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A STUDY OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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A STUDY OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

By

Jeffrey Carl Stamper
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A STUDY OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Throughout the post-modern or post-professional age (2000-present), high stakes testing and accountability of public schools forced educational organizations to improve their professional practices to work collaboratively (Little, 2003). As a result, professional learning communities (PLCs) have been found to improve student learning among educational organizations (DuFour, 2007; Hord, 2004). During the past 20 years, a significant amount of research has been conducted, which describes PLCs in the educational settings (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008) Researchers note a lack of empirical research which focuses on teacher and principal perceptions of PLCs (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

The central focus of this study is to better understand teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions of professional learning communities (PLCs) as identified by Hord through reporting data collected using the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R). This study seeks to report teacher and principal perceptions of PLCs to identify specific practices that are most common in Kentucky schools.

Findings suggest teacher and principal perceptions differ regarding the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord, and as measured by Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman's (2010) PLCA-R. Findings also suggest that both teachers and principals agree that these five dimensions exist including: Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice, Supportive Conditions – Relationships, and Supportive Conditions- Structures and that the majority of the specific practices related to each are in place. However, principal perceptions reflect that PLC practices were more common than teachers reported.

KEYWORDS: Professional Learning Community

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Student's Signature

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Date

A STUDY OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present." – Bill Kean

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The children's' story *The Biggest Pumpkin Ever* tells the tale of two mice who embark on an illustrious journey to raise a pumpkin. Along with their enormous aspirations and grandiose dreams, the two protagonists Clayton, the house mouse, and Desmond, the field mouse, begin working simultaneously in the garden to achieve their goal. Clayton aspired to win the largest pumpkin award at the fair as he worked throughout the day, while Desmond dreamed of carving the largest jack-o-lantern ever as he worked throughout the night. Throughout the growing season, both mice consulted with relatives to learn how best to care for their pumpkins. Both discovered the importance of adding sugar water to the root system for optimal growth, as well as wrapping the pumpkin during cold weather. Clayton and Desmond discovered how their collaborative efforts contributed to an enormous pumpkin that would allow both to achieve their goals. Eventually, the pumpkin was ripe enough to be transported to the local fair for judging, but the task was too great for the young mice. Therefore, they gathered their friends and family to collaboratively move the pumpkin to town for the fair, and later to the hill for carving. The pumpkin won the grand prize and was placed on the hill above the town where it was carved with a smiling face that lit up the night sky on that very special Halloween night.

While the tale of Clayton and Desmond is a simple children's story, elements of professional learning communities (PLCs) are present throughout. Evidence of shared and supportive leadership appeared as both mice worked independently to achieve their own personal goals to finally realize their work could be conducted collaboratively much more efficiently. Regarding the dimension of shared values and vision, the goals of growing an award-winning pumpkin and carving the world's largest jack-o-lantern lead to a common purpose for both mice. Elements of collective learning and application occurred as both mice developed their own

agricultural skills as it pertains to pumpkin growing from village elders. Indication of shared personal practice was portrayed as both mice worked diligently to grow the perfect pumpkin suitable for their specific goals. Lastly, the pumpkin was well taken care of as both mice supplied sugar water and warm blankets to create supportive conditions to improve growth. The story of *The Biggest Pumpkin Ever* provides a light-hearted introduction to the main goals and important elements of PLCs.

The concept of collaborative problem solving is not a new idea, but one that has become popular within educational organizations in recent years. The term PLC evolved from *learning communities* first introduced during the pre-professional age (1900-1960). During this time, collaboration among teachers and students was a topic for rhetorical discourse among scholars. Dewey's (1933) research suggested that teachers and students should share in the learning process. This collaborative model engaged students in the learning process with hopes of creating lifelong learners. Dewey's contemporary, Meiklejohn (1932) is known for his work with the *Experimental College* during the 1920s. Through his inquiry, he discovered the importance of conferencing among students and faculty members. Meiklejohn's conferencing provided the framework in which current PLCs operate today to improve instruction and student achievement.

The age of space exploration required students who were more proficient in higher levels of mathematics and science. In turn, this gave way to the age of the autonomous professional (1960-1980). The need to compete with Russia increased classroom rigor and consequently increased teacher isolation (Hargreaves, 2000). Teachers remained isolated in their classrooms while instruction was delivered independently with no fear of standardized testing or accountability forming teaching silos (Joyce, 2004). Meanwhile, at the collegiate level of education, Cox (2001) first coined the term *faculty learning communities*. Learning communities,

according to Cox, developed as a learning experience for faculty members to discuss curriculum, teaching methods, and new ideas to further enhance student learning.

The evolutionary process of education developed into isolated experiences for teachers and students throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The results of globalization required teachers to educate students differently to meet the needs of the new world (Murphy & Adams, 1998). In addition, globalization indicated a strong need for improving education overall for students in the age of the collegial professional (1980-2000). In conjunction with federal and state government mandates for standardized testing, schools were forced to improve their practices through teacher collaborative efforts (Hargreaves, 2000; Murphy & Adams, 1998). The times of educators teaching their favorite lessons while remaining isolated from collaboration with others became a vestige of the past (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Joyce, 2004).

Educational organizations continued to evolve into collaborative environments focused on student improvement and professional learning during the post-modern or post-professional age (2000-present) (Eacker & Keating, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Hord, 2004; Schmocker, 2004). Finally, the term PLC became common in educational organizations across the country and prevalent through the works of DuFour (2008) at Adlai Stevens High School and Hord (2004) at the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL). The post-modern age led to continual professional growth and increased teacher empowerment in the decision-making process (Joyce, 2004).

The review of the literature suggests a measure of consistency with regard to characteristics of PLCs that are crucial for success and sustainability. The five primary characteristics of PLCs are: (a) shared vision, values, and goals; (b) shared leadership; (c) collaborative learning; (d) supportive conditions; and (e) shared personal practice (Blankstein,

2004; DuFour & DuFour, 1998; DuFour, et al., 2008; Hord, 1997; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Murphy, et al., 2000).

The characteristics of "shared beliefs, values, and vision" are necessary for sustainable success of a PLC (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Shared beliefs refers to "how (teachers) conceive the purpose of the school, and how they will construct their vision of what the school should look like and how (teachers) will work together" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 9). The concept of shared values may be defined as the common values that allow teachers to collaborate and share unique perspectives (Louise & Marks, 1998). When beliefs and values are shared, teachers begin to describe what will happen next and begin charting a path to reach common goals. Hord and Sommers (2008) describe a shared vision as "a mental image of what is important to the organization and its individuals" (Hord & Sommers, 2008 p. 10). Fullan (1993) further states that vision shows what is most important to the organization. In addition, Wald and Castleberry (2000) state that vision inspires members to work together for a common dream. Thus, a shared vision is the actual act of moving forward as an organization with the principal serving as a guide through the process.

The characteristic of shared leadership refers to the idea that schools are learning organizations, and teachers and principals are in a continuous cycle of learning together. This process is not only challenging for the principal, but for teachers alike. Research suggests that teachers tend to primarily rely on administrative intervention for problems that arise, rather than developing new ways of thinking and doing (DuFour, 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Reliance on administrators for decision-making hinders the ability of teachers to assume roles which foster shared leadership (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Through shared leadership, and with the help of principals, teachers contribute to instructional decisions and other identifiable problems within

the school. This does not relinquish responsibility from the principal, but allows everyone to become contributing professionals (Byrk et. al, 1999).

The characteristic of collective learning indicates the commitment of the entire school staff to learning to become more effective teachers and improve student learning (Klein-Kracht, 1993). Through collective learning, teachers engage in shared knowledge and meaningful discussions to continually improve student learning. The process of "identifying student needs and areas for attention indicate to the staff where they need to learn new content for instructional strategies, so that they can become more effective teachers and administrators" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p.13). Schools that foster continuous discussions among its members for the purpose of growth will improve overall functionality (Danielson, 2002). Principals continuously challenge teachers to develop collaborative innovations in order to improve the overall functionality of the school and the entire educational process.

The characteristic of supportive conditions refers to physical and structural factors of the school in terms of relational and human capacities. Research suggests that allocating time for PLC's is one of the greatest physical and structural challenges PLC's will face (DuFour, 2007; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lord, 1994); it is crucial for principals and teachers to strategically work together to find time to physically meet. Research has also indicated that teachers who feel supported by fellow teachers and administrators are more likely to be effective (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The characteristic of shared personal practice is not an evaluative process, but a process of professionals helping one another. Hord and Sommers (2008) stated that shared personal practice is "peers helping peers that includes teachers visiting each other's classrooms on a regular basis to observe, take notes, and discuss their observations with the teachers they have

visited" (p. 15). Shared personal practice occurs when teachers work together to share ideas that will benefit students. (Danielson, 2002). Guskey (2005) asserted that endeavors regarding shared personal practice aid in preventing teacher isolation. Evidence suggests "that those communities that did engage in structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions and that investigated the relationships between instructional practices and student work produce significant gains in student learning" (Christman, 2003, p. 5).

Statement of Problem

Throughout the post-modern or post-professional age (2000-present), high stakes testing and accountability of public schools forced educational organizations to improve their professional practices to work collaboratively (Little, 2003). As a result, PLCs have been found to improve student learning among educational organizations (DuFour, 2007; Hord, 2004). During the past 20 years, a significant amount of research has been conducted (mostly qualitative in nature) to describe PLCs in the educational setting (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, 2008; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Murphy, Jost, & Shipman, 2000; Newmand & Wehlage, 1995; Sommers and Hord, 2008; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The research presents varied perspectives of the characteristics that form PLCs.

Blankstein (2004) contributes six essential elements that are needed for PLCs to operate successfully: (a) Common mission, vision, values, and goals, (b) Ensuring achievement for all students, (c) Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning, (d) Using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement, (e) Gaining active engagement from family and community, and (f) Building sustainable leadership. Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) devised the first model: school based learning community. Although this model was not the first learning organization in education to focus on student learning or collaboration, it was the first to

introduce the notions of sharing among teachers through reflective dialogue designed to decrease teacher isolation. Murphy, Jost, and Shipman (2000) worked with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) to promote six necessary elements of successful PLCs: (1) facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship or a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community, (2) advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth, (3) ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, (4) collaborating with families and community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources, (5) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner, (6) understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

These standards are designed to aid administrators in planning for PLC implementation into their school. Newmand and Wehlage's (1995) work led to the establishment of common terminology essential to the development of professional communities. Their model was divided into four sections including: (a) instruction with the purpose to focus on student learning, (b) authentic pedagogy designed to be relevant to the lives of all students, (c) school organizational capacity designed to enhance teacher contributions to improve student learning, and (d) external support focused on the idea that all stake holders be responsible for student learning. The work of Richard DuFour led to the following six descriptors: (1) shared mission, vision, values, and goals, (2) collaborative culture with a focus on learning, (3) collective inquiry into best practice and current reality, (4) action orientation, (5) commitment to continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation. Shirley Hord's work through the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL) provided one of the first PLC models which include the following five

describing characteristics: (1) shared beliefs, values and vision, (2) shared and supportive leadership, (3) collective learning and its application, (4) supportive conditions, and (5) shared personal practice (Sommers and Hord, 2008). A later modified version developed by Hipp and Huffman (2010) used the following dimensions: (1) shared and supportive leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application, (4) shared personal practice, (5) supportive conditions-relationships, (6) supportive conditions-structures which lead to the development of the Professional Learning Community Assessment Revised (PLCA-R) survey instrument.

The results of the PLC meta-analysis conducted by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) from 1993 to 2006 suggested the majority of research conducted was qualitative in nature and primarily in the form of case studies (Keiffer-Barone & Ware, 2002). A review of the literature also suggests a lack of research using teacher and principal perceptions of PLCs (Hord, 2004). Furthermore, subsequent doctoral work also indicates little research that describes PLC characteristics from the teacher and principal perspective across all grade levels in a larger sample population (Bitterman, 2010; Curry, 2010; Poovey, 2012).

The central focus of this study was to describe characteristics of PLCs among all grade levels (elementary, middle, and high) based on perceptions of both teachers and principals. The study utilized the PLCA-R survey instrument as well as the following demographic statistics for teachers: (a) gender, (b) education level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years teaching at their present school, (e) grade level of students for teachers, and (f) subject area taught. The following demographic information was also collected for principals: (a) gender, (b) educational level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years as principal at their present school, and (e) grade level of students for head principals.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions of teachers and principals of Kentucky PLCs. Previous research in the field of PLCs in the United States has primarily been qualitative in nature and has helped to describe the characteristics and dynamics of how PLCs are structured, how they function, and how they are perceived by participating members (Hord, 2004; DuFour, 2007; Vescio et al., 2008). This study examined the five key characteristics of PLCs using survey research methods. These methods may enable the researcher to generalize the research findings to larger populations of teachers and principals (Babbie, 1990). Results from a meta-analysis of PLC research findings conducted by Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) from 1993 to 2006 suggested that the majority of research conducted regarding PLCs was qualitative in nature, and primarily utilized case studies (Keiffer-Barone & Ware, 2002). Thus, the paucity of quantitative research findings regarding principal and teacher perceptions of PLCs will provide a unique opportunity to add to the knowledge base in the field (Hord, 2004). This study will also contribute to the current literature base with a focus on teachers and principals from all grade levels from the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC) in Eastern Kentucky. The intent of this study was to describe differences between principal and teacher perceptions using Hord and Sommers' (2008) five dimensions of PLCs. These findings may assist school stakeholders in identifying PLCs and developing professional development to improve collaborative practices, thereby improving student learning.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
2. To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
3. Is there a difference in perceptions of teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?

Research Design

This study was quantitative in nature and utilized descriptive survey research. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research requires a selected sample as well as a predetermined instrument to collect data to answer specific research questions. The predetermined instrument is the Professional Learning Assessment- Revised (PLCA-R). The population sample selected for this study was ~~all~~ teachers (2276) and head principals (112) from 18 school districts located in the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC) service region in Eastern Kentucky. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey.com to potential participants. Proper participant protection measures were taken throughout the duration of the study. The collected data was analyzed with *Minitab 16* software. Research questions one and two were answered using descriptive research and the third question was answered using survey item mean scores of the two sample populations (Babbie, 1990; Fowler, 2009; Creswell, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher and principal perceptions of PLCs using the PLCA-R instrument, but research has limitations (Creswell, 2014). The collected data related to the population sample in Kentucky and specifically the KVEC service region and may not be generalizable to other geographic areas. The researcher must assume all teachers and principals understand PLCs. This is a self-administered study and the monitoring of participants was limited.

Summary

This dissertation will be organized into five chapters. The first chapter included the statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, research methods, and limitations of the study. Chapter two will include review of the literature concerning PLCs, as well as the historical context of learning communities, learning organizations' influence on learning communities, professional learning communities and communities of practice, professional learning community models, preparing schools for PLC implementation, and a critique of PLCs. Chapter three will include the methodology of this study and include information about the research design, KVEC context, the population sample, survey delivery, the survey instrument, reliability and validity, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four will describe and provide a detailed analysis of the data collected by the survey instrument. Finally, chapter five will present the purpose of the study and research questions; reported findings to answer each question will be followed by a discussion of relevant literature and conclusions will be presented along with implications for improving practice and further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature related to professional learning communities (PLCs). The chapter will first provide the reader with evidence to enhance historical significance of the evolutionary process of PLCs. The reader will then gain an understanding of the various PLC models developed from the business world as well as from educational settings. The chapter will define the five primary characteristics of PLCs that are essential for PLC success. The chapter concludes with descriptions of the three secondary characteristics of PLCs.

Historical Context of Learning Communities

The concept of collaborative problem solving among professionals in education is not a new idea, but rather reflects an evolution of the American education system that began in the early 1900s (Murphy & Adams, 1998). Prior to collaborative learning models, teachers worked independently and students had little interaction with their teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). This secluded environment, known as the pre-professional age, was based on the factory system where all teachers instructed students using similar methods and inexperienced teachers had little assistance (Blankstein, 2004). Instruction was commonly delivered through teacher-centered lectures with no collaboration among colleagues or teachers; this was commonly referred to as "silo teaching" (Hargreaves, 2000).

Throughout the pre-professional education era (1900-1950), researchers discussed collaborative learning groups which evolved into learning communities. Meiklejohn (1932) documented his experiences with the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin during the 1920s. Throughout the process, instructors worked with students to design a meaningful curriculum to teach the students to become responsible members of society while

receiving a general education. Discussions between students and instructors were often viewed as chaotic, but the intent to walk collaboratively through the education process was felt among all. Although the Experimental College lasted only five years, the impact was immeasurable as the terminology of *learning community* was born (Meiklejohn, 1932). Meiklejohn suggested that collaboration among teachers would prove beneficial through meaningful curriculum design for students.

