed to identify a specific question for their focus, which proved to be a challenge. Subsequently, instead of selecting a question, Susan recommended that communities needed to select instructional strategies from the resource book as their focus. Coaches would have the flexibility to “follow an interest.” [CM2-S] However, it appeared that communities also struggled to select and implement strategies. Susan explained their initial challenge in finding a question. “When we first set out we had the communities design their own focus. It seemed like we struggled a lot or were confused about setting our questions. It seemed like we were least successful when we did that.” [CM2-S]

Susan preferred the idea of communities selecting instructional strategies instead of academic areas. She was concerned that members would pick subject areas in which they were most comfortable.

I think we need to figure out exactly how we're going to do this. One of the concerns I have is we tend to pick the things that we like and that we're good at. So what would happen if you're just picking the subject areas? A lot of people, if they are pretty good at [a particular subject area], picked it. Or if everybody's bad at it, didn't pick it. [CM2-S]

Coaches expressed different views in the topic selection process and indicated that it was not working. One coach agreed that members were implementing the instructional strategies and "sharing across curricula areas." [CM2-Coach8] But another suggested, "I think if we continue to use the book next year we should really link the classroom activities. Make them have something to do and give them an assignment." [CM2-Coach6] A third suggestion was that they should link strategies they were studying to content areas. [CM2-Coach7] Susan responded, "If we tweak it, I think that's okay. But I don't want to go backwards to being lost." [CM2-S]

Following is a discussion about some successes and challenges coaches faced as they implemented the study of two topics. The first topic of nonlinguistic representation seemed to be acceptable for members of one learning community. The coach indicated that members felt it was a topic that anyone can do. She explained that members who were previously reluctant to share were sharing. "Even the people that were very reluctant are all bringing in things. And we actually have very productive meetings. Everybody is motivated. We're actually just really doing well." She expressed that teachers of non-academic subjects were also doing an awesome job. "I just think we found a topic that everyone's interested in. Everybody can do this."

[CM1-Coach1]

Pearl's community also experienced success in studying the same topic when members maintained a positive attitude.

I have [a teacher of autistic students] in my community, and you would think that [she might have difficulty making connections. Although she expressed reservations at first], she is totally coming around. As a matter of fact, she brought an example of graphs she made, the visual organizers. Her students are not just learning. They're having fun working with these nonlinguistic representations. So, I just feel that if she can use this and if she has such a positive attitude, then I don't know why other teachers wouldn't benefit. [CM1-P]

Another community had a different experience of members not bringing meaningful items to share. This coach explained her experiences in studying the two different topics. Nonlinguistic representation appeared to be a topic that members appreciated. At first, she believed that her community was making progress but realized that the sharing was not meaningful.

I also started off with nonlinguistic representation and felt like I'm really getting somewhere because everyone was bringing things to share that they were teaching. I think with nonlinguistic representation, it is something that everybody does, and they don't realize it. Once they realize that's all they do, that's every day, we really get into it. It's something easy to do with all grade levels. [CM1-Coach3]

She continued.

Everybody in my group will share or bring something to share. However, I feel that they are doing it for the learning community and not for the classroom. The reason I say that is because when I send out my reminders [of the next meeting], I have people calling or emailing me to ask for another meeting assignment. It's like a very last-minute type thing. Even when sharing, sometimes they would admit, 'This is what I had from a student today.' So they are bringing something, but I don't feel that it's authentic. [CM1-Coach3]

When studying the second topic of rubrics, this coach admitted that she used the resource book as a guide.

This book has really helped me because what I do, for instance, is: we're doing rubrics right now [and] they're all bringing a project or an assignment to our meeting today along with the rubric. But in addition, I gave them these questions: What knowledge are the students learning? How did I state the objectives for this lesson? What was the purpose of providing feedback? I asked them to answer these questions as they are preparing their lesson and that gives us something to talk about. [CM1Coach-3]

However, she faced the same challenge of members bringing last-minute items to share.

We all share our responses to these questions and that really opens up this discussion. If it's a meeting where we're just starting something new and we haven't actually gotten to the point where we're doing a lesson, it's kind of dry. On the other hand, a lot of the times . . . it's last-minute they're doing this, but they are still bringing something into this discussion. [CM1-Coach3]

Teaming with other teachers appeared to be an effective strategy. Susan suggested that teaming with other teachers might be an effective strategy in taking away "some of that last-minute stuff." She added that, "A lot of us that were obligated to ourselves, we tend to procrastinate. But if we're obligated to someone else, sometimes we make sure we get it done."

[CM1-S] Two coaches shared their successful teaming activities for nonlinguistic representations. The first activity teachers connected descriptive writing and nonlinguistic representations.

We were doing non-linguistics and we were working on mental images. A lot of people were working on descriptive writing. What we had the kids do was write a paragraph. Then we would exchange it with somebody in a different grade [whose classroom was close by]. People would have to read the descriptive paragraph and draw their mental image. So we incorporated writing into it. It was really good, and they've been working on it for a while. [CM1-Coach5]

In a similar teaming activity, teachers had their students read books, some classes drew pictures about the story, and others explained the picture.

Everybody had a lot more ideas and some people are taking the ideas and trying to work with it. I would say that with the younger class, everything is verbal so when people bring things in, they can just talk about it rather than showing us some work. That's okay. [CM2-Coach6]

Another effective strategy for successful learning community meetings was how the topic was selected. In one learning community, the coach acknowledged that the selection of the topic of nonlinguistic representation was primarily due to a checklist that Susan gave them to determine their strengths and weaknesses. The checklist also helped them identify members who

needed support. Teachers teamed up with others and worked on a project involving nonlinguistic representation. She explained their community's process.

I think that the checklist you gave us in the beginning to have us check what we were proficient in or not proficient in, really helped. We got a good overall picture this year of what we all lacked or had expertise in. Then when we came [to our first meeting], we offered suggestions. We found books that were relevant to all grade levels. So it was more buying in. Then for those few teachers who said [their students] can't write, we gave them ideas of how they could use it. So every week there's someone sharing the things they're doing in a classroom. They seem really into it; I think the questionnaire you gave helped [us to] recognize that this is something everyone really wanted to explore. [CM1-Coach2]

From the beginning of the LLC project, Susan and her coaches struggled in selecting a focus for their learning communities. At the time of this study, learning communities were focused on instructional strategies selected from the resource book, which coaches believed were not working. There was some discussion on whether communities should select an academic area of study, instructional strategy, or a combination of both. Coaches also discussed two instructional strategies: non-linguistic representation and rubrics. Communities experienced successes and challenges when studying both topics.