Dewey (1933), a contemporary of Meiklejohn, wrote that learning processes are experiences that should be shared among teachers and students collaboratively. In his research, individual students and teachers shared responsibility in what was to be taught while students actively worked in groups to solve problems. Dewey's research denoted the impact of students' curiosities and desires to be intellectually challenged. Thus, the teachers' responsibility in the classroom was to propel students and stimulate their minds, leading to collaboration among students and teachers within the learning process. Dewey perceived education to be a process of building on prior knowledge and skills while providing students with ample opportunities to acquire necessary experiences to achieve such endeavors. He believed that by including students in the journey of learning, the opportunity for success was much greater. This concept leads to Dewey's fundamental educational philosophy of "an active education promotes lifelong learning" (Dewey, 1933). Although Dewey never actually used the term "learning communities", his efforts exemplify collaborative learning and provide the foundation for successful learning communities in present times.

The concept of learning communities continued to evolve from the pre-professional age into the professional age (1950-1960). During the 1950s, the space race increased the need for students skilled in higher levels of mathematics and science to compete with Russian scientists

for the domination of space exploration. This focus on advanced learning contributed to more teacher autonomous individualization than ever before (Hargreaves, 2000). As a result, teachers instructed students within the confines of their own classroom, thus creating professional isolation commonly referred to as the "silo effect". The silo effect occurred when teachers worked independently without sharing or collaborating with colleagues (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Consequently, independence and autonomy of teachers eventually had a negative impact on accomplishing widespread improvement of learning (Joyce, 2004).

The persistence of teacher autonomy and isolation lasted well into the 1970s and 1980s; however, emergence of a global economy heightened concern for improving student learning. Reformers criticized the inability of autonomous teachers to effectively educate students to meet the demands of a shifting social, economic, and political landscape (Murphy & Adams, 1998). Globalization and a need to improve overall education of students gave way to the professional age (1980s-1990s), which underscored the importance of teacher collaboration to improve instruction. This shift was supported by federal- and state- mandated standardized testing and grants to support development of teacher quality and collaboration (Hargreaves, 2000; Murphy & Adams, 1998). High-stakes standardized testing and accountability forced schools to focus on improving student academic performance (i.e., test scores) through collaborative practices. Although educators were aware of the need for change, many teachers relished former times when they did not have to meet with peers and could deliver their own instruction without outside influences (Hargreaves, 2000; Hord, 2004; Joyce, 2004; Murphy & Adams, 1998).

During the post-modern era (2000-present), principals and teachers transformed schools into collaborative environments focused on student improvement and professional growth in efforts to break down the "silo effect" (Eaker & Keating, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Hord, 2004,

2009; Schmoker, 2004). During this time the term "professional learning community" or PLC became prevalent through the significant work of Richard DuFour at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois. Through his efforts, the school was heralded by the United States Department of Education as one of "the most recognized and celebrated schools in America" (DuFour, DuFour, & Eacker, 2008, pp xix).

Throughout the following years (2000-2014) the pressure to improve learning for all children altered the landscape of education and stimulated interest in PLCs. Consequently, professional development was designed to improve teaching practices through teacher collaboration (Joyce, 2004). Teachers became more comfortable within collaborative environments, their confidence rose, and they began tackling student-achievement problems through problem solving and inquiry (Joyce, 2004). Successful teacher collaboration influenced student achievement, increased teacher empowerment through building leadership capacity, and provided continuous support of teacher professional growth (Hord, 2004). Subsequently, the potential for improvement that lies within the school exists in the capacity of the teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Hord, 2004: Joyce, 2004).

Learning Organizations' Influence on Learning Communities

The work of Bolman and Deal (2003) and Senge (2006) had a significant influence on shaping the development of the notion of PLCs (Niles & Marcellion, 2004). Bolman and Deal's four frame model (i.e., structural, human resource, political, and symbolic) acknowledges the values of multiple perspectives in enhancing the effectiveness of organizational leaders. On the other hand, Senge's (2006) work elicited five components of a learning organization (i.e., personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking) that are the ground work for building the capacity of an organization over time.

The first component of a learning organization (Senge, 2006) is personal mastery which refers to the responsibility of members within an organization to continually learn. As a result, members who work to improve their own skill knowledge in turn improve the capacity of the organization to launch and sustain improvements. As a whole, if people within the organization are not learning, then it is impossible for organizational learning to occur. The second component of Senge's model is mental models, which exist as the inherent assumptions members have about their organization and the working environment. Espoused theory (i.e., what individuals and organizations state as their intentions) and theory-in-use (i.e., what individual and organizations are actually doing) enables observers to ascertain dissonance in the organization (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Consequently, growth among organization members may be observed when what they believe to be happening is actually happening.

The third component of the Senge model refers to the shared vision of an organization. In its simplest of form, it reflects as the most pertinent purpose of the organization. Vision reflects the ideas and constructs shared by individual members that drive and guide the decision making process in the organization. The notion of team learning refers to the process in which all members of an organization share accomplishing a common objective. Through team building, members learn from each other to improve their own weaknesses for the sake of improving the organization holistically. The last component refers to systemic thinking, which illustrates the way members within an organization or a group composed of interconnected parts are interdependent and consequently impact each other (Senge, 2006).

Each component builds upon the foundation of the previous one to effectively help create a learning organization. For example, personal mastery indicates an individual desire to improve the overall functionality of the organization, as mental models promote assumptions about the

organizations which lead to growth within the organization and assimilation of individuals into the organizations, through shared vision; individual members contribute their own unique vision to collaborate with others for an overarching vision that includes all members. Member collaboration leads to moving towards the same goal where team learning can occur. As a result, each team member becomes part of an interconnected relationship with everyone else, creating systemic thinking. Therefore, the work of Senge (2006) provides an essential knowledge base for organizational learning, and provides the conceptual framework essential to create PLCs and enable them to flourish within a school.

The Bolman and Deal (2003) model is based on four frameworks, including structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The assumptions of the structural frame include clear definitions that differentiate people into specific roles to coordinate activities through policy, rules, and chain of command (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The structural frame is focused on increasing the efficiency of the organization and based heavily on organizational hierarchy and formal roles and relationships. Typically, organizational charts indicate formal relationships and vertical and lateral communication patterns for coordination. Organizational managers are responsible for commonly creating a "division of labor" as well as rules, policies, and regulations to deal with routine work. On the other hand, the human resource frame is made up of four basic assumptions. Organizations serve human needs, instead of humans serving the organizational needs. Organizations and people enter a state of symbiosis through their mutual benefit. People need money and jobs, while organizations need a talented workforce. Additionally, both the organization and people benefit when both work well together and lead to a satisfying career. On the other hand, both suffer when the organization and its people do not work well together (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The assumptions of the political frame include organizations viewed as

arenas for competition and conflict among opposing interests for scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Although conflict is normal within groups, the political frame examines the power of individuals, groups, and coalitions who have different needs (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The assumptions of the symbolic frame include cultural symbols that shape human behavior and a shared sense of mission and identity (Bolman & Deal, 1991). The symbolic frame is guided by unique rituals, myths, ceremonies, and stories more so than by rules and policies. In essence, each participant is an actor within the organization and success is measured on those actors' abilities to portray their roles. Bolman and Deal describe four key organizational perspectives and relationships between the organization and its members, which are essential for understanding how PLCs may be launched and function within a school over time.

Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is defined as a "collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavor…in response to common interest or position, and play an important role in forming their members' participation in, and orientation to, the world around them" (Eckert, 2006). In terms of organizational structure, communities of practice develop informally through shared common passions to achieve the same purpose or goal (Wenger, 2000). Members voluntarily participate in the process, but managers make attempts to align different people with similar needs. According to Wenger (2000), executives must be able to identify potential communities of practice that may perpetuate organizational goals; develop infrastructure components that support sustainability; and develop nontraditional approaches for evaluating them. This definition of a CoP uses elements of Senge's (2006) learning organization in that capacity-building within an organization improves the organization as a whole. Elements of the Bolman and Deal (2003) model can be observed through the structural framework as the

members function for the good of the group. Organizations with developed CoPs have a set structure in which work is completed using human capital to create knowledge.

Although CoPs were initially designed for use in the business world, Eckert (2006) states that CoPs exist anywhere that people work together in groups for a common purpose or goal (e.g., church groups, dog clubs, book club, drug cartel, nuclear family). Two fundamental conditions must occur over time to develop a CoP: shared experience and commitment to shared understanding (Eckert, 2006). Communities of Practice can exist in the work place or the common place of life. In either instance, people join together for the common good of the group.

Subtle differences exist between Communities of Practice and Professional Learning Communities. The goal of each is to improve the overall systemic operation of the organization as both communities must have leadership support, time, and resources dedicated to sustainability as well as intentional sharing of knowledge among group members that enhance growth through professional inquiry. However, they are different in several regards. For example, the primary purpose of a PLC is to improve student learning while CoPs may focus on a wide array of goals including student learning. An important distinction between the two models is that CoPs would not traditionally engage in shared leadership. Since the primary operational definition of a CoP is to develop and disperse knowledge, it precludes the group members from engaging in leadership activities. Scholars observe that even though it may be possible for a CoP to establish its purpose or goal to define how leadership should function within an organization, its purpose is not to actually support leadership activities. On the other hand, the purpose of PLCs is to improve student learning, nurture professional inquiry, and provide opportunities for teachers to influence the decision making process (DuFour, 2004).

Consequently, a Professional Learning Community can be a Community of Practice, but not vice versa.

Professional Learning Community Models

Researchers and practitioners incorporated Senge's learning organization theories after many years of documented failures since Cox's (2001) work on *The Experimental College* and Dewey's work (1933). The combination of learning organizations and learning communities created a new framework that provided a foundation for professional learning models in education.

The combination of education and business models provided educational organizations with the framework that would lead to prominent PLC models (Hord, 1997). Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) contributed the first model called school based learning community. Although this model was not the first learning organization in education to focus on student learning or collaboration, it was the first to introduce the notions of sharing among teachers through reflective dialogue designed to end teacher isolation. Newmand and Wehlage's (1995) work led to establishing common terminology essential to the development of professional communities. Their model was divided into four sections including: (a) instruction with the purpose to focus on student learning (b) authentic pedagogy designed to be relevant to the lives of all students (c) school organizational capacity designed to enhance teacher contributions to improve student learning, and (d) external support focused on the importance that all stakeholders be responsible for student learning.

One of the most essential contributors to the development of PLCs was Shirley Hord. She worked through the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL) to provide one of the first PLC models. Through her work, she developed a specific set of characteristics that all PLCs

must have beginning with a strong evidence of shared beliefs, values, and vision among teachers and the community. In this regard, leadership developed along with collective learning ultimately developed supportive conditions and shared personal practice proved to be essential characteristics of successful PLCs (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Richard DuFour, principal of Adlai Stevenson High School, successfully developed and implemented one of the first PLCs in an urban setting through his early experience and subsequent research; six principles of successful PLCs were developed (DuFour, et al., 2008). The primary focus of his discussion of PLCs was development of shared mission, vision, and goals. Dufour also asserts that these components collectively exist among all stakeholders in successful PLCs to create a collaborative culture conducive to student learning. Teachers played an integral role through collective inquiry, i.e., action research into best practices. These behaviors lead to action orientation and the concept of "learning by doing" which is instrumental in continuous learning initiatives. The overall results and significant changes lead to the ability to promote discussions about results and what needs to happen next (DuFour, et al., 2008).

Murphy, Jost, and Shipman (2000) worked with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) to promote six necessary elements of successful PLCs. The Murphy et al. (2000) model indicates the importance of focusing developments of a shared school vision by teachers, parents, and community and its use to develop a school culture that promotes effective instruction and quality professional development. Murphy et al. (2000) presented the following standards for administrators who desired to implement PLCs into their schools: (1) facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship or a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community, (2) advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conductive to student learning and staff professional

growth, (3) ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, (4) collaborating with families and community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources, (5) acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner, and (6) understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Blankstein (2004) contributed six essential elements for PLCs to operate successfully in the book *Failure is Not an Option: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools*: (a) Common mission, vision, values, and goals, (b) Ensuring achievement for all students, (c) Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning, (d) Using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement, (e) Gaining active engagement from family and community, and (f) Building sustainable leadership. Blankstein (2004) asserts the importance of common mission, vision, values and goals as the foundation for communal focus. Through an intentional focus on student learning, the school can work to avoid negative mindsets that take away from the process. The second element, ensuring achievement for all students, ensures that teachers understand that all students are deserving of learning. Blankstein (2004) suggested the third element of collaborative teaming focused on the dichotomous relationship between teaching and learning among teachers which is essential for high achieving schools. This dichotomous relationship is referred to as collaboration by Blankstein (2004). The fourth element of using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement is the notion that data is used to make informed decisions about student learning. According to Blankstein (2004), gaining active engagement from family and community indicates the importance of stakeholders in students' lives to provide support systems necessary for learning. The final element of

building sustainable leadership states that "distributed leadership" is necessary to build communal capacity to make decisions for student learning.

Danielson (2012) designed the Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument where she describes PLCs as "organizations whose full potential is realized only when teachers regard themselves as members of a professional community" (p. 82). In Doman 4 entitled "Professional Responsibilities," PLC characteristics are identified as: (1) Relationships with colleagues; (2) Involvement in a culture of professional inquiry; (3) Service to the school; and (4) Participation in school and district projects. The teacher (Teacher Growth and Effectiveness System) and principal (Principal Growth and Effectiveness System) evaluation system in Kentucky is based on Danielson's (2012) framework. Furthermore, prior to the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, all principals must have satisfactorily passed the state mandated test regarding the domains of this framework.

Throughout the evolution of PLCs, considerable emphasis was placed on ending teacher isolation and recommendations were made to nurture collaboration focused on improving student performance. Along with support from administrators and community, teachers were able to build their collective capacity through expanded leadership opportunities and professional development programs. These opportunities gave teachers the collective capacity for engaging in inquiry and dispositions for engaging in action-oriented work.

Primary Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

The review of literature suggests a measure of consistency with regard to characteristics of professional learning communities that are crucial for success and sustainability. The five primary characteristics of PLCs are (a) shared vision, values, and goals, (b) shared leadership, (c) collaborative learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (Hord, 1997;

Hord and Sommers, 2008; DuFour and DuFour, 1998; DuFour, et al., 2008; Hipp and Huffman, 2010; Murphy, et al., 2000; and Blankstein, 2004). Each characteristic is listed individually to assist the reader in understanding the purpose and support for the research questions and corresponding survey items in chapter three.

Shared and Supportive Leadership. In the past, teachers have relied on administrators to make key decisions for the school (DuFour, 2004), but this type of practice limits collaboration and PLC development (Donahoe, 1993). Hord and Sommers (2008) stated, "the sharing of power and authority may be tough not only for the principal, but for the staff as well. Historically, teachers have been acculturated to see the principal as all-powerful, all-wise, and all-competent" (p. 10-11). The overall process of implementing PLCs becomes easier after teachers have previously experienced shared leadership (Bell, 2001). Since research suggests that top-down unilateral management is not effective to create collaborative environments (Bailey, 2000; Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1990, 1996; Sikes, 1992), shared leadership is necessary to improve overall organization functionality through PLC success (DuFour et al. 2008). Hord and Sommers (2008) suggest that teachers who embrace empowerment and accept the responsibility of shared leadership have a must greater chance of sustaining PLCs over time (Wahlstrom & Lewis, 2008). Thus it is essential for teachers to understand that building leadership capacity is critical and to adhere from turning to administration for all decision making (DuFour, 2004). Therefore, within the building the concept of leadership becomes juxtaposed as teachers must embrace more leadership responsibility as administrators must relinquish unilateral power for a collaborative approach with an overall purpose of student learning.

Researchers suggest that traditional roles of principals and teachers have changed to foster decision-making responsibility by all (Leech and Fulton, 2008). The role of the principal

must be conducive to creation of shared goals alongside parents and teachers to ensure all stakeholders are involved in the PLC process (DuFour & Burnette, 2002). The diffusion of leadership from the administrator to the teachers is supported by findings of Leonard and Leonard (1999) who stated that teachers in Canada felt that everyone in the building had leadership roles.

Scholars provide additional evidence in support of shared leadership. Scribner et al. (1999) stated that building capacity for shared leadership often takes time because some teachers lack the confidence to make decisions, as evidence was found in three middle schools in the Midwest. During this study, the researchers found that when school leadership supported conflict that teacher cohesion improved. Shared leadership is best exhibited through teacher autonomy (DuFour et al., 2005; Hord, 1997). Furthermore, teachers gain autonomy to make their own decisions (Hord & Hirsh, 2008) as they continue to understand that concentrated leadership responsibility being held by one or few leaders at the top does not build capacity (Blankstein, 2004). A study from Cincinnati and Philadelphia confirmed that the focus of school leaders should be on shared leadership to ensure teacher autonomy (Supovitz & Christman, 2004). Shared leadership builds capacity within the building to continue growth even after a principal has left (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).