Challenges they encountered included topic selection, members not finding the topic relevant to their teaching responsibilities, and not sharing meaningful items. Successful strategies included teaming with other teachers and making connections with the classroom activities, utilizing a checklist to determine the group's needs, and following the guidelines of the resource book. It seemed that a process for selecting and a framework for articulating the focus of study needed to be in place. Strategies for having members commit to the topic of study needs to be explored.

Finding Time

Moving from an isolationistic culture toward collaborative practices proved to be a lengthy process. Susan acknowledged that the process is slow and admitted more time would be beneficial.

I think that I'd like to get more to where teachers feel comfortable going into each other's classroom or to call on one another. I think it takes a long time to build that trust. It's coming, but it's a very slow process—especially when you're only meeting about eight times a year for 45 minutes. Several people have said, 'I really wish we met more frequently.' But I don't know how we would fit it in. They do feel that if they met more frequently they would get further, and I do agree with that. [S2-1]

Participants shared that having more time would build collaborative collegiality, ensure consistency, and encourage authentic reflections. One coach stated, "I attribute the problem to time. There is too much of a gap between meetings." [CM2-Coach6] Jill indicated that other groups collaborated more than learning communities because they met more often. She compared participation in learning communities to the comprehension group and team meetings.

They (members of learning communities) don't have the same comfort level that they do in their team meetings. I don't think I would have any conflicts or anyone holding back at all. Part of this is because we see each other every week for coffee and comprehension. I feel like consistency is one of the reasons why those team meetings and comprehension meetings are so successful. How do we do that with our learning communities? [CM1-J]

Jill believed that meeting twice a month would enable more coordination between her team meetings and learning community meetings.

I almost feel like we should be meeting twice a month. I feel like if we were together more maybe we would take the learning community frame and do it in our teams and have that cross level communication. [CM1-J]

Claudia also expressed the need for more meetings in order to get into a richer exchange of ideas. "A little bit more time would be helpful, trying to accommodate our schedule to have more time to work within the groups." [C3-Coach6] Another coach added, "I think the progress that we made could have been made quicker had we met every week." [CM2-Coach8]

Susan pointed out that the time they did have was valuable. She commented:

Sometimes I think we try to push it too fast. Like one group, they're taking their time with what they're doing, to give it time. I think that sometimes like last year, you just went through the book, but this year, you're taking your time. Less is more. [CM1-S]

She elaborated on the importance of taking time.

You might look at one piece of work or a maximum of two pieces of work in an afternoon, in a 45-minute session. In a year, you might only look at eight pieces of work. So people would only share one time. I don't really have a problem with that because I think you are really getting some substance out of it, if it's going that way. [S2-9]

Pearl pointed out that her community was taking more time on one instructional strategy. She explained that studying the same book for three years was a "plus because now we are looking at the strategies more carefully as opposed to skimming through a book. We are really delving into what the author has to say." [P2-1] However, meetings were often rushed. "Once you get started you don't want to stop." [P3-7]

Susan acknowledged the importance of creating a schedule that allowed time to ensure in-depth discussions and reflections in learning community meetings but admitted it was a challenge.

Time is something that we fight against all the time because of contract issues and because of all the other responsibilities people have. I think that probably meeting longer than 45 minutes would be good. You really need a little longer than that to get into good beefy discussions and be able to debrief with some sort of meaningful reflection. [S3-3]

She added.

I find that the coaches sometimes run out of time for the wrap up piece, or the reflection piece but I know that that is part of having short meetings. That is sort of the structure we live in by teacher contract. [S2-12]

Susan explained that time for reflection may be beneficial for members who did not participate verbally. Susan explained.

A group that is getting together and meeting knows what they're going to talk about and has everybody participating; and participation doesn't necessarily mean that everybody is

vocal because some people are very reflective and don't say a lot but when they do, wow! They are contributing in some way. [S3-9]

Susan acknowledged that there was not sufficient time for reflections in learning community meetings. However, she was confident that some teachers were reflecting on their practices by collaborating with others to improve their classroom instruction.

Well, I definitely think it's using those ideas you got from somebody else, having somebody coach you on something that didn't work. They're thinking about doing lessons in a different way. When you're reflecting on doing a lesson in a different way, you're starting to think again about what is the purpose of the lesson? What am I trying to get across? How will I engage students? You're examining your own practice. [S2-15]

Susan noted from her end-of-year surveys that the majority of group members wanted to stay in their communities (see Table 4-2). People wanting to stay in their communities were an indication to Susan that they were getting to know each other and building trust. She believed that less time would be spent on trust building activities allowing more time for reflections.

The idea that you can have that feeling over time, that people want to stay, that there is trust, that they get along, that they know the routine, then I think that's going to help us in the future too. They may not need to spend as much time in a 45-minute meeting on the trust-builder. We can get very quickly into the meat of the meeting and maybe a little more of a reflection or evaluation of what we need to do next, which I think has suffered as a result of building a community up. [S3-5]

There was indication that allowing more time for meetings would result in more collaborative practices. Susan acknowledged the need for more time. However, she inferred that the available time needed to be spent wisely. [S2-9] Researchers agreed that principals needed to schedule more time for collaboration (Barth, 2001; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Blasik, 2005; Coburn, 2001; Dufour & Berkey, 1995; NAESP, 2001; Parson, 1999; Wood & Anderson, 2005).

Table 4-2. Staff choosing to stay or change learning communities

| Year | Stay | No Preference | Change |
|------|----------|---------------|--------|
| 1 | 30 (73%) | 8 (20%) | 3 (7%) |
| 2 | 25 (76%) | 6 (18%) | 2 (6%) |

Five Years Later

Lily Elementary saw many changes in five years. The culture of the school changed from being an isolationistic culture and moved toward a collaborative culture. Susan focused internally to promote morale boosting and cohesion (Griffith, 2003) and build interpersonal relationships (Leithwood, 1990). Susan created overlapping communities that increased school development (Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004). She viewed the school as one large community and created other smaller communities within it. She provided opportunities for staff members to build congenial and collegial relationships. Grade level teams were created. Other study groups were formed and a Leadership Team was created. Susan incorporated structure and provided leaders for the book clubs that existed, transforming them into nine learning communities, which she implemented school-wide.

Jill summarized the function of learning communities. She believed that they benefited the whole school and helped create a bond among staff.

The effect [of learning communities] is a cohesive school. I think it puts everybody on the same page. I think you get respect from one another and you get a wealth of ideas. You get [different] perspectives from others. You get different takes on things and peoples' expertise. I think it gives you a broader view. It gives you a whole approach to teaching and it gives you cohesion that you wouldn't otherwise have. [J2-14]

There were indications of progress within some learning communities. Jill summarized how learning communities began as very leader-directed groups with little sharing and experienced steady growth.