Shared Values and Vision. The components of shared vision, values and goals are necessary for creating and sustaining successful PLCs (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Hoy and Hoy, 2006; Kruse et al., 1994). These components are considered by researchers to be so profoundly important that the concepts of shared vision and goals are the most common components within all successful PLC models (Kruse, Louis, & Byrk, 1994; Vescio et al., 2008).

The fundamental building block of creating a collaborative vision is explaining what is important among educators (Fullan, 1993). With shared vision, members are inspired to invest in individual dreams as a collective organization (Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Kounzes and Posner (2003) express that cohesive dreams among all stakeholders lead to a collective vision that accomplishes goals that are tied to academic success. The process of creating a clear vision allows staff members to become more engaged (Bennis & Nannus, 2005). Research also suggests that teachers become more involved in the overall decision making process of the school through participation in vision creation (Supovitz, 2002).

In order to create goals for vision guidance, O'Neil (2000) developed SMART goals while working with two elementary schools from Wisconsin. The acronym SMART refers to Specific Measurable Attainable Results-Oriented Timely. *Specific* refers to the stakeholders who should be involved in the goal creation process and who the goal will impact. *Measurable* identifies the evaluative process in which each goal is measured over time for success. *Attainable* suggests that the reverse thinking of goal creation allows members to think of those things that should happen and a potential path to reach success. *Results-Oriented* ensures that members are committed to the outcome, not the process. This allows members to work backwards with the final goal in mind. *Timely* represents the time frame for the entire goal completion along with minor steps in the process. During this work, shared goals were developed using the SMART concept of goal creation that is strategic, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. The researcher later attributed SMART goals to the success that teachers were experiencing while working collaboratively and helping students achieve their own learning goals.

The vision functions as a destination for the stakeholders, while goals serve as way-points throughout the process. During the process of fulfilling the collective vision of student learning and achieving the goals, values serve as the belief system adopted by the stakeholders (Schlechty, 1990). According to Barth (2001), values are, "complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization" (p. 8). Values are essential for creating change as they provide members with intrinsic worth (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). As a result, research indicates that individuals will not engage in groups without feeling motivated to contribute (Fullan, 2001).

Teachers working collaboratively become a PLC once they begin working together sharing the same vision, achieving the same goals and operating using the same belief system (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Principals work to inspire stakeholders in developing goals that fulfill the collaborative vision to ensure student learning (Sydanmaanlakka, 2003). Through this process, Sergiovanni (1996) asserts that members become bound together as they begin to shape shared collective values. Although the concepts of shared vision, goals, and values are very intertwined and possess a significant value to PLC sustainability and success, the concept of vision drives the process of goal creation and the need of values, thus indicating the primary focus of this PLC characteristic.

Collective Learning and Application. The functionality of the PLC depends on relationships built by teachers and their efforts to develop collaborative environments within the school. Collaboration is defined as the dichotomous relationship between teaching and learning (Blankstein, 2004). Relationships often take time; research from a high school in Seattle indicated that collaboration took time to develop due to conflicts among teachers and other factors that hindered the process to build trust (Little, 1990; Wineburg & Grossman, 1998). In

order to create a collaborative environment, everyone should be included in the decision making process on issues that impact the school community (Kruse, 1999). The process of collaboration among teachers, specifically PLC involvement, is believed to improve morale of the school (Bolam, et al., 2005). Through teacher involvement in PLCs, trust is built.

Time spent collectively is a commodity that must be closely guarded among teachers and administrators (DuFour, 2004). Keiffer-Barone and Ware (2002) suggest that collaboration among teachers and administrators decreases isolation while increasing responsibility of work, students, and school. Furthermore, Berry, Johnson and Montgomery (2005) respond that the implementation of PLCs improves teachers' willingness to share practices and even entices them to improve practice through note-taking and team teaching and produces increases in collaborative time. By making collaborative time together a focus and carefully guarding it, the transition is much easier for teachers to take on more leadership roles (Hord, 1997) and leads to better relationships that may extend to instances outside of the normal school day (King & Newmann, 2000).

Collaborative environments through PLCs for teachers have proven to be worthwhile investments for schools. Boaler (2006) indicates from research in a math department at a high school in New York that other academic areas adopted PLCs and improved overall culture as well. In addition, through capacity, teachers begin to see the need to develop their own professional development opportunities without seeking outside assistance from consultants (DuFour, 1998; Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996). Researchers' stress that all educators must be continuous learners (Kleine-Kracht, 1993) to provide an adequate education that promotes student learning (Lambert, 2004).

Shared Personal Practice. The characteristic of shared personal practice is best defined as "peers helping peers that includes teachers visiting each other's classrooms on a regular basis to observe, take notes, and discuss their observations with the teachers they have visited" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 15). Through PLC participation, teachers work collaboratively and share ideas to impact all stakeholders (Danielson, 2002). King and Newmann (2000) state the importance of teachers having opportunities to discuss and share knowledge. Similarly, researchers indicate a need for teachers to collaborate on a regular basis (Cheetham & Chivers, 2000). Sharing personal practices increases stability, teacher satisfaction, and performance (Little, 1990).

The research stresses the importance of shared personal practices through decreasing teacher isolation. Guskey (2005) asserted that endeavors regarding shared personal practice combated teacher isolation. Leonard and Leonard (1999) suggested that isolated teachers are less likely to adopt best practices to use in their own classroom. As a result, evidence suggests, "that those communities that did engage in structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions and that investigated the relationships between instructional practices and student work produce significant gains in student learning" (Christman, 2003, p. 5).

Supportive Conditions-Relationships. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), supportive conditions are the processes involved in human relationships and physical structures. Both must function at an optimal level for the highest level of efficiency to be obtained (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Danielson (2012) also provides additional insight, "teachers maintain a professional collegial relationship that encourages sharing, planning, and working together toward improved instructional skill and student success" (p. 84).

The human relationship aspect of supportive conditions is based primarily on the ability of teachers to support each other by working collaboratively and minimalizing the silo effect. In order to minimalize the silo effect, strong teacher relationships must be fostered to break down those barriers of individual autonomy with increased collaboration among teachers (Harlacher, Kattleman, & Sakelaris, 2014). Further research suggests that creativity and innovation increases when strong relationships between teachers exist (DiLiello, 2006). Furthermore, teachers who feel supported by peer teachers and principals are more likely to be effective and committed to their jobs (Rosenholtz, 1989). As relationships among teachers grow deeper, a mutual understanding of each other as individuals begins to develop (Harvey & Drolet, 2003) which leads to feelings of openness and sharing (Levi, 2001).

In order for human relationships to develop and grow stronger, trust is built among all participants (Barth, 2001). Communication for pleasure and enjoyment between teachers becomes the normalcy as collective satisfaction increases (Anderson and Martin, 2002). The success or failure of the human relationship aspect of supportive conditions depends on the element of trust among group members (Friedman, 2005). The element of trust can lead to stronger bonds between group members or conflict. Researchers suggested that PLCs became more successful when conflicts were addressed through intentional conversations rather than disregarded as a result of varied visions (Achinstein, 2002; Louis & Marks, 1998; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996) stated in a study of 910 teachers from 240 schools that elementary teachers are more eager to share goals and address conflict than secondary schools due to their inability to work across the curriculum. In a later study, Louise and Marks (1998) suggested that common values allow teachers to collaborate across the curriculum to share unique instructional strategies while handling conflict in a transparent

fashion. Further research indicates the strong need to address conflicts in order to have successful PLCs. School administrators should support conflict in the building on shared vision and goal setting (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). During a two-year study of three rural middle schools, research indicated that conflict helped build unity among the staff members which lead to a more stringent focus on student learning. Although school administrators were leery of supporting conflict, they soon discovered the benefits far outweighed the costs as teachers discussed goals more effectively and contributed to the success of PLCs (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake & Oliver, 2008).

Supportive Conditions- Structures. The second aspect of supportive conditions refers to structures such as time, buildings, grounds, and materials. Researchers assert that time allocated for PLC engagement is important along with teacher physical proximity. The most important resource that teachers and principals must collectively allocate is time to work as a PLC (Hickman, Schrimpf, & Wedlock, 2002). Numerous studies indicate the lack of time as being a serious issue to school wide collaboration (Blankstein, 2004; Cook & Friend, 1991; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Idol & West, 1991). Principals can support PLCs by allocating time throughout the instructional day (Leithwood & Janzi, 1990). Those principals who facilitate such practices will promote PLC growth (Byrk et al., 1999). The physical proximity between teachers does factor (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Both researchers state that great physical distance between teachers will decrease opportunities for collaboration. On the other hand, close proximity among teachers promotes increased student achievement (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Increased opportunities for collaboration also decreases the number of isolated teachers (Little, 1993).

In summation, the following primary characteristics (a) shared vision, values, and goals, (b) shared leadership, (c) collaborative learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared

personal practice are necessary for describing PLCs. The characteristics are interwoven together creating the PLC experience. Each characteristic is specific and interdependent on the others to create a sustainable and successful PLC.

Supporting Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

The following characteristics serve as supports to the success of PLCs: (a) professional development, (b) collaborations with parents and community, (c) PLC induction process, and (d) student learning and achievement.

Professional Development. Professional development opportunities are a necessary component of teacher collaboration and successful PLCs (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 2004; King, 2004; Kruse et al., 1994). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggest that quality professional development provides teachers with opportunities to collaborate on student learning. In addition, time for teacher collaboration should be provided for teachers to discuss professional development. Through collaboration, teachers can identify specific areas of growth to improve student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Sagor (1995) provided research conducted in Washington and Oregon that asserted that when professional development was based on topics that teachers found interesting, morale was higher.

Professional development should be based on what teachers need through collective inquiry (DuFour, 2008). Not only does this process provide teachers with meaningful professional development opportunities, but it builds the teachers' knowledge base. Teachers should utilize action research by using classroom experiences to drive professional development through developing trust and professional autonomy (Quicke, 2000). As a result, teachers should become experts in their specific areas of interest to provide continuous professional development for the entire PLC group (DuFour, 2004; King, 2004; Schmoker, 2004). Blankstein (2004) also

suggested that professional development opportunities should provide strategies for involvement of parents and community in the PLCs.

Collaboration with Parents and Community. Collaboration among teachers with parents and community members is a characteristic of the most successful PLCs (Blankstein, 2004; Kruse et. al., 1994; Murphy et. al, 2000). This dimension is of such importance that The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) asserted the importance of efforts for schools to establish relationships outside the building and to allow parents and community members to become involved in the PLC process (Lewis, 1993). In addition, parents and teachers should establish collaborative relationships through mutual respect to improve student learning (Kruse, 1994). Scholars have found evidence exists that indicates the importance of the parent-teacher-community relationship. Research suggests that by involving parents and community members, goals of the school begin to encompass the surrounding community to have an even greater impact on student learning (Meier, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Murphy, et. al, 2000). These partnerships can also provide additional perspectives in meeting the needs of the students (Little, 2002).

Scholars observe a correlation exists between student achievement and teacher morale when discussing the power behind meaningful relationships with parents (Blankstein, 2004). The relationship between parents and teachers could ultimately align student learning needs between school and home through additional reinforcement. Additionally, Blankstein (2004) asserted that PLCs that involved parents and community members had a higher degree of impact on student learning and sustainability. Furthermore, schools often collaborate with parents and community members, but must also focus and initiate new teachers into the existing PLCs (Hord, 2004).

Professional Learning Community Induction Process. The lack of an induction procedure to assimilate new teachers into the professional learning community is commonly considered the largest failure of the PLC process (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, 2008; DuFour & Eacker, 1998; Kruse et. al., 1994). In order to ensure the success of new teachers, many schools have implemented a mentoring program (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Not only are mentoring programs beneficial, but Kruse et al., (1994) indicated that opportunities for experienced teachers and new teachers to work collaboratively were necessary to assimilate new teachers into the current culture. Through mentoring, a novice teacher has the opportunity to work with a veteran teacher to provide professional experience (Browne- Ferrigno, 2007). Educators in New Jersey enacted the Teaching and Learning Collaborative (TLC) to incorporate learning opportunities between experienced and new teachers to improve instruction and further develop learning community assimilation (Wepner &Moberly, 1998).

Scholars note that mentoring new teachers is essential for developing effective teachers and integration to PLCs. For example, Dunne, Nave, and Lewis, (2000) indicated that teachers who had mentors were assimilated into the PLC much easier than those who did not. Further evidence suggests that mentors should provide guidance, organizational understanding, shared vision, and should be forthcoming in describing both positive and negative perceptions of the learning community process (Senge, 2004). Through interaction with a mentor, teachers assimilate into existing PLCs much more easily as evidence from New York Schools indicated (Joyce, 2004). The process of integration of new teachers into existing PLCs is necessary to build culture and ensure new teacher success. New teachers should feel as if they are an important part of the PLC and participate in decision making through the shared vision of the community (Blankstein, 2004). Lack of mentoring opportunities and PLC involvement could

lead to isolation and low morale for a new teacher. Research from Washington, DC provided evidence that multiple mentors can fulfill the need through technological mediums (Fulton, Burns, & Goldenberg, 2005). Teachers continued to feel involved in PLCs through computer communication with teachers in other schools and districts. This opportunity limited new teachers' feelings of isolation while allowing them to become contributing members of a PLC.

Not only does mentoring impact new teacher effectiveness, but so do available resources provided by the school and district. Research conducted in Copley and Ashton Connecticut over a one year period in two high poverty urban districts indicated that teachers who had more available resources tended to be more effective (Youngs, 2007). Through resources and mentoring, new teachers must understand that student learning and achievement is the primary component of PLCs.

Student Learning and Achievement. As noted previously, the primary purpose of PLCs is to improve student learning (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eacker, 1998; Hord, 2008; Kruse et. al., 1994). Since schools are places designated for education and student learning, (Darling-Hammond, 1996) shared vision, values, and goals are all focused on building capacity of teachers to function in PLCs focused on student learning. It is evident that PLCs provide teachers opportunities to share resources and ensure instructional efficiency to optimize student learning (DuFour, 2008; Hord, 2008).

Bolam et al. (2005) indicates the importance of using student learning to improve instructional practices. Research from a New York Middle School reflects the importance of focusing on student learning and working collaboratively (Phillips, 2003). An additional four year study from teachers in Cincinnati and Philadelphia suggests that teachers who work more collaboratively enjoy higher student achievement (Supovitz, 2002). A follow-up study was

conducted shortly afterwards by Supovitz and Christman (2003), which indicated that teachers who collaborated on pedagogical methods continually improved by adopting best practices from their peers.

PLCs focus on improving student learning, but schools should have an overall culture and climate conducive to student learning through collective responsibility (Darling-Hammonds, 1993; DuFour, 2008). Lee and Smith (1996) suggested through a study of 820 high schools with developing PLCs, that correlation exists between student achievements focused PLCs and higher student success and collaborative responsibility. Researchers report that schools with a sense of collaborative responsibility for student learning reported higher student achievement and morale than schools that lacked both descriptors (Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002).

Preparing Schools for PLC Implementation

Preparing schools for PLC implementation depends on various factors, such as, school climate and culture as well as the actual implementation process. This section will describe how these factors attribute to the PLC implementation process.

School Climate. Researchers have discovered negative reactions from teachers when top-down policy changes are imposed (Baily, 2000; Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1990, 1996; Sikes, 1992). Sikes (1992) discovered that most changes elicited by using a top-down approach resulted in either employees rejecting the change, or splitting into opposing factions. The implementations of professional learning communities incorporate large-scale school reform where teachers are the centerpiece of change according to policy makers and school-change experts (Datnaw & Castellano, 2000; Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Hargreaves, 1998). Implementation of professional learning communities' center on the involvement of teachers by ensuring they have empowerment to create change. (Elmore & Sykes, 1996). Teachers' discernment toward reform

depends almost completely on their level of involvement in the change process (Fullan, 1991, 1993). Hence, Kentucky Department of Education policy supports to keep core teachers involved in the process (Kentucky Department of Education, 2010). Researchers support the importance of teachers in the decision making process on large scale changes (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). If teachers fail to experience a personal connection to the change, involvement will decline (Rice & Schneider, 1994). Therefore, teachers must become involved in large-scale change to personally experience the reform and assume ownership. Teachers will generally attempt to influence areas that directly affect teacher efficacy in the classroom (Marks & Louis, 1997).

School-wide changes are typically unsuccessful when imposed by outsiders or when they lack correlation to school purpose and personal efficacy (Sikes, 1992). Teachers may resist change if the schema does not match the existing construct (Baily, 2000). When compulsory changes are implemented consistently, teachers develop a "culture of compliance" to complete the task as quickly as possible instead of fully divulging into communities of practice (Wenger, 2000).

Since the field of education is constantly moving and adapting to new and innovative changes, it becomes evident that teachers need to become part of the reform process (Hargreaves, 1994). Consequently, teachers should be involved in every step of the planning and implementation process to promote responsibility and empowerment (Sarason, 1996). Not only should teachers see themselves as experts, but they should also understand they can also become catalysts for change (Fullan, 2006).