At first they were almost scripted. They were hard to get going for a while but I think the next step was to build some trust because we were with people we were never with before. At first when we would share work, because we started with *Working on the Work*, it was always our best work. Nobody was really willing to share something that didn't work. [J2-9]

As members began to build trust, more authentic student work was shared.

I would say by year two you started to see that people were bringing things that didn't work. We were discussing a student that maybe you needed assistance with, or that was difficult. There was more truth, so to speak, to what was being brought. Each and every year they get better. [J2-9]

All of the communities, groups, and teams worked together on changing the culture of the school. Susan was encouraged by the progress. "I love the idea of having professionals gather together to be able to discuss topics of interest, student needs, or problems. These could be both formal and informal." [S3-4] Susan stated, "I do think our school has a relatively warm kind of feel to it. People know each other and know a little bit about each other." [S2-11]

Susan planned to build staff capacity by providing opportunities for them to become learners and leaders (Barth, 2001; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Prestine & Nelson, 2003; Speck & Knipe, 2001; Youngs and King, 2002). Her past professional development experiences helped her value learning and shared leadership. As a result, she offered activities in a variety of contexts to appeal to everyone's needs (NAESP, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Scribner, 1999; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; Youngs & King, 2002). She fostered learning by encouraging her staff to participate in workshops, conventions, the National Board process, and learning communities. The activities were relevant and connected to school development.

The Leadership Team offered leadership experiences. They worked to identify the needs of staff and students and set the direction for the school. Susan also created coaches' learning communities that offered a supportive environment where they shared the experiences as leaders of their learning communities. Their meetings helped them to be prepared for their learning communities. However, strengthening their leadership skills was one of the challenges that Susan encountered as she continued to move toward a collaborative culture.

Coaches seemed to experience difficulty identifying their roles and responsibilities. Their community meetings strengthened their leadership skills somewhat. However, they need

guidance in being a facilitator, being able to recognize their needs as well as those of the members of their learning communities. Another challenge was eliciting authentic participation from learning community members. At their meetings, Susan and coaches exchanged their perspectives, offered support and suggestions to elicit more participation. Susan's role at the meetings seemed to be encouraging and supportive. She expressed the need for training for the coaches. Other challenges that Susan faced were the selection of a topic of study and finding time for more meetings. Coaches attributed the slow progress in building collaborative processes to not having enough time. Researchers acknowledged the importance of providing time for collaboration (Barth, 2001; Blasé & Blasé, 2005; Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Blasik, 2005; Coburn, 2001; Dufour & Berkey, 1995; NAESP, 2001; Parson, 1999; Wood & Anderson, 2005).

Susan remained committed to her decision to change the culture of the school and understood that it would take a long time.

I do think that it takes a long time to really shape culture. You can say that you can change culture in a year or two, but I don't think that's true. I think people will give lip service to what you are espousing. I know that people know that I believe in learning communities. I do try and temper a lot of feedback. 'Oh that is great,' or 'it's nice.' They say great, but why, how does that affect you? You get some of that in the beginning if you are demanding a change in culture, but that's also not my style. I don't think of myself as patient, but I do want to try and grow it.
[S2-6]

Susan admitted that Lily Elementary was not at the point of experiencing a collaborative culture but she reflected, "There are all of the analogies, the echoes, the waves from the pebble in the water." [S2-15]

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of a principal in implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Using the qualitative paradigm, interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed. This study adds to the body of research by conceptualizing the implementation of PLCs at Lily Elementary School. It outlines the strategies that were utilized and the challenges that were encountered. The final product offers “a rich and complex explanatory schema of the social phenomena” (Sherman & Webb, 2001, p. 126).

Prior research indicated that PLCs are the vehicles that promote learning and collaboration among teachers and administrators (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). In addition, other researchers determined that a culture of learning provides opportunities for collaboration (Dufour & Berkey, 1995; Leithwood, 1990; NAESP, 2001; Renchler, 1992; Speck & Knipe, 2001; Supovitz, 2002). Although descriptions and definitions of PLCs are extensive, the implementation process is unclear. Speck (1999) implied that a professional learning community has to be invented by each school. Researchers agreed that the leader is the key to success of an organization that promotes learning and collaboration (Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Leonard & Leonard, 1999; NAESP, 2001; Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2002). The review of the research indicated a need for studies to examine effective leadership in different environments (Blasé & Blasé, 2001) and more specific models of leadership roles (Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis, 1996).

The current case study focused in-depth on one school and the role of the principal in implementing PLCs. It compliments the extensive body of knowledge by spotlighting one school and provides a distinctive description of the organization, essential strategies that were

implemented, and the challenges that were encountered in implementing PLCs. It is a qualitative case study designed to be exploratory and descriptive (Maycut & Moorehouse, 1994). It involved “sensitivity to the nuances in data, tolerance for ambiguity, flexibility in design, and a large dose of creativity” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 34).

Lily Elementary participated in a grant offered by Lucent Learning Technologies to implement learning communities in their district. They participated two years before the grant ended and continued to implement learning communities for three years after it ended. Data were collected from interviews, observations, and documents. The principal and three of the 18 leaders/coaches of learning communities within her school were interviewed. The first interview was structured to gain background information on the interviewees. The questions from the second and third interviews were based on literature findings from Chapter 2. Coaches had their own learning communities and two of their meetings were observed. Documents that were analyzed gave the perspective of all staff members in the school.

Data were coded in three levels. Level I coding broke notes and transcripts into small pieces. Level II coding placed data into categories. Level III coding identified abstract constructs by conceptualizing the relationship among the three levels of codes (Sherman & Webb, 2001). The constant comparative method was used to move through the three levels of coding, each time going back to the original data and reorganizing accordingly. Interpretation of the data revealed meaning to how the principal implemented learning communities in her school.

Data triangulation was limited to interview responses, observations, and reviewed documents. No generalizations were made to other educational professionals in the schools or in other organizations. Standardized open-ended interviews allow little flexibility of wording and may limit naturalness of responses (Patton, 2002). An assumption is made that the perspective of

others is meaningful (Patton, 2002). This research contributes to literature relating to the work of PLCs by offering the experiences of one school.

Summary of Findings

How is the School Organized to Incorporate Learning Communities?

Lily Elementary was a large school where staff did not know each other. Teachers taught in isolation, often confining themselves to their own classrooms. The biggest challenge for Susan when she was first appointed principal was to break down communication barriers and build collegiality and rapport among staff (Hopkins, 1990; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; Sparks, 2002). She incorporated an internal focus to promote morale boosting and cohesion among staff (Griffith, 2003) that was a critical step toward developing a culture of learning.