Teachers may resist change and persist in current practice when attempting to incorporate change based on their own ideologies and pedagogical practices. As a result, isolated teachers

may develop their own personal curricula which inevitably creates variations. Teachers become more concerned with their personal classroom than what students actually need to succeed (Elmore & Sykes, 1996). This process describes potential variance between schools, districts, and states.

School Culture. Culture consists of norms, values and beliefs, but professional ideologies are beliefs and values about education, life, and teaching (Fullan, 1991) and they impact the creation and sustainability of professional learning communities. The level of commitment from teachers toward change is influenced by school culture (Hargreaves, 1994). While each school's culture is comprised of the individuals within; individuals within the organization form subgroups based on similar interest and ideologies. Therefore, each subgroup will perceive change in a different way (Hargreaves, 1994; Muncey & McQuillan, 1996). Throughout the development process, it is essential to provide support services needed for teacher "buy in" to accept professional learning communities.

Since individual teachers contribute to the school culture and subgroups, personal ideologies will impact school reform. Teachers who discover their personal ideology that is consistent with the proposed change will typically accept it; on the other hand, those who feel threatened will resist the change (Muncey & McQuillan, 1996). Additionally, ideology and resistance to change can be attributed to personal characteristics such as age and career stage (Huberman, 1989; Riseborough, 1981), gender (Datnow, 1998), or race (Bascia, 1996), and conflict within the organization. Although conflict among collaborating teachers can be viewed as positive when it involves instructional decision making (Achinstein, 2002; Louis & Marks, 1998; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), personal attacks can isolate teachers (Magolda, 2001; Pomson, 2005) it can become detrimental to implementing new ideas.

Implementation. Due to the commonly perceived ambiguous nature of PLCs, implementation, success, and sustainability can become difficult. Researchers express how PLCs are often mislabeled as professional meetings that occur during school time (DuFour, et al., 2006). Schmoker (2004) asserts that "clarity precedes competence" (Schmoker, 2004, p.85) and that a clear understanding of PLCs among school stakeholders is necessary prior to implementation. Scholars express that PLCs are not a program, process, a task, or something a team can organize in one meeting (DuFour, et al., 2006), but a school or districtwide effort to build collaborative teams designed for teacher job embedded professional development focused on improving student learning. Therefore, maintaining a clear understanding of the "current reality" of the school's present practices and student achievement is necessary throughout the implementation process (DuFour, et al., 2006).

As professional learning communities are implemented they pass through seven phases which impact the participants and resources needed to ensure sustainability and success (Graham & Ferriter, 2008). The phases include: filling time, sharing practices, planning, developing common assessments, analyzing student learning, differentiating follow-up, and instruction reflection (Graham & Ferriter, 2008). Filling time consists of the structures to guide meetings from beginning to end. Sharing practices refers to the discussion between teachers that guide instruction. Planning discusses the process involved for teachers to collaboratively design lessons. Developing common assessments allows teachers to discuss common results among colleagues. Analyzing student learning is the process by which make instructional decisions based on student assessment results. Differentiating the follow-up among teachers requires principal involvement to guide teachers and pose questions that direct them to a higher sense of accomplishment. The final stage of Graham and Ferriter's (2008) model is instruction reflection,

which directs teachers at the highest level to professionally reflect on their instruction to establish best practices. Through carefully established meetings, teachers can design meetings based on the characteristics/dimensions of PLCs which are: (a) shared vision, values, and goals, (b) shared leadership, (c) collaborative learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, 1998; DuFour, et. al., 2008; Hord, 1997; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Murphy, Jost, & Shipman, 2000). By conducting an honest assessment of where the school currently is in the progression, and intentionally developing plans with results in mind (Guskey, 2001) the school can more effectively move through the steps of implementation (Collins, 2001)

The Principal's Role in Supporting Professional Learning Communities

A review of the literature states the importance of the principal's role in leading PLCs which indicates that principals are critical for improving teacher collaboration that focuses on student learning (Smith & Andrews, 1989). More evidence from Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstom (2004) suggests that quality principal leadership is so important that it ranks second only to teaching for impacting student learning. Furthermore, principal guidance is so important that Evans (1996) stated that innovations rarely occur without direct support from the principal. The success and sustainability of PLCs within schools depends on the quality of leadership found in the building. Therefore, "Principals are the lynchpins of school change, providing the necessary modeling and support required for a learning school" (Hord and Sommers, 2008, p. 28).

The role of principal will be discussed using the five primary characteristics of PLCs found in the literature: (a) shared vision, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) collective learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice.

Research suggests that a shared vision is the most necessary characteristic for creating successful and sustainable PLCs (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, 2007; Sommer & Hord, 2008, Hoy & Hoy, 2006, Kruse et al., 1994). Leithwood, Begley, and Cousins (1990) suggest development of the school mission and goals are necessary to create a school vision that brings a consistent approach to student learning. The principal guides PLCs through the collaborative process of developing a shared vision (Byrk et al., 1999). The vision creation process of a school often creates conflicts among teachers, but the principal can support positive conflict during the process in order to further build the vision (Schribner et al., 1999). Ultimately, the principal guides teachers through a process of combining personal dreams for the future of the school into one common vision focused on student learning (Wald & Castleberry, 2000).

One of key roles of shared leadership is to build capacity within the organization to achieve greater results (Fullan, 2001). The process of building capacity is not a unilateral top-down managerial approach to leadership, but one of shared responsibility among administrators and teachers alike. According to Lambert (1998), "school leadership needs to be…embedded in the school community as a whole…(which)…suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose of community" (p. 5). Leaders have a specific role in the school, but leadership should exist throughout the school with shared decision making and responsibility when available. Therefore, leadership is needed at every level to continually develop sustainable leadership that focuses on student learning (Farson, 1996; Sommers & Hord, 2008; Tichy, 1997). For shared leadership to exist, the principal supports teachers in decision-making for issues concerning the school as well as encouraging teachers to become leaders (Leech & Fulton, 2008; Wahlstrom and Lewis, 2008).

Hord and Sommers (2008) assert that collective learning is the process by which teachers acquire new knowledge. PLC success depends on collaborative learning through relationships built by teachers and principals to develop collaborative environments within the school. Researchers Thessin and Starr (2011) suggested, "Like students, adult learners who are engaging in problem solving and teamwork for the first time need differentiated supports to ensure that they can work together effectively to meet their students' learning needs" (p. 54). Schools that foster continuous discussions among members for the purpose of growth will improve overall functionally (Danielson, 2002). Principals continuously challenge teachers to develop innovations collaboratively to improve the overall functionality of the school and the educational process.

The supportive conditions for PLCs refer to the physical and structural conditions of the school. Both are very important from the perspective of principal. Research suggests that allocating time is one of the greatest physical and structural challenges PLCs will face (DuFour, 2007; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lord, 1994). In fact, so important that Barton and Stepabek (2012) indicated that assistant superintendents established procedures to protect meeting times in 20 schools before PLCs were introduced. The very same researchers also noted that, "building time into the schedule for PLCs is one of the most important steps a principal can take" (p. 3). Providing time for teachers to collaborate is essential for reducing teacher isolation as well (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010). Research also indicates that teachers who feel supported by teachers and principals are more likely to be effective and committed (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The characteristic of shared personal practice is not an evaluative process, but rather professionals helping each other while growing professionally. The role of principal fosters

professional growth through in-depth teacher collaboration while creating an environment conducive to adult learning as well as student learning. Danielson (2002) states that teachers working collaboratively will benefit the students, school, and stakeholders. Sharing personal practices is linked to improved levels of work-force stability, teacher satisfaction, and performance (Little, 1990). Research suggests that collaboration serves as an aid to problem solving (Cheetham and Chivers, 2000) while, Reynolds (2008) reports that finding time to collaborate is often difficult. The more often that personal sharing occurs, the more likely it is to become common practice among all staff (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005). The role of the principal is to encourage personal sharing while providing time for the process to occur.

Current Kentucky policy supports PLC implementation through the mandated Teacher Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (TPGES) currently used to evaluate teachers. Prior to the 2014-2015 school year, all principals and staff who are responsible for evaluating teachers were required to pass a certification exam before any evaluations could take place. The process and corresponding assessment is based on the Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument, which focuses on improving instructional quality and professional growth (Danielson, 2012). Danielson (2012) asserts, The Framework for Teaching identifies aspects of teaching that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research to improve student learning, such as peer reviewing and participation in professional communities.

"Defining leadership is not easy, yet most of us know it when we see it" (Sergiovanni, 1994, P. 6). The role of principal is to support teachers in vision creation, leadership development, to ensure collaboration, provide supportive conditions, and promote shared personal practices (Hord & Sommers, 2008; DuFour, 2007). The process of evolving from the

"all-knowing" (Hord & Sommers, 2008) to becoming the lead learner who focuses on developing teacher learners who are focused on student learning is quite the revelation. Principals who engage in PLCs experience a school that learns and leads at all levels (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Barton & Stepanek, 2012). Therefore, the role of principal is essential for the well-being of the school and PLCs.

Critique of Professional Learning Communities

Although the majority of research indicates positive outcomes as a result of PLC implementation, some scholars remain skeptical and have critiqued this approach (DuFour, 2008; Hord, 2008; Schmoker, 2001). One key issue that arises during PLC development is the failure to implement all essential dimensions: (a) shared vision, values, and goals, (b) shared leadership, (c) collaborative learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (DuFour, 2007; Sommers & Hord, 2008). Although PLCs have become widely popular across the nation, DuFour indicated the lack of focus on shared vision and student achievement to be the reason behind many failed attempts. Often, teachers simply adopt educational change without understanding the full implications of PLCs. As a result, teachers develop a sense of belonging and enjoy being part of the decision making process, but lack the understanding of the purposes of PLCs to improve student learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Teachers and administrators also fail to understand how to properly implement all characteristics of PLCs to achieve maximum effectiveness and sustainability (Martin-Kniep, 2004), which consequently impacts student learning.

Research from two middle schools in California indicates the importance of careful implementation of all aspects of PLCs. Westheimer (1999) discovered one school focused on shared vision and collaboration, while the other school simply labeled meetings among teachers

as collaborative PLCs. The focused school enjoyed higher student achievement as a result, while the other school failed to reach similar levels of achievement. Not only did proper implementation affect the outcome, but Westheimer suggested that experience among teachers and administrators also played a significant role. Teachers with more experience and administrators working in the school for two years or more increased the chances for PLC success. Thus, schools are fully aware of all aspects prior to implementing PLCs (Supovitiz & Christman, 2003).

Another criticism found of PLCs is occasional collaboration among teachers (DuFour, 2008; Little, 2002). Occasional collaborative models lead to isolation of teachers like the pre-professional models of the 1950s. Similar to the forefathers of "learning communities" the intricate relationship between students and teachers is important, but lacks the multiple perspectives that PLCs provide (Little, 2002). Little (2002) also suggested that teachers felt their own time was better spent building rapport among students instead of seeking a multiple perspective approach. Another contributing factor to occasional collaboration is the lack of time teachers have to dedicate to PLC implementation, development, and sustainability.

An additional criticism of PLCs is that isolation typically occurs among teachers for a variety of reasons (Magolda, 2001; Pomson, 2005). Pomson (2005) suggested that teachers worked in isolation primarily to protect their own pedagogical methods, which developed as circumstances for non-collaboration, while Magolda (2001) indicated from research that teachers with more than ten years' experience chose to work independently and avoided PLCs. Further evidence suggests that teachers who felt their voice was not heard or acknowledged in collaborative practices often resisted collaborative opportunities (Haberman, 2004; Little, 2002). This often occurs among new teachers who feel they do not contribute to the school community

(Little, 2002). Haberman (2004) also added that teachers often need at least five years before they feel part of the school community. Isolation often stems from cross-curricular collaboration as teachers see these collaborative opportunities as unbeneficial because teachers from different content areas are not familiar with their own content (Fullan, 2006). As a result, these can all lead to a breakdown of shared vision, values, and goal creations which are primary dimensions of PLCs.

A critique of PLCs is that inadequate planning for high stakes standardized testing can lead to demise. Schmoker (2003) discovered strict focus on increasing standardized testing results negatively impacted PLC attempts. As a result, schools became more concerned about high stakes testing results rather than continuous PLC growth, which failed to provide immediate results (Fullan, 2000). Typically, pressures from high stakes accountability force teachers into teacher-centered isolation to ensure students receive all necessary materials. Research indicated that this was the case when 200 interviews discovered that pressure related to high stakes testing drove PLCs out of the school in favor of more stringent reform models (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Once again, research indicated that schools who had properly implemented their PLCs by developing shared vision and goals had a much higher chance for sustainable success (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

Summary

The literature review in chapter two provided historical context for the evolution of the learning community into the professional learning community we recognize today (Cox, 2001; Dewey, 1933; Hargreaves, 2000; Mieiklejohn, 1932). The fusion between business and educational models (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Senge, 2006) led to the development of various learning community models (DuFour, 2008; DuFour & Eacker, 1998; Hord, 2009; Kruse et al.,

1994; Newman & Wehlage, 1995). The most crucial dimensions of PLCs were shared vision, values, and goals (DuFour, 2007; Hord, 2008), but elements of shared leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, and student learning and achievement are essential to successfully implement PLCs (Hord & Sommers, 2008; DuFour, 2007; Murphy et al., 2000). The majority of research indicates the positives of PLC implementation, but problematic issues are specifically identified. Administrators and teachers must understand that all aspects of a PLC must be implemented to achieve success and sustainability (DuFour, 2007; Hord, 2008; Schmoker, 2001). Chapter three will describe the sample population and methodologies used to conduct this research.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology, research design, and procedures used for this study. This section also describes how the research design was carried out throughout the study, a description of the survey instrument, data collection procedures, population sample identified for research, analysis procedures, and study limitations.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions of professional learning communities (PLCs) as identified by Hord (2008) by reporting data collected using the Professional Learning Community Assessment- Revised (PLCA-R) survey instrument in 18 Kentucky school districts.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
2. To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
3. Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?

Research Design

This quantitative study utilized descriptive survey research. Quantitative research requires a predetermined instrument, numerical data, and a large sample population using a specific and narrow purpose to explain trends and relationships (Creswell, 2005). This study

utilized the predetermined instrument entitled the Professional Learning Community Assessment Revised (PLCA-R) to produce statistical findings to describe a sample population in one single phase (Babbie, 1990; Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2009). The population for this study included 18 school districts from the Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative (KVEC) located in Eastern Kentucky. The sample population participants included all teachers and head principals from all school levels (elementary, middle and high) in these districts.

Study Context

The Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC) is a public educational agency governed by superintendents from 19 Appalachian school districts, which aims to collectively serve the region's school district needs. This study was administered in 18 Appalachian school districts and in 93 schools. The participating school districts are: Breathitt County, Floyd County, Johnson County, Knott County, Harlan County, Lee County, Leslie County, Letcher County, Magoffin County, Owsley County, Pike County, Wolfe County, Hazard Independent, Jackson Independent, Jenkins Independent, Middlesboro Independent, Paintsville Independent, and Pikeville Independent. Of the 93 participating schools, this study will include 37 elementary schools, 18 K-8 schools, 2 K-12 schools, 15 middle schools, and 21 high schools with a total of 41,557 students, 2,788 teachers, and 112 head principals. Of the 41,557 students, 32,290 or 77% were from low-income families. The determination of low-income status is based on eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch subsidies under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (J. Hawkins, Executive Director of KVEC, personal communication, September 18, 2013).

Sample Population

Selecting an appropriate sample enables the researcher to more accurately generalize research findings to a larger population (Hinkle et al., 2003). The population of this research study included all teachers and principals from participating Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC) member districts. Teachers and principals within the KVEC service region have participated in PLC school-level implementation based on the DuFour and Hord models (J. Hawkins, Executive Director of KVEC, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

Even though all member district teachers were included in the sample, according to Raosoft Software (2012), a population size of 2,276 teachers required a minimal sample size of 328 participants to ensure 95% confidence with a 5% margin of error. Thus, the researcher sent the survey instrument to 100% of teachers to ensure at least the minimal amount of participants. A population size of 112 head principals required a minimal sample size of 87 participants to ensure 95% confidence with a 5% margin of error (Creswell, 2014; Johnson and Christensen, 2004). The researcher also sent the survey instrument to 100% of head principals to ensure at least the minimal amount of participants. The sample sizes took into consideration that the typical return rate when using online surveys is 30% (Creswell, 2014; Nulty, 2008). The sample included head principals from all grade levels as well as general education teachers (math, English, social studies, and science), elective teachers (agriculture, industrial technology, art, band, and physical education), and special education teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school level.

The KVEC service region was intentionally chosen primarily because of widespread PLC implementation in member school districts as well as past workshops to immerse school administrators and teachers in the PLC models of DuFour and Hord. Evidence of PLC

workshops and training programs across KVEC member district schools provided reasonable assurance that principals and teachers have participated in PLC training programs and implementation efforts during the past four years. (J. Hawkins, Executive Director of KVEC, personal communication, November 7, 2012). Superintendents from member districts have made PLC implementation a priority (K. Bell, Superintendent of Wolfe County Schools, personal communication, October, 24, 2012). Consequently, the researcher is confident that selecting the KVEC service region and their member districts for this study provided an informed population from which to select a sample that participated in PLC training and implementation. Aside from PLC implementation, the KVEC service region serves Eastern Kentucky region school districts, which is essential to this study's purpose.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used in this research study was the Professional Learning Community Assessment Revised (PLCA-R) version. The researcher received permission to use the PLCA-R instrument prior to investigation (Appendix A). The original Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) was designed to assess classroom and school-level practices based on PLC the dimensions as described by Hord (Oliver, Hipp, & Huffman, 2003). The PLCA instrument has been administered throughout the United States in numerous schools and grade levels to determine practices within each PLC dimension: (a) shared vision, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) collective learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p.30).

Additional research suggested that a very important component was missing from the PLCA instrument. According to Hord and Hirsh (2008), the process of collection, analysis, and use of data to inform improvement efforts is an essential component of PLC work. As a result,

the PLCA instrument was revised into the PLCA-R. The revised PLCA-R instrument still uses the same four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The original 45 questions from the PLCA remain, but seven additional questions were added. Before adding the additional questions, an expert panel of teachers, administrators, district and regional support staff, university professors, educational consultants, and doctoral students studying PLCs was formed. The work of the expert panel centered on the Expert Opinion Questionnaire which asked participants to rate proposed items. The Expert Opinion Questionnaire asked participants to rate proposed statements in terms of relevance using the following rating scale:

- *H/(3) = high level of importance and relevance to PLCA instrument revisions.*
- *M/(2) = medium level of importance and relevance to PLCA instrument revisions.*
- *L/(1) = low level of importance and relevance to PLCA instrument revisions.*

Findings from the Expert Opinion Questionnaire were positive and all seven items were added to the new PLCA-R instrument (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). According to Hipp and Huffman (2010) in their book entitled *Demystifying Professional Learning Communities: School leadership at its best,* the PLCA-R instrument illustrates school-level practices and descriptive statistical analysis will determine the strength or weakness of the essential practices within a PLC (Hipp and Huffman, 2010, p. 35). The PLCA-R instrument is broken into the following subcategories: (a) shared and supportive leadership; (b) shared values and vision; (c) collective learning and application; (d) shared personal practice; (e) supportive conditions-relationships; and (f) supportive conditions-structures. The following table lists the PLCA-R dimensions and corresponding statement numbers.

Table 3.1
The PLCA-R survey instrument dimensions with corresponding statement numbers.

PLC Dimensions	Corresponding Statement Numbers
Shared and Supportive Leadership	1-11
Shared Values and Vision	12-20
Collective Learning and Application	21-30
Shared Personal Practice	31-37
Supportive Conditions-Relationships	38-42
Supportive Conditions-Structures	43-52

The dimension of Shared and Supportive Leadership contains the following items: (1) staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues; (2) the principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions; (3) staff members have accessibility to key information; (4) the principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed; (5) opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change; (6) the principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions; (7) the principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority; (8) leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members; (9) decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas; (10) stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority; and (11) staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.

The dimension of Shared Values and Vision contains the following items: (12) a collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff; (13) shared

values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning; (14) staff members share visions for school improvement that have undeviating focus on student learning; (15) decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision; (16) a collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff; (17) school goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades; (18) policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision; (19) stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement; and (20) data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.

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

The following dimension of Shared Personal Practice is comprised of the following items: (31) opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement; (32) staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices; (33) staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning; (34) staff members

collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices; (35) opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring; (36) individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices; and (37) staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.

The dimension of Supportive Conditions- Relationships is comprised of the following items: (38) caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect; (39) a culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks; (40) outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school; (41) school staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school; and (42) relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.

The dimension of Supportive Conditions- Structures contains the following items: (43) time is provided to facilitate collaborative work; (44) the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice; (45) fiscal resources are available for professional development; (46) appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff; (47) resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning; (48) the school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting; (49) the proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues; (50) communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members; (51) communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members; and (52) data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.

Reliability and Validity

Widespread use of the instrument provided ample opportunities for internal consistency. The most recent analysis of the PLCA confirmed internal consistency in the following Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients for factored subscales (n=1209); Shared and Supportive Leadership (.94); Shared Values and Vision (.92); Collective Learning and Application (.91); Shared Personal Practice (.87); Supportive Conditions- Relationships (.82); Supportive Conditions-Structures (.88); and one factor solution (.97) (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 30). Research using this instrument indicated results with the highest mean score of 3.27 within the Collective Learning and Application dimension, and the lowest mean score of 2.74 within the Shared Personal Practice dimension (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p30).

Data Collection

The participants were informed through email of the study by KVEC Executive Director, which included a letter from the researcher to all participants explaining the purpose of the study, and noting that their participation was on a strictly voluntary basis. Participants were offered an incentive to complete the survey and were informed that participation in this study would include two separate drawings (one for teacher participants and one for principal participants) for a 100 dollar Amazon gift card. The gift cards were delivered electronically exactly two weeks after the study's end**.** Two days after the initial email invitation for participation, the participants received an email with instructions and an online link for completing the survey. Participants were given 14 calendar days to complete the survey. Reminders were sent to participants after the first seven days and then again on the twelfth day. Once the survey window closed, an appreciation

email was sent to all participants. The drawing for the Amazon gift card occurred exactly 14 days following the close of the survey and the winners were notified.

Data Analysis

All data analysis was completed using *Minitab 16*. Descriptive statistics is a method used to describe quantitative data in a manageable format (Babbie, 1990; Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2009). The collected demographic data is presented in chapter four in tables. Each section will describe teacher and principal demographic data in tables using the following: (a) gender, (b) education level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years teaching at their present school, (e) grade level of students worked with, and (f) subject area taught for teachers. The data tables present the nominal data representing the demographic survey data collected from participants. Data collected from the PLCA-R survey instrument was used to answer all research questions.

Research question number one, "To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?" was answered using descriptive statistics to report mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of each survey item and dimension of PLCs.

Research question number two, "To what degree do principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?" was answered using descriptive statistics to report mean, median, mode, and standard deviation of each survey item and dimension of the PLC.

Research question number three, "Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?" was answered using mean values to describe the relationship between teacher and principal perceptions. This process of analysis utilized the differences between the means of teacher and principal perceptions of each item and dimension.

Participant Protection

Proper ethical considerations were taken into consideration throughout the study. The researcher received the proper IRB approval prior to conducting this study (Appendix D). Each participant's participation was strictly voluntary with no threat of consequences or repercussions. Participation posed no potential risks and names of the participants were kept confidential. Since the researcher used Surveymonkey.com to host the survey and participants completed the survey online, responses were kept confidential. All names, addresses, and other identifiable information was removed from data before analysis took place to protect participant identification. Collected data were stored on the researcher's personal password-encrypted computer and flash drive, which no one else had or will have access to during, or after the completion of the study. All identifiable data will be destroyed once the study has concluded.

Role and Bias of the Researcher

As the researcher, I have participated in various PLCs throughout my career at the school, district, and regional level. As a professional, I have served as a teacher, assistant principal, and district level administrator. These experiences have provided me with pre-conceived notions about what teachers and principals may perceive as significant characteristics of PLCs. As a quantitative researcher, I acknowledge the existence of this potential bias.

Limitations of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe teacher and principal perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of school level PLCs in Kentucky using the PLCA-R instrument. The research questions were designed to achieve the aforementioned purpose, but the limitations are as follows:

- This study utilized a specific sample population from Eastern Kentucky. The findings may not be generalizable to other populations.
- This study assumes that all teachers and principals within the sample population are familiar with PLCs. Even though the researcher feels confident that all teachers and principals within the population have engaged in some type of PLC during the past four years, there is still the potential that a selected participant has not.
- This study took into consideration that self-administered surveys prevent the monitoring of participants. The researcher was unable to ensure that responses were not shared among participants. Often, the time of the year, events, or personal feelings could influence participant responses to a study.
- Data from this study will be reported for the Eastern Kentucky geographical region and not disaggregated by individual school districts.
- This study does not compare specific principal and teacher perceptions, but perceptions of the overall groups.
- This study does not take into consideration that specific sample populations may be over represented (i.e., same school, school level).

Summary

Chapter three addressed the methodology, research design, and procedures that were used in this study. The instrument entitled Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised was introduced and supported to assess Hord's five dimensions of PLCs. Data collection procedures were described as well as study limitation. Chapter four will report demographic data for participating teachers and principals, and collected data from all research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the collected data and provide a detailed analysis for each research question. This chapter includes the purpose statement, research questions, summary of collected demographic data, tables reporting data for research questions 1, 2 and 3, analysis for internal consistency, and comparison of mean values for all five PLC dimensions.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions of professional learning communities (PLCs) as identified by Hord (2008) by reporting data collected using the Professional Learning Community Assessment- Revised (PLCA-R) survey instrument in 18 Kentucky school districts.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
2. To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
3. Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?

Sample

The chosen survey instrument for this study was the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R), a 52 item survey developed by Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman

(2010) and hosted by SurveyMonkey.com. The instrument assessed teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions of PLCs as defined by Hord and Sommers (2008): (a) shared and supportive leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice; (e) supportive conditions-relationships, and (f) supportive conditions-structures. The survey used a four point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree). For this study, the comments will provide additional qualitative insight on understanding each dimension in order to aid with school, district, and regional next steps in improving their PLC practices (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Following the 52 item survey, questions designed to collect the following demographic information was collected for teachers: (a) gender, (b) education level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years teaching at their present school, (e) grade level of students worked with, (f) subject area taught for teachers, (g) grade level of students worked with for head principals. The following demographic information was also collected for principals: (a) gender, (b) educational level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years as principal at their present school, and (e) grade level of students for head principals.

Although the survey was sent to all potential teachers and principals, not everyone participated. Of the entire sample population of 2,276 teachers, 410 or 18.0% completed the survey instrument, and of the potential 112 head principals, 93 or 83.0% completed the survey instrument. According to Raosoft Software (2012), the population size of 2,276 teachers would require a minimal sample size of 329 participants to ensure 95% confidence with a 5% margin of error, which was achieved. Consequently, the population size of 112 principals would require a minimal sample size of 87 to succeed with 95% confidence and a 5% margin of error, which was also achieved (Creswell, 2014; Fowler, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). As stated before,

this quantitative study used descriptive statistical analysis to answer research questions one and two, and differences in mean values for question three using the statistical program *Minitab 16.* The following table will identify the statistical methods used to answer each research question in the study.

Table 4.1

Research Questions and Statistical Tests Used to Answer Each Question

Research questions	Statistical method used
1. To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?	❖ Frequencies ❖ Means ❖ Percentages of Agreement
2. To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?	❖ Frequencies ❖ Means ❖ Percentages of Agreement
3. Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?	❖ Frequencies ❖ Means

Demographic Information

Tables C-1 through C-8 located in the Appendix C describe demographic data collected by survey respondents who chose to answer items 59-65. Participating teachers were asked to select responses for the following questions: (a) gender, (b) education level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years teaching at their present school, (e) grade level of students for teachers, and (f) subject area taught. Principals were asked to select responses for the following questions: (a) gender, (b) educational level, (c) number of years of experience, (d) number of years as principal at their present school, and (e) grade level of students for head principals.

Although 410 teachers and 93 principals participated in the survey, some participants elected not to answer some of the questions. Therefore, the n for some questions will differ. Among those who participated in the survey, most teachers were female (74.9%; n=257), have a Master's degree with additional hours (45.9%; n=155), taught at the elementary level (137; n=40.8%), and have 20 or more years of experience (33.3%; n=113). The majority of principals were male (51.9%; n=28), have a Master's degree with additional hours (83.3%, n=45), served as principal at the high school level (37.7%; n=20), and have more than 20 years of experience (37.7%; n=20).

Research Question Findings

Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's PLCA-R survey instrument contains 52 statements from the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord (1997). The five dimensions are Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice, and Supportive Conditions. The dimension of Supportive Conditions was broken into Supportive Conditions – Relationships, and Supportive Conditions – Structures during the creation of the PLCA-R instrument. The following table lists the dimensions and the corresponding number of questions.

Table 4.2
Categories Based on Hord's Five Dimensions and Number of Statements in Each Category

Category	Number of statements
Shared and Supportive Leadership	11
Shared Values and Vision	9
Collective Learning and Application	10
Shared Personal Practice	7
Supportive Conditions-Relationships	5
Supportive Conditions-Structures	10

Research Question 1

The first research question posed, "To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?"

Teacher study participants responded to the 52-item survey that was organized by dimension. For each dimension, the findings were ranked from highest to lowest by mean values across all dimensions. The following tables reflect teacher perceptions based on survey results in percentages of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

Shared and supportive leadership. Table 4.3 represents teacher perceptions of Shared and Supportive Leadership. The participating teachers reported that staff uses multiple data sources when making decisions about teaching and learning, by reporting the highest mean value of this dimension (M= 3.12) to "staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning." Of the 409 participating teachers, 68% chose *agree* and 22% selected *strongly agree* to this item, resulting in 90% of the participating teachers expressing positive agreement. Furthermore, the following two items were among the highest scored responses for

this dimension among teacher participants, “the principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions” (*M*=2.97), and “the principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed” (*M*=2.95). These three highest rated items reported at least 80% of positive agreement among teachers. Thus, the overall top three statements for Shared and Supportive Leadership suggest that participating teachers believe that multiple data sources are used in making instructional decisions and principals listen to staff and support as needed.

Table 4.3
Shared and Supportive Leadership (Teachers)

Shared and Supportive Leadership statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	1%	9%	68%	22%	3.12
The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	2%	16%	63%	18%	2.97
The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	4%	16%	60%	20%	2.95
The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	2%	20%	60%	18%	2.93
Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	6%	19%	58%	17%	2.87
Staff members have accessibility to key information.	2%	24%	59%	15%	2.86
Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	5%	20%	60%	15%	2.86
Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	2%	23%	62%	13%	2.85
Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	4%	24%	59%	13%	2.82
Decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	5%	24%	55%	16%	2.82
The principal participates democratically with sharing power and authority.	4%	25%	57%	14%	2.81

Note. The number of responses for all 11 Shared and Supportive Leadership statements varied between 404 and 410 because respondents chose not to rate all 11 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the lowest ranking statement was "the principal participates democratically with sharing power and authority". This statement received a mean score of 2.81 with 57% of participants who *agreed* and 14% who *strongly agreed* with a

combined percentage of 71% of participants who found this statement in positive agreement. The next two lowest ranking statements were, "decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas", with a mean score of 2.82 and 55% of respondents reporting *agree* and 16% reporting *strongly agree*, and "opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change" with a mean score of 2.82 with 59% of respondents *agreeing* and 13% *strongly agreeing.* The statements showing the least agreement among teacher perceptions of this dimension were related to shared leadership in the school setting.

Shared Value and Vision. The following table 4.4 reports teacher responses for the dimension of Shared Value and Vision. Survey results indicate that participating teachers reported the statement, "data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision" (M=3.10) as ranking first with the highest mean score. Collected data also reported that of the 389 respondents who selected a response for this item, 67% of them selected *agree* and 22% selected *strongly agree*, which indicates an 89% positive agreement for this statement. Teacher respondents also reported, that "decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision" as the second highest statement ranked by mean score with 3.08. Data collected by this statement also reported that 64% of respondents reported *agree* and 23% reported *strongly agree* with a combined 87% suggesting positive agreement.

Table 4.4
Shared Value and Vision (Teachers)

Shared Values and Vision	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	1%	10%	67%	22%	3.10
Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	1%	12%	64%	23%	3.08
Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	1%	13%	69%	17%	3.01
Staff members share visions for school improvement that have undeviating focus on student learning.	1%	15%	68%	16%	3.00
Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	2%	15%	68%	15%	2.96
Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	3%	19%	60%	18%	2.95
A collaboration process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	2%	20%	63%	15%	2.90
A collaboration process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	2%	22%	63%	13%	2.87
School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	4%	23%	56%	17%	2.86

Note. The number of responses for all 9 Shared Values and Vision statements varied between 387 and 391 because respondents chose not to respond to all 9 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

On the other hand, 391 respondents who elected to answer the item, "school goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades" elicited a mean of 2.86 with 73% reporting agreement (56% *agree*; 17% *strongly agree*). The table also reflects that, "a collaboration process exists for developing a shared vision among staff" (M= 2.87) as the second lowest rated item with 63% of respondents selecting *agree* and 13% selecting *strongly agree*. Considering

these statements as lowest may suggest a strong focus on state accountability and less focus on school wide planning for the future.