Susan assessed the current state of the school and utilized processes what were already in place to change its isolationistic culture to become collaborative. She restructured the learning climate by transforming what she already had in place: book clubs became learning communities; the Study Team became the Leadership Team; combined grade level teams were separated so that each grade level had its own team; and the newsletter included more extensive information. Other groups were encouraged to collaborate on academic needs. Brown University Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) supported the implementation of overlapping communities as the framework for building learning communities.

Susan's restructuring plans functioned as one system to move the school toward a collaborative culture and implementing learning communities. She built professional networks and relationships (Wood & Anderson, 2005). Leonard and Leonard (2001) determined that professional learning communities could exist only in an open environment that cultivated a climate of professional and personal respect.

What Strategies are Essential in Implementing Learning Communities?

School-wide implementation

Susan implemented nine learning communities school-wide with 18 coaches as their leaders and required participation of all staff members. Communities included representatives from each grade level. Stein (1998) posited that community learning must be for everyone. She took the opportunity of participating in the district's LLC project that offered training and support for coaches that led the learning communities. Susan also created two learning communities for the coaches and appointed Jill as the coaches' coach. The school-wide implementation was the primary vehicle used to promote cross grade level interactions and support professional collegiality. Researchers agreed that people desired to be in a supportive community (Mullen & Kochan, 2000; Speck, 1999). Colleagues also developed a broad perspective of how the school functioned as a system (Abu-Tineh, 2003; Senge, 1990).

The school-wide implementation of learning communities also provided the opportunity for professional development to be embedded in the culture of the school (Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Richardson, 1998; Strahan, 2004). Colleagues formed professional relationships with their peers, became familiar with curricula and students' developmental levels and had new appreciation for one another. Claudia explained that she was able to compliment what students were learning in other classrooms with her instruction. Jill indicated that colleagues helped her to see different perspectives. Her learning community offered the opportunity for in-depth sharing of ideas and helped her to implement different instructional strategies. [J1-7] Sharing student work that was not perfect signified that people were examining and critiquing each other's practices. Coaches agreed that learning communities changed their educational practices. Changes included implementing new strategies for giving home-work and following directions. Susan was encouraged that implementing school-wide learning communities and working on building

rapport and collegiality were changing the culture of her school. [S2-3] Grodsky and Gamoran (2003) reiterated that school-based professional development contributed to professional community.

Building staff capacity

Susan's professional development perspective had a strong impact on her leadership decisions. She valued learning and wanted her staff to participate in different kinds of opportunities that would foster their learning (NAESP, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Scribner, 1999; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1993; Youngs & King, 2002). In addition to implementing learning communities as described above, Susan provided other activities for her staff and encouraged them to be learners and leaders (Barth, 2001). Susan guided the activities of the leadership team as they experienced school leadership and made decisions. Susan utilized teacher expertise (Richardson, 2003) by planning staff development in a mini convention design where teachers had the opportunity to lead and learn.

It is important to note that the activities were relevant and connected to school improvement (Blasé & Blasé, 1999). Susan encouraged teachers to become National Board Certified Teachers. Jill indicated that going through the process complimented the research-based learning she was trying to implement in her learning community. [J1-7] Susan believed that there were times when learning how to use a different technology would come before it could actually be used to impact instruction in the classroom. [S3-9] Teachers attended the traditional workshops offered by the district, had hands-on practice and discussions in their learning communities, and finally implemented the technology as an instructional tool in their classrooms. Blasé and Kirby (1992) suggested that leaders should support both formal and informal learning activities. [S2-2] Susan provided different professional development activities because she hoped it was "making them (teachers) a bit more curious."

De-privatization of practice

Structures were in place at Lily Elementary for de-privatization of practices (Hopkins, 1990; Supovitz, 2002). The scoring of students' writing was a significant activity that de-privatized practices of all teachers at Lily Elementary. Other significant activities for de-privatization involved leadership team activities, and peer observations by the comprehension study group.

The scoring of writing prompts was a year-long process that enabled all grade level teachers to examine the student writing in other classes/grade levels. The goal was to improve fourth grade students' writing scores on the state standardized test and understand that it is not only the responsibility of the fourth grade teachers. Susan indicated that teachers should have a "vested interest" in what others were teaching. [S2-6] Teachers collected writing responses from their students, exchanged them with other teachers who critiqued them. The state's six-point writing rubric was used as a guide to determine the levels of each student's writing. Teachers had the opportunity to reflect on how writing instruction at all grade levels impacted each other. The standardized test scores at the end of the year showed an increase of 9% in writing.

Susan, members of the leadership team, and classroom teachers were involved in conversations about students' progress and achievements. They identified, assessed, discussed students' work, and followed through on their progress. The team also visited classrooms, brought back data, reflected on what they saw, and communicated their observations with teachers whose classes were observed. Leadership team members and teachers were able to share observations and classroom practices since every teacher was provided an overview of the classroom walk-through process that they utilized during classroom visits. Susan noted that the innovative experience of participating in classroom walk-throughs was a good experience for all

of the staff involved. [S3-4] Stein (1998) suggested using innovative strategies to de-privatize practices.

The reading comprehension group was beginning to do peer observations, modeling lessons, and giving feedback to members within their group. Susan explained that this practice was flowing into the learning communities. Wood and Anderson (2005) noted that peer evaluation was the most successful professional development activity. The leadership team, other study groups, and learning communities are three structures at Lily Elementary that have the potential to de-privatize practices, change classroom practices, and increase student achievement. Bryk and Camburn (1999) reported that de-privatization was a core practice in schools that implemented learning communities. HRD (2003) noted that the sharing of successes and struggles of professional practices was an indication of de-privatization of practice. Such practices were embedded in the activities described above.

Data collection and analyses

There were indications of data collection and analyses for the purpose of improving practices in learning communities and across grade levels (HRD, 2003). Susan indicated that a learning community collected and analyzed data on homework practices, which resulted in changes in the way teachers addressed homework. [S2-2] She stated that another community investigated the amount of nonfiction and fiction books students were reading. The community members went back to their grade level teams and gathered information. Yet another community examined why students didn't follow directions the first time they were given. The community developed a questionnaire, collected, and organized the data in order to make changes in the way teachers give directions to their students. [S2-2] Susan identified that activity as "one of the high points." [CM1-S] Researchers reiterated the importance of using data to set goals (Burnett, 2002; DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Joyce & Calhoun, 1995; Reeves, 2006; Richardson, 1998; Strahan,

2004). Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) acknowledged that in-depth analyses and feedback were limited. It seemed that this was the case at Lily Elementary. The institute concluded that the levels of collaboration and trust affected the quality and extent of data analyses.