Collective learning and applications. Table 4.5 reveals responses in the dimension of Collective Learning and Applications. Of the 373 respondents who elected to answer the statement, "school staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning" was ~~most~~ ranked highest with a mean score of 3.07 and 91% positive agreement (74% *agree* and 17% *strongly agree*). Also, the second highest perceived statement among teachers was "professional development focuses on teaching and learning" (M= 3.05) and an 86% positive agreement rating from a combined score of 65% *agree* and 21% *strongly agree*. Based on the collected data, the sample teachers perceive that current school programs and professional development meets the needs of the students and staff. Meanwhile, the lowest rated statement, "A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue" (M=2.87) and 76% combined positive agreement (62% *agree* and 14% *strongly agree*). These findings suggest the need for staff member initiated collaborative learning.

Table 4.5
Collective Learning and Applications (Teachers)

Collective Learning and Applications	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	1%	8%	74%	17%	3.07
Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	2%	13%	65%	21%	3.05
Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	1%	13%	68%	18%	3.04
Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	1%	13%	68%	18%	3.03
Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	2%	13%	67%	19%	3.03
Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	2%	13%	68%	17%	3.01
School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	1%	16%	70%	13%	2.96
Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	2%	19%	62%	17%	2.93
Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	2%	20%	66%	12%	2.89
A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	2%	22%	62%	14%	2.87

Note. The number of responses for all 10 Collective Learning and Application statements varied between 375 and 379 because respondents chose not to answer all 10 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Shared personal practice. As shown in table 4.6, the respondents perceive that staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning. The results reported a wide range of agreement when compared to other dimensions. The highest level of

agreement, with a mean value of 3.12 was, "staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning" with 67% reporting *agree* and 22% reporting *strongly agree*. On the other hand, only 56% of respondents agreed and 11% strongly agreed with the statement, "staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement" with a mean value of 2.75, which may suggest the need for utilizing student work in decision making.

Table 4.6
Shared Personal Practice (Teachers)

Shared Personal Practice	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	1%	10%	67%	22%	3.12
Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	2%	19%	65%	14%	2.91
Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	1%	21%	65%	13%	2.90
Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	1%	21%	65%	12%	2.88
Staff members collaboratively review student work to shared and improve instructional practices.	2%	24%	61%	13%	2.85
Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	2%	27%	60%	11%	2.79
Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	3%	30%	56%	11%	2.75

Note. The number of responses for all 7 Shared Personal Practice statements varied between 370 and 375 because respondents chose not to answer all 7 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Supportive conditions-relationships. Table 4.7 illustrates five statements pertaining to Supportive Conditions-Relationships. Of the 374 respondents who elected to report on the statement, "caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect" ranked as the common perception among teachers with a mean of 3.22 and 63% rating *agree* and 30% rating *strongly agree*. Four out of the five statements of this dimension are above the survey instrument's overall mean (*M*=2.93) except, "school staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and united effort to embed change into the culture of the school" with a mean score of 2.91 and 62% *agree* and 15% *strongly agree*. Therefore, teachers perceive that strong supportive relationships among teachers are the most common dimension of the sample population.

Table 4.7
Supportive Conditions- Relationships (Teachers)

Supportive Conditions- Relationships	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	1%	6%	63%	30%	3.22
A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	2%	13%	64%	20%	3.03
Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	2%	12%	67%	19%	3.03
Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	2%	17%	56%	24%	3.02
School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and united effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	2%	20%	62%	15%	2.91

Note. The number of responses for all 5 Supportive Conditions- Relationships statements varied between 370 and 374 because respondents chose not to answer all 5 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Supportive conditions- structures. As shown in table 4.8, the respondents of the sample schools perceive their school facility as a clean, inviting, and attractive environment. Of the 10

statements of Supportive Conditions- Structures, only the item, "the school facility is clean, attractive and inviting" (*M*= 3.02) and 62% *agree* and 22% *strongly agree* with a combined 84% positive perceptions was rated above the overall average mean (*M*=2.99). The remaining nine statements were below the overall average mean (*M*=2.99), which suggests the need for improved structures to help build and maintain PLCs.

Table 4.8
Supportive Conditions- Structures (Teachers)

Supportive Conditions- Structures	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	3%	13%	62%	22%	3.02
The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	3%	14%	67%	17%	2.99
Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	2%	16%	69%	13%	2.93
Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	4%	19%	63%	14%	2.87
Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available for staff.	6%	24%	55%	15%	2.80
Resources people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	5%	24%	60%	11%	2.77
Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	5%	25%	57%	12%	2.76
Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	5%	30%	55%	10%	2.69
The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	5%	33%	50%	12%	2.69
Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	6%	29%	56%	9%	2.66

Note. The number of responses for all 10 Supportive Conditions- Structures statements varied between 361 and 364 because respondents chose not to answer all 10 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Consequently, the dimension of Supportive Conditions-Structures, was rated the overall lowest dimension among responding teachers. Teachers perceived the statement, "Fiscal resources are available for professional development" as the most uncommon entity of all with the lowest overall mean score of 2.66. The respondents reported only 56% *agree* and 9% *strongly agree* for a total of 65% of positive agreement. The following statements are the second

and third lowest, respectively. For statement, "the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice" respondents report a mean of 2.69 with 50% rating *agree* and 12% rating *strongly agree* with a combined 53% in positive agreement which is the lowest positive agreement ranking. Finally, "Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work" is ranked third in both mean and positive agreement with a mean score 2.69 and a collective positive agreement of 69% from a rating of 57% *agree* and 12% *strongly agree*. The collected data would suggest that finances, time, and schedule are the most needed attributes to promote PLCs within sample population schools.

Research Question 2

The second research question was presented, "To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?"

Principal study participants responded to the 52-item survey that was organized by dimension. For each dimension, the findings were ranked from highest to lowest by mean values across all dimensions. The following tables reflect principal perceptions based on survey results in percentages of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

Shared and Supportive Leadership. The following table 4.9 reports principal responses for the dimension of Shared and Supportive Leadership. Survey results indicate that participating principals reported the statement, "the principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions" (M= 3.44) as most favorable for this dimension. Of the 93 respondents, 43% reported agree and 51% reported strongly agree, which indicates a 94% positive agreement regarding this statement. Participating principals also reported, "Staff

members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues" with a mean score of 3.42 and respondents reporting 47% *agree* and 47% *strongly agree* to this statement. Also the statement, "staff members have accessibility to key information" ranked third highest by mean score (M=3.37) with 55% reporting *agree* and 41% reporting *strongly agree*. The highest three ranking items would suggest that principals perceive that the sharing of knowledge and leadership is common practice.

Table 4.9
Shared and Supportive Leadership (Principals)

Shared and Supportive Leadership statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0%	6%	43%	51%	3.44
Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0%	6%	47%	47%	3.42
Staff members have accessibility to key information.	0%	4%	55%	41%	3.37
Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0%	2%	62%	36%	3.34
The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0%	3%	61%	36%	3.33
The principal participates democratically with sharing power and authority.	0%	6%	56%	38%	3.33
Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	0%	3%	62%	35%	3.32
Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0%	3%	65%	32%	3.29
The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0%	3%	65%	32%	3.28
Decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	1%	2%	65%	32%	3.28
Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0%	5%	70%	25%	3.20

Note. The number of responses for all 11 Shared and Supportive Leadership statements varied between 91 and 93 because respondents chose not to answer all 11 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

On the other side, the lowest ranking statement among principals was "stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority" with a mean score of 3.20 and 70% reporting *agree* and 25%

reporting *strongly agree*. The next two lowest ranked statements were "decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas" with a mean score of 3.28 and 65% reporting *agree* and 32% reporting *strongly agree;* and "the principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions" with a mean value of 3.28 and 65% reporting *agree* and 32% *strongly agree*.

Shared values and vision. Table 4.10 represents principals' perceptions for Shared Values and Vision. The results indicated that principals perceived that the highest level of agreement was, "a collaboration process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff" with a mean value of 3.41 and respondents reported 40% *strongly agree* and 55% *agree*. Additionally, of the 91 respondents who elected to complete this statement, "shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning" was ranked second highest (M=3.37) with a combined 98% agreement (58% *agree*; 43% *strongly agree*). Consequently, the lowest rated statement, "policies and programs are aligned to school's vision" (*M*= 3.25) received a 95% positive agreement among participants.

Table 4.10
Shared Values and Vision (Principals)

Shared Values and Vision	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
A collaboration process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0%	2%	55%	43%	3.41
Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0%	2%	58%	40%	3.37
Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0%	4%	58%	37%	3.33
School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0%	5%	65%	33%	3.31
Staff members share visions for school improvement that have undeviating focus on student learning.	0%	7%	59%	34%	3.27
Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0%	10%	54%	36%	3.26
A collaboration process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0%	2%	65%	33%	3.26
Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0%	6%	63%	31%	3.26
Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0%	5%	64%	31%	3.25

Note. The number of responses for all 9 Shared Values and Vision statements varied between 88 and 91 because respondents chose not to respond to all 9 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Collective learning and applications. As shown in table 4.11, principals perceive that staff members work collaboratively to discover new strategies through collegial relationships for school improvement efforts. According to collected data, for the statement "staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work" principals perceive this statement positively (*M*= 3.43) based on a positive rating of 98% (52% *agree*; 46% *strongly agree*). Also, "collegial relationships exist among staff members that

reflect commitment to school improvement efforts" (*M*=3.40) reflects a positive rating of 95% (51% *agree*; 44% *strongly agree*).

Table 4.11
Collective Learning and Applications (Principals)

Collective Learning and Applications	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0%	2%	52%	46%	3.43
Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0%	4%	51%	44%	3.40
Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0%	7%	55%	38%	3.32
Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0%	3%	62%	34%	3.31
Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0%	3%	66%	31%	3.28
Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0%	1%	61%	38%	3.28
Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0%	3%	68%	29%	3.25
School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0%	64%	66%	30%	3.25
School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0%	3%	69%	28%	3.24
A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0%	3%	70%	26%	3.23

Note. The number of responses for all 10 Collective Learning and Application statements varied between 90 and 91 because respondents chose not to answer all 10 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

The dimension of Collective Learning and Applications maintained an overall mean value of 3.30, with the previously described statements receiving mean values of 3.43 and 3.40 respectively. On the other hand, the lowest rated statement, "a variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue" scored a mean value of 3.23 and 96% positive agreement. Furthermore, principal respondents also rated, "school staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning" (M= 3.24) as the second lowest rated statement.

Shared personal practice**.** Table 4.12 illustrates seven statements describing Shared Personal Practice. Principals perceived that staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices. Based on respondents' reporting, 59% agree and 44% strongly agree that "staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices" (*M*=3.67). All of the statements within this dimension received a mean value of 3.20 or higher with the highest rated statement being 3.67, as compared to the lowest mean value of 3.20. The lowest score was in response to, "staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices". When analyzed, 66% reported *agree* and 29% reported *strongly agree* with a combined 95% positive agreement.

Table 4.12
Shared Personal Practice (Principals)

Shared Personal Practice	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0%	2%	59%	44%	3.67
Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0%	6%	53%	45%	3.38
Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	0%	9%	59%	32%	3.33
Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0%	3%	74%	23%	3.25
Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0%	2%	59%	39%	3.23
Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0%	3%	68%	29%	3.23
Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0%	5%	66%	29%	3.20

Note. The number of responses for all 7 Shared Personal Practice statements varied between 90 and 91 because respondents chose not to answer all 7 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Supportive conditions-relationships. Table 4.13 reflects Supportive Conditions-Relationships as the highest overall perceived dimension among participating principals with the highest overall mean value of 3.38. Respondents reported, "caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect" (*M*= 3.46) as the highest rated statement of the dimension with 52% rating *agree* and 47% rating *strongly agree* with a combined 98% positive agreement. Subsequently, the statement, "relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning" as the lowest rated

statement of this dimension with a mean value of 3.29 and a combined positive agreement of 95%.

Table 4.13
Supportive Conditions- Relationships (Principals)

Supportive Conditions- Relationships	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0%	2%	52%	47%	3.46
A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0%	3%	53%	44%	3.41
Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0%	3%	53%	44%	3.41
School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and united effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0%	8%	53%	39%	3.33
Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0%	5%	62%	33%	3.29

Note. The number of responses for all 5 Shared and Supportive Conditions- Relationships statements varied between 90 and 91 because respondents chose not to rate all 5 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Supportive conditions-structure. Table 4.14 presents results for Supportive Conditions-Structure. The participating principal respondents reported that they organize data and provide access to staff members by assigning the highest mean value (M=3.31) to "data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members". Of the 91 respondents, 60% marked agree and 35% selected strongly agree to this survey item, resulting in 95% of principals expressing a positive agreement.

Table 4.14
Supportive Conditions- Structures (Principals)

Supportive Conditions- Structures	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	0%	4%	60%	35%	3.31
Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	1%	3%	60%	35%	3.30
Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	1%	2%	64%	33%	3.29
Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available for staff.	0%	7%	63%	31%	3.24
The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	1%	6%	63%	31%	3.23
Resources people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0%	4%	69%	26%	3.22
The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0%	6%	68%	26%	3.21
Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	2%	12%	49%	37%	3.20
The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	2%	11%	52%	35%	3.20
Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	1%	13%	54%	32%	3.16

Note. The number of responses for all 10 Supportive Conditions- Structures statements varied between 90 and 91 because respondents chose not to answer all 10 survey items. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

On the other end of the spectrum, nine of the 10 statements of Supportive Conditions-Structures are lower than the overall mean average of 3.31 indicating this dimension is perceived by principals as the most uncommon practice among the sample population. The overall mean score of this dimension was (*M*= 3.24), along with the overall lowest rated statement of the entire survey. The lowest rated statement, "Fiscal resources are available for professional

development" (M=3.16) with an 86% (54% *agree*; 32% *strongly agree*) approval rating. The second lowest statements were "the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice" (M= 3.20) and "time is provided to facilitate collaborative work" (M= 3.20) which similarly to teachers' perceptions, suggested fiscal resources, time to collaborate, and school schedule as the most uncommon practices among the sample population.

Research Question 3

The third and final research question was posed, "Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?"

Statements collected from the PLCA-R were used to describe differences between mean values of teacher and principal perceptions. Table 4.15 indicates the mean values of teacher and principal perceptions based on PLC dimensions. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether PLC dimensions scored higher levels of agreement within the particular population samples (teachers and principals), and to observe combined dimensional ratings. According to the table, the overall average mean value of principal perceptions of all dimensions was 3.31, which is higher than any single dimensional perceptions of teacher respondents. The range for teacher perceived dimensions was 2.89-3.04, with Supportive Conditions-Relationships receiving 3.04 and Shared and Supportive Leadership with 2.89. The range of principal perception data was 3.24-3.38; with Supportive Conditions-Structures reporting 3.24 and Supportive Conditions-Relationships reporting 3.38.

Table 4.15
Overall Mean of Dimensions

Category	Mean of Teachers	Mean of Principals
Shared and Supportive Leadership	2.89	3.33
Shared Values and Vision	2.97	3.30
Collective Learning and Application	2.98	3.30
Shared Personal Practice	2.89	3.33
Supportive Conditions-Relationships	3.04	3.38
Supportive Conditions-Structures	2.82	3.24
Overall	2.93	3.31

The highest rated dimension in common for both principals and teachers was Supportive Conditions-Relationships with mean averages ranging from 3.04 to 3.38. The dimensions of Collective Learning and Application (2.98) and Shared Values and Vision (2.97) were the next highest rated based on teacher perception data. Principals perceived the second and third most common dimensions of PLCs as Shared and Supportive Leadership (3.33) and Shared Personal Practice (3.33). Furthermore, tables 4.16 through 4.21 report collected survey data that indicate principal perceptions reflect a higher level of agreement for all five dimensions than teachers.

Shared and supportive leadership. The greatest difference between teacher and principal perceptions occurred in the dimension of Shared and Supportive Leadership in Table 4.16 for the statement, “staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues”. The principal mean value was 3.42 and the teacher mean value was 2.86, for a difference of 0.56.

Table 4.16
Shared and Supportive Leadership (Principals and Teachers)

School practice statement	Teacher mean score	Principal mean score
Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	2.86	3.42
The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	2.97	3.44
Staff members have accessibility to key information.	2.86	3.36
The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	2.95	3.33
Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate changes.	2.82	3.32
The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	2.93	3.28
The principal participates democratically with sharing power and authority.	2.81	3.33
Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	2.87	3.29
Decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	2.82	3.27
Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	2.85	3.20
Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	3.12	3.34

Shared values and vision. According to table 4.6, statement, "a collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff" reported a principal mean value of 3.41 and the teacher mean value was 2.90, with a difference of 0.51. Also, "data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision" was reported with a discrepancy of 0.23 between the principal mean value of 3.33 and teacher mean value of 3.10.

Table 4.17
Values and Vision (Principals and Teachers)

School practice statement	Teacher mean score	Principal mean score
A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	2.90	3.41
Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	2.96	3.37
Staff members shared visions for school improvement that have undeviating focus on student learning.	3.00	3.27
Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	3.08	3.26
A collaboration process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	2.87	3.26
School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	2.86	3.31
Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	3.01	3.25
Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	2.95	3.26
Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	3.10	3.33

Collective learning and application. On the other hand, the smallest difference was observed for the statement, "School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning" from Collective Learning and Application, Table 4.18, which had a principal mean value of 3.34 and a teacher mean value of 3.12 for a difference of 0.17. Also of significance, the statement "decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision" has the second lowest mean value difference of 0.18 from principal score of 3.26 and a teacher score of 3.08.

Table 4.18
Learning and Application (Principals and Teachers)

School practice statement	Teacher mean score	Principal mean score
Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	3.04	3.30
Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	3.01	3.40
Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	2.93	3.28
A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	2.87	3.23
Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	2.89	3.25
Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	3.05	3.37
School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	2.96	3.25
School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	3.07	3.24
Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	3.03	3.31
Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	3.03	3.32

Shared personal practice. In addition, the statement, "opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement" from Shared Personal Practice reported by Table 4.19 received the next largest differing mean value. Collected data reflected principals' mean value as 3.43; compared to teachers' mean value of 2.91 with a difference of 0.52 for this statement.

Table 4.19
Shared Personal Practice (Principals and Teachers)

School practice statement	Teacher mean score	Principal mean score
Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	3.04	3.30
Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	3.01	3.40
Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	2.93	3.28
A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	2.87	3.23
Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	2.89	3.25
Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	3.05	3.37
School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	2.96	3.25
School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	3.07	3.24
Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	3.03	3.31
Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	3.03	3.32

Supportive conditions-relationships. Data collected from the dimension of Supportive Conditions-Relationships were rated highest overall by principals (*M*=3.38) and teachers (*M*=3.04). The statement "caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect" was rated highest overall by principals with a mean value of 3.46 and teachers with a mean value of 3.22.

Table 4.20
Supportive Conditions-Relationships (Principals and Teachers)

School practice statement	Teacher mean score	Principal mean score
Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	3.22	3.46
A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	3.03	3.41
Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	3.02	3.41
School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and united effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	2.91	3.31
Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	3.03	3.29

Supportive conditions-structures. Further evidence indicates that the statement, "communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members" from the Supportive Conditions-Structures dimension in Table 4.21, contains the second largest level of agreement. For this statement, principal data indicated a mean value of 3.30 and teacher perceptions reflected a mean value of 2.76 with a 0.54 disparity between the two values.

Table 4.21
Supportive Conditions-Structures (Principals and Teachers)

School practice statement	Teacher mean score	Principal mean score
Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	2.69	3.20
The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	2.69	3.20
Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	2.66	3.16
Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	2.80	3.24

Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	2.77	3.22
The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.	3.02	3.21
The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	2.99	3.23
Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	2.87	3.29
Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents and community members.	2.76	3.30
Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	2.93	3.30

Summary

Chapter four included the purpose statement and research questions. This chapter also reported demographic data for all participants, tables in which data were reported for all research questions, internal consistency information, and a comparison of mean values for all five PLC dimensions. Chapter five will summarize the study, reported findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are described by Hord (1997) as school staff learning together and directing efforts toward improved student academic achievement. In other words, PLCs aid in collaboration among school administrators and teachers in regards to their building capacity to continuously improve instructional practices and strengthen and engage in student learning. Although scholars offer several definitions of PLCs, this study was guided by Hord's (2004) definition of five key dimensions including: (a) shared and supportive leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, (e) supportive conditions involving relationships and structures. This chapter will briefly review the purpose of the study and the research questions. This chapter will also report findings which answer the research questions and provide a discussion of relevant literature. Conclusions will be presented as well as implications for improving practice and further research.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions of professional learning communities (PLCs) as identified by Hord (2004) by reporting data collected using the Professional Learning Community Assessment- Revised (PLCA-R) survey instrument in 18 Kentucky school districts.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?

2. To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?
3. Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?

Findings of Study

The research question posed include: "To what degree do teachers in PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?"

The degree to which teachers perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs was assessed using collected data from the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) and providing ranges of positive agreement in percentages and mean values. Teacher perceptions of the dimensions range from 72.9% to 84.0% positive agreement with mean values ranging from 2.82 to 3.04. Further findings provide insight into teacher's perceptions of the importance of each of the five dimensions including: (A) Shared and Supportive Leadership (76.5% positive agreement; *M*=2.89); (B) Shared Values and Vision (81.6 % positive agreement; *M*=2.97); (C) Collective Learning and Application (83.6% positive agreement; *M*=2.98); (D) Shared Personal Practice (76.1% positive agreement; *M*=2.89); (E) Supportive Conditions – Relationships (84.0% positive agreement; *M*= 3.04); (F) Supportive Conditions- Structures (72.9% positive agreement; *M*= 2.82). In sum, a majority of participating teachers (79.1% positive agreement; *M*= 2.93) indicate the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs described by Hord (2004) for all dimensions except one dimension defined by the PLCA-R

survey instrument. A closer examination of findings and relevant literature provided further insight into teacher's perceptions.

A notable finding relates to the importance of building relationships among teachers and minimalizing the silo effect (Harlacher, Kattleman, & Sakelaris, 2014). Research supports the strong need for relationships among teachers (Harvey & Drolet, 2003) who exhibit mutual understanding, which contributes to feelings of openness and sharing (Levi, 2000). Barth (2001) adds that as relationships continue to grow stronger, trust is experienced by all. Thus, the element of trust can lead to success or failure of relationships (Friedman, 2005). Survey findings are consistent with extant literature. For example, a vast majority of teachers agreed with the statement, "Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect" (93% positive agreement; *M*= 3.22) suggest that they concur with the importance of Supportive Conditions- Relationships. Empirically based literature also supports the notion that communication among teachers for both pleasure and enjoyment contribute to overall collective satisfaction in schools (Anderson & Martin, 2002) and may extend outside the normal work day (King & Newman, 2000). Furthermore, Keiffer-Barone and Ware (2002) indicate the importance of strong relationships to decrease teacher isolation and empower them as they transition into leadership roles (Hord, 1997). The importance of teacher relationships is explained by Danielson (2012) who describes teachers' professional responsibility to collaborate, which provides support with eliminating teacher silos (Fisher & Frey, 2012).

In addition, findings related to the dimension Supportive Conditions- Structures were related to the lowest overall rated statement, "Fiscal resources are available for professional development" (65% agreement; M=2.66). Thus, teacher perceptions about the lack of resources for professional development in schools in Kentucky may influence the degree to which

conditions may be created to support PLCs. Klein-Kracht (1993) suggests that educators should always be learning and Lambert (2004) adds that professional development should be a job embedded experience: however, this may not be the case. DuFour (2008) points out that job embedded professional development is best practice, but teachers may not feel their voice for professional development needs are heard at the school and district levels. The aforementioned scholars express concerns for the paucity of "fiscal resources" as a significant barrier to improving public education.

Another concern relates to one of the most documented barriers to PLC success: the lack of time in personal schedules for collaboration (DuFour, 2011). The statement "the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice" (62% positive agreement; *M*= 2.69), and "time is provided to facilitate collaborative work" (65% positive agreement; *M*= 2.69) received teacher responses that were among the lowest rated survey statements. Scholars strongly assert the lack of time in personal schedules is the most common barrier that hinders PLC success. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) indicate that pressure from high stakes testing often moves the focus from collaboration to a more stringent focus on instructional practices that immediately impact results (Fullan, 2000). Even though high stakes accountability is essential for school success, further research shows the importance of teacher relationships. For example, DuFour (2004) suggests that time spent collectively must be a closely guarded commodity, while Hickman, Schrimpf, and Wedlock (2002) note that principals must intentionally schedule time for collaborative work. Giles and Hargreaves (2006) agree that properly implemented PLCs focused on teacher relationships have a much higher chance for sustainable success.

These data indicate the degree to which teachers of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of Hord's (2004) five dimensions of PLCs. A majority of teachers perceive that

these practices are in place throughout school districts surveyed in Kentucky based on 72.9% to 84.0% positive agreement. Furthermore, the importance of relationships among teachers was perceived with the highest percentage of positive agreement; whereas, fiscal resources for professional development, time, and schedules were perceived the lowest.

The second research question posed, "To what degree do head principals of PLC schools in Kentucky perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs as described by Hord as measured by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman's Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised?

The degree to which principals perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs was assessed using the PLCA-R instrument described using ranges of mean values and positive agreement percentages. A summary of principal responses on the dimensions ranges from 92.4% to 96.7% positive agreement and mean values 3.24 to 3.38. Specific findings include: Shared and Supportive Leadership (95.6% positive agreement; *M*=3.33), Shared Values and Vision (95.4% positive agreement; *M*=3.30), Collective Learning and Application (96.7% positive agreement; *M*=3.30), Shared Personal Practice (95.7% positive agreement; *M*=3.33), Supportive Conditions – Relationships (95.2% positive agreement; *M*= 3.38), and Supportive Conditions- Structures (92.4% positive agreement; *M*= 3.24). In sum, a majority of principals perceive the five dimensions as being important.

A significant finding from this study relates to Kentucky Department of Education's mandated procedure, Teacher Professional Growth and Effectiveness Systems (TPGES). As discussed in chapter two, the TPGES process is based on Danielson's work on teacher effectiveness. The Danielson Framework (2012) requires teacher peer observations be conducted for schools to maintain compliance. School principals participating in this study received

TPGES related training that may have influenced their responses. The survey statement, "staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices" was the overall highest rated positive statement among principal respondents (98% positive agreement; *M*= 3.67). This statement's mean value rating was .21 higher than the next highest rated statement. Danielson (2012) strongly asserts the importance of peer observation in professional growth as defined in "The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument". Therefore, not only is this practice highly recommended in Kentucky schools, but it is a requirement.

Study findings indicate that fiscal resources available for professional development were perceived by principals as being important to the development of PLCs. One of the five dimensions of Supportive Conditions- Structures included the statement, "Fiscal resources are available for professional development" (86% positive agreement; *M*= 3.16). It was the lowest positive rated overall statement. Scholars note the importance for educators to be continuous learners (Klein-Kracht, 1993). Lambert (2004) suggests that learning and professional development should occur throughout the school year and become embedded into the learning landscape. DuFour (2008) certainly agrees with job embedded professional development, but adds the importance of collaboration among teachers to grow collectively. Teachers who meet collaboratively to have conversations focused on student learning have a greater chance to grow professionally (DuFour, 2008). DuFour (2008) also asserts that principals may consider certain elements of professional development out of their control, since central office staff often plans district wide professional development initiatives.

Another noteworthy finding suggests that the lack of time in personal schedules is the largest hindrances that may influence successful implementation of PLCs. Time for teacher collaboration has been identified as being crucial to PLCs (DuFour, 2011). The statements,

"Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work" (86% positive agreement; *M*=3.20); "staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices" (85% positive agreement; M= 3.20); and "the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice" (87% positive agreement; *M*=3.20) were rated by principals as being second lowest by mean value. Principal responses to all three statements indicate that they perceive that the lack of time for teacher collaboration was a concern. Scholars acknowledge the difficulty of providing time for teacher collaboration (Reynolds, 2008; DuFour, 2011). Yet, the importance of this practice is strongly supported by many researchers. For example, Danielson (2002) observes that working collaboratively may benefit all stakeholders and Little (1990) notes that teacher collaboration is linked to improved levels of teacher satisfaction. In addition, the importance of principals deliberately scheduling time for teacher collaboration (Hickman, Schrimpf, & Wedlock, 2002), and intentionally protecting these collaborative efforts was discussed by DuFour (2004). Although the importance of providing time is well documented, implementation is often difficult (Blankstein, 2004; Cook & Friend, 1991; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Idol & West, 1991; Redditt, 1991).

Findings suggest the degree to which principals of PLC schools perceive the importance of the five dimensions (Hord, 2004). Principal perceptions provide evidence of the impact that the TPGES implementation process has had during the time of this study. Furthermore, principal perceptions of survey statements (86% to 98% positive agreement; *M*= 3.16-3.67) and PLC dimensions (92.4% to 96.7% positive agreement; *M*= 3.24-3.38) suggest that these practices are present, as well as the importance of fiscal resources for professional development, time, and schedules for the success of PLC implementation.

The third research question posed, "Is there a significant difference in the perceived degree of importance by teachers and principals of the five dimensions of PLCs in Kentucky?"

The significant difference in the perceived degree of importance of teachers and principals regarding the five dimensions of PLCs is described by analysis of data using the PLCA-R survey instrument. The first significant difference between teacher and principal perceptions was reported with ranges of positive agreement and mean values for each survey statement. Principal perceptions for each survey statement (86%-98% positive agreement; *M*= 3.16-3.67) was consistently higher than teacher perceptions (65%-91% positive agreement; *M*= 2.66-3.22) for all survey statements. The second significant difference between teacher and principal perceptions was reported by ranges of positive agreement and mean values for survey dimensions. Principal perceptions for survey dimensions (92.4%-96.7% positive agreement; *M*= 3.24-3.38) were consistently higher than those reported by teacher perceptions (72.9% -84.0% positive agreement; *M*=2.82-3.04). Therefore, differences exist between principal and teacher perceptions of the five dimensions of PLCs based on positive agreement and mean value ranges. The differences between principal and teacher perceptions may be the result of misaligned definitions of PLCs among participants. Researchers have noted how PLCs are often mislabeled as professional meetings required by school level administration (DuFour, et al., 2006). Furthermore, principals may refer to collaborative meetings as PLCs, while teachers perceive them to be more closely aligned to professional meetings without a clear focus on teacher learning. Also, researchers indicate that principals and teachers may have differing perceptions of the school's "current reality" of the PLC process. According to DuFour, et al. (2006), all school staff must have a common understanding of present instructional practices and student learning for PLC success and sustainability. This process may be misaligned within participant

schools. Jessie (2007) indicates the emphasis principals often place on results rather than practices. In regards to "current reality", principals may perceive differently than teachers where their schools exist on the PLC implementation continuum.

Conclusions Based on Findings

Study findings suggest that the majority of participants perceive that PLC practices are in place. At least 67% of participating teachers and principals agreed with statements from the PLCA-R instrument which indicates the presence of Hord's (2004) five dimensions in schools that are implementing PLCs in Kentucky**.** Survey findings report differences between teacher and principal perceptions. Principal perceptions of PLC dimensions (92.4%-96.7% positive agreement; *M*= 3.24-3.38) and survey statements (86%-98% positive agreement; *M*= 3.16-3.67) were consistently higher than teacher perceptions of PLC dimensions (72.9% -84.0% positive agreement; *M*=2.82-3.04) and survey statements (65%-91% positive agreement; *M*= 2.66-3.22). Although these survey findings report perceptions of teachers and principals from Kentucky, they may not reflect other geographic regions. Yet, Hord and Sommers (2008) note that, "Many administrators proclaim to have a PLC in their school, and many would like to be known for their involvement as a PLC, but the specificity of just what constitutes a PLC has yet to be communicated among many educators" (p. 8). This does not suggest the reason for the differences between teacher and principal perceptions, but could simply provide additional insight.

This study found that teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions suggest the need for greater financial support of professional development as well as intentional scheduling of time to enable teachers opportunities to engage in PLC related collaboration. These findings are consistent with relevant literature. Idol and West (1991) indicate that teacher collaboration

serves as a catalyst for school improvement, while Cook & Friend (1991) suggest collaborative opportunities decrease chances for school failure. Furthermore, Leithwood and Janzi (1990) elaborate that collaboration among teachers builds internal leadership, and principals who facilitate this practice will experience greater PLC success (Byrk et al., 1999), all of which indicate the need for collaborative time.

The second aspect of supportive conditions refers to physical structures, such as time, buildings, grounds, and materials. Researchers assert that time allocated for PLC engagement is important along with teacher physical proximity. The most important resource that teachers and principals must collectively allocate is time to work as a PLC (Hickman, Schrimpf, & Wedlock, 2002). Numerous studies indicate the lack of time as being a serious issue to school wide collaboration (Blankstein, 2004; Cook & Friend, 1991; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Idol & West, 1991; Redditt, 1991). Principals can support PLCs by allocating time throughout the instructional day (Leithwood & Janzi, 1990). Those principals who facilitate such practices will promote PLC growth (Byrk et al., 1999). The physical proximity between teachers does factor into the success of collaboration (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Both researchers state that great physical distance between teachers will decrease opportunities for collaboration. On the other hand, close proximity among teachers promotes increased student achievement (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Increased opportunities for collaboration also decreases the number of isolated teachers (Little, 1993).