Trust-building activities

Trust-building activities helped develop a collaborative climate in learning communities at Lily Elementary. The activities contributed to success and became a critical component of their meetings (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Parson, 1999). Susan utilized trust-building activities as the primary vehicle used to move members from congenial to collegial relationships. Youngs and King (2002) determined that it was the responsibility of the principal to establish a culture of trust. Jill referred to the activities as being "powerful." [J3-7] Some coaches suggested that the activities took less time, indicating that trust among members increased. This resulted in having more time for sharing student work. [CM2-Coach7; CM2-Coach8] Coaches seemed to continue to include trust-building activities despite the level of trust that they perceived in their communities. Bryk and Camburn (1999) identified trust as the strongest facilitator in developing learning communities. Other researchers agreed that the level of trust determined the level of collaborative practice (Hargreaves, 2002; Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Parson, 1999; Youngs & King, 2002). However, Susan pointed out, "It does take time to be trustworthy." [S2-4]

Providing a shared educational purpose

All participants readily acknowledged that Lily Elementary had the common goal of improving student achievement by improving instruction. However, Susan provided a specific educational purpose for learning community meetings via two resource books, the first one for members and its companion handbook for the leaders/coaches as referenced in Chapter 2. These

district-recommended books offered structure and guidance for leaders and members of learning communities. They also helped members to make connections among communities. Learning communities focused on one chapter at a time that addressed a specific instructional strategy and the communities selected the specific instructional strategy their community would study. Pearl indicated that the text was the “authority.” [P3-3] Researchers suggested that members were connected in collegial communities to pursue a common goal (D’Agostino, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2001). There were indications that coaches felt connected when they identified commonalities among their communities. [J2-14]

What Challenges were Encountered in Implementing Learning Communities?

Selecting a goal

The goals of learning communities were implied via resource books. Coaches acknowledged the advantages of having a common thread that connected all communities. However, the topics of focus seemed open-ended and coaches struggled with their selection, when to change to another topic, and the time-line for the study. The topic did not appear to be meaningful to some members. Some found it irrelevant and others seemed unable to adapt what they were studying to their grade levels. One coach suggested that there should be a link between the strategies studied in their learning communities to classroom activities, giving members specific assignments. [CM2-Coach6] Another suggestion was that they should link strategies they were studying to specific content areas. [CM2-Coach7] Some coaches reported that activities that involved teaming with other teachers seemed to be successful in motivating members to share authentic student work. Utilizing a checklist to determine the group’s needs and closely following the guidelines of the resource books were also successful.

Setting direction and identifying goals are essential in increasing student achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Researchers established a significant relationship between setting

goals and student achievement (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). A focus on teaching and learning is also very much supported by research (Burnette, 2002; Coburn, 2001; DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Leithwood, 1990; Phillips, 1995; Sparks & Hirsh, 1999; Stein, 1998; Strahan, 2004; Tanner, 2003; Youngs & King, 2002). Other researchers added that a mission grounded in student achievement influenced the development of learning communities (Richardson, 2003; Stein, 1998; Tanner, 2003).

Coaches leadership skills

Susan encouraged coaching as a form of professional development (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Shepherd, 1996; Showers, Joyce & Bennett, 1987). In order to support and train coaches effectively, she created coaches learning communities (Yendol-Silva, 2003). However, coaches appeared to struggle in leading their communities and seemed unclear about their roles as facilitators of meetings. [J2-16; CM2-C] Susan acknowledged that coaches needed to be trained. [S2-1] In order to move to more collaborative collegiality that would impact student achievement, coaches needed to strengthen their leadership skills. They needed to be able to identify legitimate concerns and develop skills in coaching their peers and facilitating learning community meetings.

Moving from congeniality to collegial collaboration

There was a tremendous effort to encourage congeniality at Lily Elementary. Susan was successful in building staff congeniality by creating structures that increased whole school, grade level, and cross grade level interactions. The structures allowed staff to build personal relationships with, and identify professional responsibilities of their peers. It seems this is a continual process in moving toward a collaborative culture. Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform (2004) documented that collaboration was limited to building up the groups. Susan stated, "We've been missing the spark that inspires us to get to the next level."

[S2-1] Parson (1999) established a continuum toward collaboration included people having little or no relationship with each other, then cooperation, followed by coordination, and finally collaboration. Shiu (2003) identified similar stages as prescriptive, participatory, and collaborative.

Learning communities at Lily Elementary seemed to experience different levels of collaboration. Levels also seemed to fluctuate at different times. Learning communities seemed to experience the participatory and coordination stages more than the collaborative stage. Supovitz (2002) admonished that collaboration did not translate to instructional focus. Coaches acknowledged that eliciting authentic participation from members of their learning communities was a major problem. They needed to overcome this challenge in order to progress to collegial collaborations that would change practice. Coaches addressed the lack of participation among members by discussing possible reasons that prevented and strategies that encouraged more participation. It seemed that some members lacked confidence in the topic they were studying and others were not finding the experience of participating in learning communities meaningful. Other comments suggested that coaches needed to be trained on how to facilitate meetings and recognize the different ways that people participate.

Coaches agreed they needed to utilize a list of shared norms that was developed by Lily Elementary to be implemented during school-wide community meetings. Having a list of shared norms was an element of learning communities identified by the district. It was defined as the agreed upon expectations for members (HRD, 2003). The norms were displayed at the observed coaches' meetings. Pearl indicated that utilizing the list of shared norms was successful in her community and adding "everyone shares" seemed to elicit more participation among members.

[CM1-P] Other researchers documented that everyone was connected by shared norms and

values (Calderwood, 2000; Ritchhart, 2002; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Still others suggested that groups were diverse in nature and needed to develop shared norms in order to function successfully (Calderwood, 2000; Shields & Seltzer, 1997). Jill and Claudia added that people needed to be open and willing to accept ideas from others (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Joyce & Calhoun, 1995; Patterson, 1993; Senge, 1990; Speck, 1999).

Finding time

Susan and the coaches expressed the need for more time. Susan struggled to schedule more meeting times because of contractual issues. She recognized the need for meetings that were longer than 45 minutes in order to have in-depth discussions and reflections. [S3-3] Coaches also agreed that they needed more time for meetings, trust-building, and collaborative practices. Researchers suggested that principals needed to schedule more time for collaboration (Barth, 2001; Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Blasé & Kirby, 1992; Blasik, 2005; Coburn, 2001; Dufour & Berkey, 1995; NAESP, 2001; Parson, 1999; Wood & Anderson, 2005).

Susan agreed that lack of time inhibited reflections. Coaches often ran out of time because reflections were last on the agenda. Researchers reiterated that time for reflection was essential because it allowed leadership development and impacted teacher growth (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hopkins, 1990; Patterson, 1993; Richardson, 1998). It is noteworthy to point out that Jill's learning community had times when members completed their reflections but she was disappointed in their responses. She described their reflections as "compliant." [J1-8] Susan stated, "Less is more." indicating that the quality of work was more important than the quantity. [CM1-S] Addressing the issue of time might be twofold. The first is to find creative ways to schedule time for more and longer meetings within contractual parameters. The second is to determine how to use time more effectively.

Conclusions

Archambault (1964) reported that Dewey, leader in the progressive movement, believed that education has two main phases that are distinguishable and should not be separated: organization of a school as a system, and adaptation of the school structure to meet individual needs. Senge (1990) suggested understanding how the whole system operates is crucial to the success of the organization and the individual. Understanding how learning communities function within the system of school is critical to their success. Lily Elementary functioned as a system to move from an isolationistic culture toward collaboration. Many processes were in place to support the implementation of learning communities.

Researchers offered suggestions for implementing learning communities (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Burnett, 2002; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Phillips, 1995; Shiu, 2003; Tanner, 2003). However, processes were diverse. They were not recipes for implementing learning communities, but consisted of menus of ingredients. Susan selected her menu of building networks for congenial and collegial relationships and developing structures that would continue the process. She believed that they would work interdependently to move the school toward a collaborative culture. Some successful strategies that Susan incorporated included implementing school-wide learning communities, building staff capacity, planning for de-privatization of practice, data collection and analyses, incorporating trust-building activities at meetings, and establishing a shared educational purpose.

Challenges that were encountered included selecting specific goals within learning communities, strengthening the coaches' leadership skills, developing strategies that will encourage staff to engage in authentic participation, and finding time for more and longer meetings. The body of research offered insights for informed decision-making in implementing learning communities. However, it is the leader's responsibility to facilitate the process

according to the needs of the school. This is a challenging task when faced with an abundance of information.

Implications

Lily Elementary implemented learning communities school-wide with the guidance of the district and the LLC grant. During the grant period, they received support and training from the district that decreased significantly after the grant ended. Susan managed to maintain learning communities but little progress was evident to the researcher that the faculty understood that the communication practices in their learning communities (on which they had been working on for the past five years) needed to focus on increased student learning and achievement. This case study offers a clear example of a school that has the stage set for developing learning communities and focusing on increasing student learning. However, Christman and Supovitz (2005) admonish districts and school leaders to provide support for teachers to improve their instructional practices within their communities. They added that teachers need tools and processes for connecting teaching and student learning. Wood (2007) acknowledged that coaches as leaders of learning communities need to be knowledgeable of and communicate the theoretical perspective and potential impact of learning communities on student learning in order to influence others.

Research is clear that learning communities have significant impact on student achievement. After a comprehensive review of the literature, Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2007) determined that well-developed learning communities have a positive impact on both teaching practices and student learning. This review documented a connection between teachers' participation in learning communities and improved student achievement in 8 of 11 schools. One study compared schools in England that did and others that did not implement learning communities. It revealed a significant increase in student achievement as drawn from Bolam et al

(2005). The reviewers acknowledged that the stronger the learning community, the higher the increase in student achievement. However, they warned that gains were not evident in communities where teachers worked together but did not focus highly on student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Learning communities offer a structure for teaching and learning within a collaborative culture. Collaboration that impacts classroom instruction and student learning is a process that develops over time beginning with the current state of the school. The school in this study had to overcome the barriers of communication among staff members. Creating opportunities for interpersonal interactions was necessary. After five years of implementing learning communities, the school had changed from an isolationistic culture to a friendly and inviting environment. People developed personal relationships and were comfortable in sharing their professional practices. Norwood's (2007) review of the literature suggested that it is difficult to plan continuous collaborative practices that focus on student achievement. However, he acknowledged that, if sustained, there are positive outcomes on student achievement.

Learning communities have the potential to change practice when members move beyond congeniality and coordination to collegial collaborations. However, there is a possibility of remaining status quo unless collaborative practices are implemented. Leonard & Leonard (2001) suggested that collaboration needs to be defined and made a priority. In this case, implementing school-wide learning communities served as a structure for making collegial connections and gaining a broad perspective of the school. It helped in creating a network where everyone was connected and knew how they fit in.

Characteristics of the learning communities in this study suggest that communities are very diverse and progress in a cyclical rather than a linear manner. Each of the nine learning

communities in this study was unique: their environments, their members, what they studied, how they studied, and levels of participation and collaboration. Any particular learning community could also experience changes within itself from time to time. Strong communities are not always strong and could experience periods of highs and lows. Such diversity among and within communities calls for establishing a direction, setting goals, monitoring frequently, and determining an outcome. Only then can authentic learning be measured and next steps planned. Researchers acknowledged the importance of setting and monitoring goals and documenting evidence of improvement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Richardson, 1998).

In addition to setting and monitoring goals, it is important to provide time and create a timeline for progress toward the goal. Phillips (1995) stated that she created a timeline to monitor progress toward the goal, and was able to make critical changes that led to the success of the learning communities. Lily Elementary took five years to move from an isolationistic culture toward collaborative practices. Their learning communities met eight times a year. Many of the participants believed that if they met more often, more progress could have been made. Christman and Supovitz (2005) suggested that learning communities in two cities failed to focus on instructional practices because of lack of time.

Several insights for leadership consideration emerged from this study. Leaders need to be skilled in facilitating dialogue and coaching in order to effectively lead learning communities. A leader should be cognizant of: outside influences such as new state standards, her own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of her colleagues, different perceptions of collaboration, different perspectives of the topic of study, and research pertaining to adult learning. Research indicates principal leadership impacts student learning indirectly through different paths (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). Renschler (1992) acknowledged that a principal interested

in academic achievement should consider whether the school culture is one of learning. Strahan (2004) added that successful reform was accomplished when an agenda was established to address student needs in the context of a collaborative environment.

Future Studies

Several research studies were conducted to examine learning communities on a broad scale. Such studies determined that leadership roles were comprehensive. More studies that could provide models of leadership roles in implementing learning communities are needed. This case study focused on one school and could possibly serve as a model of how the principal started from ground zero and implemented learning communities in order to develop a collaborative culture that would lead to increased student achievement. Further studies might examine schools that did not have to begin at the point of building congenial relationships. A study that begins at the point at which this study ends could be insightful.

Previous research is clear that leaders have indirect effects on student achievement by influencing organizational variables. Organizational variables and evidence that documents positive outcomes of learning communities need to be explored. A beneficial study could observe the process from creating a mission, articulating goals, evaluating teacher and student learning. The phenomenon of collaboration and how it is articulated within a learning community could be examined. It would also be beneficial to study one small learning community and document the process and outcome of collaborative practices. What does it look like? How do you know it is occurring? How can you monitor its effects on teacher and student learning? Observing meetings, classroom instruction, goal setting, and how the principal monitors those goals should be studied.