Further reported evidence suggests the impact of TPGES implementation in Kentucky. Principals perceive the statement, "staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices" (98% positive agreement; *M*= 3.67) as the highest overall, but teachers rated the same statement much lower (78% positive agreement; *M*=2.90). Peer feedback is an

essential element of the TPGES process and the Danielson (2012) framework. All principals in Kentucky are required to obtain certification using this process before conducting teacher evaluations in the 2014-2015 school year. These data suggest that teachers have yet to be impacted by the TPGES process to the degree of principals in Kentucky.

Implications for Practice

A thorough review of the literature and insights gained from study findings of teacher and principal perceptions of PLCs offer several implications for practice. First, school level leaders and educators who intend to implement PLCs may benefit from understanding how PLCs are defined. Hord and Sommers (2008) defined PLCs as "continuous and intentional staff learning, so that staff always are increasing effectiveness leading to students' increased successful learning" (p. 24). In this regard, principals may be more effective in implementing PLCs if they move away from being "the person with all the answers" to becoming part of the organization that seeks answers. In many instances, principals may understand dimensions that comprise a functional PLC; however, they may not fully grasp changes in their management and leadership roles required to make it successful. As Hord and Sommers (2008) note, "Many administrators proclaim to have a PLC in their school, and many would like to be known for their involvement as a PLC, but the specificity of just what constitutes a PLC has yet to be communicated among many educators" (p.8). The notion that principals may have an incomplete understanding of PLCs may be reflected in study findings regarding differences of teacher and principal perceptions. Principals considering developing a PLC in their school may enhance their success by developing a shared understanding among all participants.

The intended purpose of PLCs is to increase student learning through professional growth, and through organizational/school wide collaborative learning. In this regard, PLCs

serve as a catalyst for creating shared knowledge and instituting deliberate processes essential to re-centering schools to focus on improving student academic achievement. Hipp and Huffman (2010) observe that, "currently, researchers and practitioners maintain that the concept of a PLC is perceived as the promise for school change and lasting reform" (p.12). Principals who either intend to initiate or are engaged in PLCs may benefit from articulating and supporting practices that contribute to consistently focusing on student learning.

Current PLCs face financial constraints that hinder their success and sustainability. Although these circumstances are difficult, school leaders may support PLC development in other important ways including protecting collaborative learning time for teachers by building school-wide schedules conducive to professional collaboration. DuFour (2010) suggests that several changes in practice may promote professional learning including providing for common preparation time when building the master schedule. Thus, principals can use schedules to create time for teachers to meet collaboratively on a regular basis. Parallel scheduling also allows professional learning to occur by scheduling physical education, art, music, library, foreign language, and guidance counselors to meet with students on a consistent basis. Lastly, the concept of adjusted start and end times allow schools to stagger the start time for PLC meetings for teachers. Professional collaborative meetings can occur during obligatory duties by rearranging teacher supervision schedules. In other words, regular meetings are critical for the success and sustainability of PLCs and often require innovative planning.

The continued support of PLCs is essential to ensure institutionalization of shared perspectives, focused professional development, and creation of a student-centered learning culture that contributes to long-term school improvement and the enhancement of student academic performance. This is especially true in areas and small schools in Eastern Kentucky.

Berry, Johnson, and Montgomery (2005) view PLCs as a way to improve teacher's willingness to share and improve instructional practices. Therefore, teachers in similar geographic regions can benefit greatly from PLC practices that develop long term commitments focused on student learning and success through systemic changes based on the five dimensions of PLCs.

Implications for Future Research

Reviews of literature, study findings, and procedures may be useful in identifying opportunities to conduct future PLC related studies. Future research concerning the degree to which teachers and principals perceive the importance of the five dimensions of PLCs (Hord, 2004) and measured by the PLCA-R (Oliver et al., 2010), or deeper analysis of principal and teacher relationships may contribute to the existing knowledge base. Although study findings and results may not generalize well to other regions or school districts outside of Eastern Kentucky, conducting a similar study in other educational cooperatives throughout Kentucky or other states may provide additional insights into the importance of these five dimensions of PLCs. It may be advisable to expand the size of the sample population to strengthen findings from future research studies.

Further future PLC research may include school district support staff (superintendents, instructional supervisors, etc.) to provide insight on district level PLCs or the degree of support provided for school level PLC implementation. Additional research may be conducted to examine professional development funding regarding PLCs and any relationships that may exist.

Misalignment of perceptions and practices may influence the degree of success of PLCs and gathering further evidence on this phenomenon may contribute to corrective action. In addition, future studies which examine and compare teacher perceptions at different grade levels, i.e. high, middle, and elementary may provide additional insights into how they may differ in

these distinct school contexts. Potential differences are noted by Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1996), who suggest that PLCs are more easily implemented at the elementary school level.

Although this study was designed to include head principals of all school levels, the researcher recognizes that perceptions of assistant principals may differ and may influence the success of PLCs. For example, findings suggest that there may be differing perceptions regarding collegial relationships among teachers and principals. An examination of how perceptions of assistant principals may be similar or different than those of head principals and teachers may be a promising area for future research.

Further research may also be conducted regarding differences between teacher and principal perceptions of the five dimensions of PLCs. Findings identified a difference between teacher and principal perceptions, but future research may be conducted to provide more insights into the relationships between them.

Appendix A: Permission to use the Professional Learning Communities Assessment Revised (PLCA-R) Instrument

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA Lafayette

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091

January 29, 2014

Jeffrey Stamper
P.O. Box 201
Campton, KY 41301

Dear Mr. Stamper:

This correspondence is to grant permission to utilize the *Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised* (PLCA-R) as your instrument for data collection for your doctoral study through the University of Kentucky. I believe your research *examining teacher and principal perceptions of professional learning communities in rural Kentucky schools* will contribute to the PLC literature and provide valuable information related to overall development of the PLC process within rural schools. I am pleased that you are interested in using the PLCA-R measure in your research.

This permission letter allows use of the PLCA-R through paper/pencil administration, as well as permission for the PLCA-R online version. For administration of the PLCA-R online version, services must be secured through our online host, SEDL in Austin, TX. Additional information for online administration can be found at www.sedl.org.

While this letter provides permission to use the measure in your study, authorship of the measure will remain as Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (exact citation on the following page). This permission does not allow renaming the measure or claiming authorship.

Upon completion of your study, I would be interested in learning about your entire study and would welcome the opportunity to receive an electronic version of your completed dissertation research.

Thank you for your interest in our research and measure for assessing professional learning community attributes within schools. Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dianne F. Olivier

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor

Joan D. and Alexander S. Haig/BORSF Professor
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
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Reference Citation for Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised measure:
Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.). *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its best.*

Appendix B: Professional Learning Communities Assessment Revised (PLCA-R)

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

Next

Shared and Supportive Leadership

1. Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

2. The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

3. Staff members have access to key information.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

5. Opportunities are provided for staff members to intiate change.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

7. The principal participates democratically with sharing power and authority.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

9. Decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

10. Stakeholders assume shared responsbility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

11. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Stronly Agree

12. Comments (Optional)

Prev Next

Shared Values and Vision

13. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

14. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

15. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have undeviating focus on student learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

16. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision

Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree

17. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

18. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

19. Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

20. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectation that serve to increase student achievement.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

21. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

22. Comments (Optional)

Prev Next

Collective Learning and Application

23. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree

24. Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

25. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

26. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

27. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

28. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

30. School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

31. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

32. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

33. Comments (Optional)

Prev Next

Shared Personal Practice

34. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

35. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

36. Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

37. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

38. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

39. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

40. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

41. Comments (Optional)

Prev Next

Supportive Conditions - Relationships

42. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

43. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

44. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

45. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and united effort to embed change into the culture of the school.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

46. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

47. Comments (Optional)

Prev Next

Supportive Conditions - Structures

Supportive Conditions - Structures

48. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

49. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

50. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

51. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available for staff.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

52. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

53. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

54. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

55. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

56. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

57. Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

58. Comments (Optional)

Prev Next

Demographic Information

59. Number of years teaching experience

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 20+

60. Number of years teaching at this school:

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 20+

61. Gender:

- Male
- Female

62. Education

- Bachelor
- Masters
- Masters +30 (Rank 1)
- PhD/ EdD

63. Grade level of students I work with:

- Elementary (K-5)
- Middle (6-8)
- High (9-12

64. Subject teaching area:

- Math
- English
- Foreign
- Social Studies
- Health/PE
- Art
- Music
- Agriculture
- Home Economics
- Business
- Special Education
- Industrial Arts
- Self Contained

65. Number of years that you have participated in a PLC

- 0-1
- 1-2
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 5+

66. Name and email to be added to the drawing for the 100.00 Amazon Gift Card.

Prev Done

Appendix C: Survey Respondent Demographic Information

Table C-1: Sample Teacher Population by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	78	25.4%
Female	257	74.6%
Total	335	100.%

Table C-2: Sample Principal Population by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Male	28	51.9%
Female	26	48.1%
Total	54	100.%

Table C-3: Sample Teachers by Educational Level

Education Level	Frequency	Valid Percent
Bachelor Degree	35	10.4%
Master Degree	145	42.9%
Master Degree +30 (Rank 1)	155	45.9%
Doctorate	3	0.8%
Total	338	100%

Table C-4: Sample Principals by Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Valid Percent
Bachelor Degree	0	0
Master Degree	8	14.8%
Master Degree +30 (Rank 1)	45	83.3%
Doctorate	1	1.9%
Total	54	100%

Table C-5: Sample Teachers by Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Valid Percent
0-5	52	15.3%
6-10	48	14.2%
11-15	60	17.7%
11-20	66	19.5%
20+	113	33.3%
Total	339	100%

Table C-6: Sample Principals by Years of Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency	Valid Percent
0-5	1	1.9%
6-10	4	7.7%
11-15	12	23.1%
11-20	15	28.8%
20+	20	38.5%
Total	52	100%

Table C-7: Percentage of Teacher Respondents by School Grade Level

School Grade Level	Frequency	Valid Percent
Elementary School (K-5)	137	40.8%
Middle School (6-8)	92	27.4%
High School (9-12)	107	31.8%
Total	336	100%

Table C-8: Percentage of Principal Respondents by School Grade Level

School Grade Level	Frequency	Valid Percent
Elementary School (K-5)	26	49.1%
Middle School (6-8)	7	13.2%
High School (9-12)	20	37.7%
Total	53	100

Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval

Office of Research Integrity
IRB, IACUC, RDRC
315 Kinkead Hall
Lexington, KY 40506-0057
859 257-9428
fax 859 257-8995
www.research.uky.edu/ori/

Initial Review

Approval Ends
November 18, 2015

IRB Number
14-0793-P4S

TO: Jeffrey C Stamper
Education
PO Box 201
Campton, KY 41301
PI phone #: (606) 359-2516

FROM: Chairperson/Vice Chairperson
Non-medical Institutional Review Board (IRB)

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol Number 14-0793-P4S

DATE: November 24, 2014

On November 19, 2014, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

A Comparative Study of Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in Rural Eastern Kentucky

Approval is effective from November 19, 2014 until November 18, 2015 and extends to any consent/assent form, cover letter, and/or phone script. If applicable, attached is the IRB approved consent/assent document(s) to be used when enrolling subjects. **[Note, subjects can only be enrolled using consent/assent forms which have a valid "IRB Approval" stamp unless special waiver has been obtained from the IRB.]** Prior to the end of this period, you will be sent a Continuation Review Report Form which must be completed and returned to the Office of Research Integrity so that the protocol can be reviewed and approved for the next period.

In implementing the research activities, you are responsible for complying with IRB decisions, conditions and requirements. The research procedures should be implemented as approved in the IRB protocol. It is the principal investigators responsibility to ensure any changes planned for the research are submitted for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation. Protocol changes made without prior IRB approval to eliminate apparent hazards to the subject(s) should be reported in writing immediately to the IRB. Furthermore, discontinuing a study or completion of a study is considered a change in the protocol's status and therefore the IRB should be promptly notified in writing.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's IRB Survival Handbook web page [http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/IRB-Survival-Handbook.html#PIresponsibilities]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [http://www.research.uky.edu/ori]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

N. Van Tuinen, PhD/gh
Chairperson/Vice Chairperson

Appendix E: Letter of Invitation

Form M- Survey Instrument Cover and Consent Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Jeffrey C. Stamper and I am a fellow educator from the Eastern Kentucky region attending University of Kentucky, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership. I am conducting a study entitled, "A Comparative Study of Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in Rural Eastern Kentucky" in your region. The purpose of this study is to compare the degree of importance between teacher and principal perceptions of PLCs in rural Eastern Kentucky using Hord's (2008) five dimensions of PLCs as measured by Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman's (2010) Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised.

As a school teacher or principal you have a tremendous responsibility to guide your students to continued success and high student achievement. Although you will not receive a personal benefit from taking part in this research study, your participation in this survey will help to increase our understanding of PLCs and educators' perceptions of their practice. I hope to receive completed questionnaires from about 2800 people, so your answers are important. Of course, you have a choice about whether or not to complete the survey, but if you do participate, you are free to skip any questions or discontinue at any time. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. There will be two drawings for a 100 dollar Amazon gift card those who complete the entire survey, one for head principals and one for teachers which will occur exactly 14 days following the close of the survey. There are approximately 2800 teachers and 168 principals who will be eligible for participation, therefore the odds of winning the drawing solely depends on the number of entrants.

Be assured your participation in this study and the consequent survey findings will be kept strictly confidential. Data collected from this survey will be kept confidential, and reported findings will have no identifiable information. The use of this data will be limited to this research, as authorized by University of Kentucky, and results will be presented in my dissertation and if proven to assist schools and districts, may be used in other educational settings such as journal articles, educational conferences and staff development.

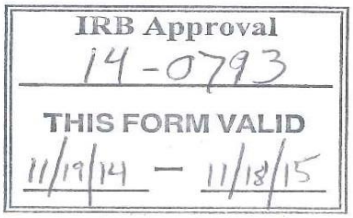
Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data once received from Survey Monkey, given the nature of online surveys, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the survey/data gathering company's servers, or while en route to either them or us. It is also possible the raw data collected for research purposes may be used for marketing or reporting purposes by the survey/data gathering company after the research is concluded, depending on the company's Terms of Service and Privacy policies. Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. When information from this study is written about or analyzed all personal information will be removed from all data. I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure I have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

If you have questions about the study, please feel free to ask; my contact information is given below. If you have complaints, suggestions, or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 859-257-9428 or toll-free at 1-866-400-9428.

By clicking the following survey link, you agree and consent to participate in this survey.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,



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Academic Degrees

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Rank 1 Union College, Barbourville, Kentucky School Leadership	2008
M.Ed. Union College, Barbourville, Kentucky Curriculum Design	2006
B.A. Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky Secondary Social Studies	2004

Certifications

Social Studies Teacher, Grades 5-12
Science Teacher, Grades 5-9
Language Arts Teacher, Grades 5-9
School Principal, Grades K-12
Supervisor of Instruction, Grades K-12
Superintendent

Professional Experience

2010-Present	District Assessment Coordinator (DAC), Gifted and Talented Director, Site-Based Decision Making Coordinator, Response to Intervention (RTI) Coordinator, Dean of Students
2006-2010	Teacher/ Coach, Social Studies/ Language Arts/ Basketball and Baseball, J.B. McNabb Middle School, Mount Sterling, Kentucky
2005-2006	Teacher/ Coach, Language Arts and Basketball, Wolfe County Middle School, Campton, Kentucky
2004-2005	Teacher/ Coach, Language Arts/ Social Studies/ Television Production and Basketball, Whitley City Middle School, Stearns, Kentucky

Professional Services

- Kentucky Association of School Administrators Governance Committee
- Kentucky Alternate Assessment Advisory Board Council Member
- PGES Certified Evaluator/ Principal Trainor
- Certified SBDM Council Trainer
- Advanced Ed Accreditation visiting team committee member
- Advanced Ed/ KDE Leadership Auditing team member
- Morehead State University Supervisor of student teachers 2008-2009
- Montgomery County School District Supervisor of KTIP intern teachers 2008-2010
- J.B. McNabb Middle School Head Boys Basketball Coach 2005-2006
- J.B. McNabb Middle School SACS (Southern Accreditation of Colleges and Schools) review committee

Professional Organization Membership

- Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA)
- Kentucky Association of District Assessment Coordinators (KAAC)
- Kentucky Association of Gifted Educators (KAGE)
- Kentucky Association of School Councils (KASC)

Presentations

- Stamper, J. (2015). Leading Schools from PLCs to Communities of Practice: Building PLCs for the Future. KASA Summer Leadership Institute. Accepted
- Stamper, J. (2015). Lessons Learned From A Comparison of Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in Rural Eastern Kentucky. 2015 Spring Research Conference, University of Louisville.
- Stamper, J. (2014). A Comparison of Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in Rural Eastern Kentucky. 2014 Spring Research Conference, University of Cincinnati.