Studies indicated that instructional leadership is necessary for professional growth, which leads to increased student achievement. A suggested study could identify principals as

instructional leaders and document their processes and actions that impact student achievement. The relationship among instructional leadership behaviors, participation in learning communities, and engaging in collaborations could be studied.

There is also a need for quantitative studies. Researchers could examine schools that are in need of improvement as determined by the federal accountability plan. Target areas are identified for each school through the accountability plan. State standardized test results could be documented for schools that have implemented learning communities and are focusing on improving their target areas. Schools that did and did not implement learning communities could be compared. What are the leadership styles? Did student achievement increase? What were the professional development activities? Leaders are responsible for improving schools. They need to be given a voice. Researchers could share their stories through qualitative and quantitative studies with others that could enlighten and empower others to create positive cultural changes.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview 1

1. How many years have you been a principal?
2. Describe your background as an educator.
3. At what point in your career did you grow the most professionally? Explain.
4. How many years have you been involved in the learning community project?
5. How would you characterize your leadership role prior to the Lucent Learning Community (LLC) project?
6. What influenced your decision to be part of the LLC project?
7. What past experiences influenced your leadership style? Explain.
8. To what extent do you use the LLC/district rubric?
9. What is your definition of a Professional Learning Community (PLC)?

Interview 2

1. Has the learning community practices changed after the support from the LLC grant ended? Explain.
2. Do you have a common goal?
3. Characterize collaboration at your school.
4. Order three priorities and explain their level of importance.
5. What activities are critical to improving practice?
6. How are decisions made?
7. Do you impact student learning? Explain.
8. Do you impact teacher professional growth? Explain.
9. Describe the process of transforming your school into a PLC.
10. What skills are necessary in order to implement a learning community?
11. How are group relationships built?
12. Describe a learning community (or more) at your school.
13. What support do you have? From whom?
14. What are the effects of being involved in learning communities?
15. How has teacher learning transformed to student learning?
16. What are your roles and responsibilities of a leader of learning communities?
17. How has your participation in learning communities impacted your instructional practices? (Coaches' question)
17. Do you consider yourself an instructional leader? (Principal question)

Interview 3

1. What is critical to the implementation of a learning community?
2. What is critical to the sustenance of a learning community?
3. Explain the essential elements of a learning community.
4. What does the concept of a learning community mean to you?
5. Do you consider PLCs at your school successful? Explain.
6. What would you do differently next year?
7. What strategies worked best? The least?
8. What have you learned from the experience?
9. How would you distinguish between a strong and a weak PLC?

Member Checks

Each interview transcript will be submitted to the participant asking the following questions.

1. Are there any misinterpreted responses? Explain.
2. Is my interpretation in line with your experiences?
3. What would you like me to change or clarify further with you?
4. How can I improve my interviewing techniques for the next interview?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

UFIRB #2007-U-1176
PRINCIPAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Educator:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration & Policy Department at the University of Florida conducting a case study research for my dissertation. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Jim Doud. The purpose of my study is to understand and interpret how one school, under the same leadership, implemented and sustained Professional Learning Communities for five years. I am asking you to participate in this study because you have been involved with the Lucent Learning Community Project for several years and continue to implement learning communities long after the grant period ended.

With your permission, I would like to observe two or more of your regularly scheduled learning community meetings. I would also like to interview you and three of your teacher leaders twice or possibly three times. Interviews will last no more than one hour and will be scheduled at your convenience after I have received a copy of the signed consent from you. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. I would also like to review any archival documents.

My written descriptions will be sent to you in order to maintain the integrity of all responses. You will have the opportunity to clarify your responses and my interpretations. I would like to take field notes and audio-tape meetings and interviews. Dr. Doud, my dissertation chair and I will have access to the audio-tapes, which I will transcribe personally, removing any identifiers during transcription and replacing your name and any other names mentioned with pseudonyms. The tapes will be transcribed within two months of the interview and will be kept secured. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law, and your identity will not be revealed in the final manuscript.

There are no anticipated risks, compensation, or other direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You are free to withdraw consent and may discontinue your participation at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at (407) 366-2829 or anjanimohabir@yahoo.com. You also may contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Jim Doud, at (352) 392-2391 x264 or jldoud@coe.ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Please sign and return this copy of the letter to me. A second copy is provided for your records. By signing this letter, you give me permission to report the data I collect in interviews with you and observations at meetings. This report will be submitted to my faculty supervisor as part of my dissertation requirements. Also, by signing, you give me permission to use these data in academic presentations and publications.

Thank you.
Sincerely,

Anjani Mohabir

I have read the procedure described above for the study entitled, "The Principal's Role in Implementing Professional Learning Communities within a School: A Case Study." I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and have received a copy of this description.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

UFIRB #2007-U-1176
TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Educator:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration & Policy Department at the University of Florida conducting a case study research for my dissertation. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Jim Doud. The purpose of my study is to understand and interpret how one school, under the same leadership, implemented and sustained Professional Learning Communities for five years. I am asking you to participate in this study because you have been involved with the Lucent Learning Community Project for several years and continue to be actively involved in learning communities long after the grant period ended.

With your permission, I would like to observe two or more of your regularly scheduled learning community meetings. I would also like to interview you twice or possibly three times. Interviews will last no more than one hour and will be scheduled at your convenience after I have received a copy of the signed consent from you. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer.

My written descriptions will be sent to you in order to maintain the integrity of all responses. You will have the opportunity to clarify your responses and my interpretations. I would like to take field notes and audio-tape meetings and interviews. Dr. Doud, my dissertation chair and I will have access to the audio-tapes, which I will transcribe personally, removing any identifiers during transcription and replacing your name and any other names mentioned with pseudonyms. The tapes will be transcribed within two months of the interview and will be kept secured. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law, and your identity will not be revealed in the final manuscript.

There are no anticipated risks, compensation, or other direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You are free to withdraw consent and may discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at (407) 366-2829 or anjanimohabir@yahoo.com. You also may contact my faculty supervisor, Dr. Jim Doud, at (352) 392-2391 x264 or jldoud@coe.ufl.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Please sign and return this copy of the letter to me. A second copy is provided for your records. By signing this letter, you give me permission to report the data I collect in interviews with you and observations at meetings. This report will be submitted to my faculty supervisor as part of my dissertation requirements. Also, by signing, you give me permission to use these data in academic presentations and publications.

Thank you.
Sincerely,

Anjani Mohabir

I have read the procedure described above for the study entitled, "The Principal's Role in Implementing Professional Learning Communities within a School: A Case Study." I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and have received a copy of this description.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

APPENDIX C
LEVELS OF CODING

Domains, Categories, & Rules for Inclusion

DOMAIN: Changing School Culture

CATEGORY: Congenial Connections

RULES: Current state of the school
Changes needed
Beginning steps to build staff relationships

CATEGORY: Professional Network

RULES: Strategies that allowed movement beyond congenial connections
Grade level connections
Across grade level connections
Transforming book clubs into learning communities

CATEGORY: Collaborative Collegiality

RULES: Progress made in learning communities
Progress in other groups that supported learning communities

CATEGORY: Strengthening the Network

RULES: Indications of successful strategies

DOMAIN: Building Staff Capacity

CATEGORY: The Principal's Perspective

RULES: Impact of past experiences

CATEGORY: Multiple Opportunities for Teacher Learning

RULES: Coaches participation in professional growth opportunities
How professional development activities are connected and relevant
Benefits of activities

CATEGORY: Leadership Opportunities

RULES: Structures for involving more staff
Roles and responsibilities

DOMAIN: Challenges Encountered

CATEGORY: Stumbling Blocks

RULES: Coaches' roles and responsibilities
Coaches' training needs
Participation of learning community members
Selecting a topic
Time

Examples of Level 1 Coding

We've been missing that spark that just inspires you to get you to the next step. S2-1

It's a pretty high amount of people who had positive feedback (from survey). S2-1

Support is more how to coach. S2-1 (also in S3-2)

I would like more of that kind of training for my coaches and I'm having a hard time finding it S2-1. (also in S2-9, S2-12, and S3-7)

I'd like to get to where teachers feel comfortable going into each other's classroom... it takes a long time to build that trust S2-1. (also in S2-11)

We want to improve student achievement and an underlying piece of that is the teaching and learning. S2-2

How do I make the teachers the best that they could be? S2-2 (also in S2-15)

If they work in that isolation, we're never going to have the best school that we can. S2-2

I really want to de-privatize practice. S2-2

Everything I read talks about the importance of collaboration and valuable conversation among school people. S2-2

I think elementary schools in particular, just by design it is very easy for a teacher to come and sign in the morning, go to their classroom, never speak to another adult in the building, and go home at the end of the day. S2-2

We have all kinds of this (collaboration). Sometimes it's a two-person collaboration; sometimes it's a much greater. S2-3

A grade level with eight teachers in that case, got together to coordinate their schedules and try to make all of that happen. I think that's real progress. S2-3

But if we're doing things that are real, and worth the time, and I left with some nugget that I would be able to use in my classroom over the next month, yes I had to be there but I didn't waste my time. S2-4

Time (is needed) to build relationships. S2-4

You can't have a learning community if people aren't participating. That means actually being there and doing something. S2-4 (also in S3-1)

It does take time to be trustworthy. S2-4

Sometimes we'll do some assessments...follow up...meet with a particular teacher S2-5

When we do some follow-up diagnostics, teachers are really excited (to have the confirmation that their classroom instruction is working). S2-5

Recognize that we don't know everything...we can get better. S2-5

We've done some training on writing this year and that was the first time we had people score prompts within their own teams. S2-6

Last year we had 78% of students who had 3.5 or higher, this year we have 87%. So I'm really pleased with the gains and I think that next year we'll be better. S2-6

How do we set a direction for school? How do we support each other? How can we have fun doing it? How do we build our teams and make our teams better (Leadership Team). S2-6

Examples of Level 2 and Level 3 Coding

CHANGING CULTURE

Professional Network

If they work in that isolation, we're never going to have the best school that we can. S2-2

I really want to de-privatize practice. S2-2

Everything I read talks about the importance of collaboration and valuable conversation among school people. S2-2

I think elementary schools in particular, just by design it is very easy for a teacher to come and sign in the morning, go to their classroom, never speak to another adult in the building, and go home at the end of the day. S2-2

A grade level with eight teachers in that case, got together to coordinate their schedules and try to make all of that happen. I think that's real progress. S2-3

But if we're doing things that are real, and worth the time, and I left with some nugget that I would be able to use in my classroom over the next month, yes I had to be there but I didn't waste my time. S2-4

Collaborative Collegiality

A few of them actually watch one another doing a lesson and give feedback. So we're just starting a little bit there. S2-3

We've done some training on writing this year and that was the first time we had people score prompts within their own teams. S2-6

Last year we had 78% of students who had 3.5 or higher, this year we have 87%. So I'm really pleased with the gains and I think that next year we'll be better. S2-6

Strengthening the Network

It's a pretty high amount of people who had positive feedback (from survey). S2-1

We want to improve student achievement and an underlying piece of that is the teaching and learning. S2-2

It helped us to have a bit of commonality, a common theme. S2-9

They do start to build some trust. They look forward to seeing each other. S2-11

They actually developed a questionnaire and analyzed their data...and made some changes in the way they gave directions. S2-2

BUILDING CAPACITY

Multiple Opportunities for Teacher Learning

How do I make the teachers the best that they could be? S2-2 (also in S2-15)

Leadership Opportunities

Sometimes we'll do some assessments...follow up...meet with a particular teacher S2-5

When we do some follow-up diagnostics, teachers are really excited (to have the confirmation that their classroom instruction is working). S2-5

How do we set a direction for school? How do we support each other? How can we have fun doing it? How do we build our teams and make our teams better (Leadership Team). S2-6

CHALLENGES

Stumbling Blocks

We've been missing that spark that just inspires you to get you to the next step. S2-1

Support is more how to coach. S2-1 (also in S3-2)

I would like more of that kind of training for my coaches and I'm having a hard time finding it S2-1. (also in S2-9, S2-12, and S3-7)

I'd like to get to where teachers feel comfortable going into each other's classroom... it takes a long time to build that trust S2-1. (also in S2-11)

Time (is needed) to build relationships. S2-4

You can't have a learning community if people aren't participating. That means actually being there and doing something. S2-4 (also in S3-1)

It does take time to be trustworthy. S2-4

Recognize that we don't know everything...we can get better. S2-5

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Anjani Devi Mohabir was born in Guyana, South America and emigrated to the United Kingdom where she completed her middle and high school education. She got married shortly after high school and spent the next 10 years raising her three children before furthering her career. Her family moved to the United States where she pursued bachelor's and master's degrees in elementary education from the University of Central Florida. Anjani continued to learn and grow in her field and became a National Board Certified teacher. She continued to pursue Specialist and Doctoral Degrees from the University of Florida. Anjani's educational experiences included being a classroom teacher, mathematics and science specialist, assistant principal, District Administrator, staff developer for the State of Florida, and a mentor for her peers. She is humbled by her achievements and knows in her heart that it is the Lord Jesus who guides her in all that she does. To Him be the glory.