ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL

Ann Elizabeth Ingram

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ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
IN A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL

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
Ann Elizabeth Ingram
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Professor of Educational Leadership Studies
Lexington, Kentucky

2017
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
IN A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL

Essential transformations within a school culture that ensure organizational learning take place at the individual, group, and organizational levels. With the recent implementation of the Teacher Professional Growth and Effectiveness System, Kentucky teachers have experienced change in their organization, but may have not yet changed their professional practice. This recently revised framework for teacher evaluation requires teachers to reflect on their practice, create professional growth plans, seek opportunities for professional development, set goals for student academic growth, analyze student progress, and participate in observations conducted by a peer and their principal. The framework for teachers centers on the belief that teachers must constantly seek to further develop their skills, and ongoing collaborative professional learning has been found to help teachers improve their practice, and in turn, to also improve student learning.

For nearly a decade, Maplewood Elementary School in Lexington, Kentucky, has been recognized as being a high-performing school based on state accountability test scores, but evidence of achievement gaps remains. While the diverse student body includes students that are highly gifted there are also 28.5% who have not reached reading proficiency, and 32.2% have not reached mathematics proficiency. Maplewood’s combined reading and mathematics proficiency target was 73.6%, yet only 69.7% of Maplewood students scored at least a proficient for the combined reading and mathematics score for 2016. When the scores of gifted students are removed from the schoolwide scores, approximately only one-third of Maplewood’s non-gifted students scored in the range of Proficient or Distinguished for reading or mathematics. Aligned with the school district goals, the school community’s shared goal includes reducing the number of students scoring at the Novice level in reading on the state assessment tests by 50% by 2020.

School principals must not only facilitate teacher professional growth and effectiveness, but they must also understand the supportive practices they must implement to foster that growth. The focus of this action research study is to understand what practices can enhance the culture of professional learning among teachers in a high performing school.
Keywords: elementary school, Community of Practice, Professional Learning Community, Professional Growth and Effectiveness System, school improvement

Ann Elizabeth Ingram

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April 24, 2017

Date
ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL

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April 24, 2017
Date
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my treasured family. My husband, Joe, has done everything in his power to take care of me while I pursued this degree. He has listened to me, built me up, cleaned up around me, and fed me—I could not have accomplished this without his help. My precious sons, Sam and Ben, both certainly experienced some neglect over the past several years, yet they gave me inspiration and encouragement throughout this journey. My parents, always selfless and pure hearted, instilled in me a drive to succeed and gave me the courage to believe I could do or be anything. Wendy, my oldest and dearest best friend, who never seems to tire of listening to school stories or counseling me, has made me believe in myself and pulled me up and encouraged me onward more times than I can count. I would not have been successful without so many special people cheering me on, and I know I am beyond blessed to have your love, understanding, and support!
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been completed without the guidance of many important people.

Professor Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, my dissertation chair, advisor and mentor, you inspired me to enter the program, believed in me, encouraged me when I lost steam, and motivated me to keep going. Words cannot express how grateful I am for your time, attention, hours of editing with me, and sharing your vast knowledge and resources.

Professor Lars Björk, I am so grateful that you served on my committee. You taught my first class in the doctoral program where from you I first learned the expectations of scholarly writing. I had never had to rewrite anything before you returned my very first piece, but your guidance, clear instructions, and second chances were much appreciated. Later, your instruction on school leadership clarified a principal’s role for me in such a way that I believed it was something I could do, and wanted to do.

I also want to express my appreciation to Dr. Sharon Brennan and Dr. Maria Cahill for agreeing to serve on my committee. Thank you for your willingness to patiently share your time and expert advice with me.

Finally, to my principal and friend, Lisa Smith, who has supported me throughout my entire program, I extend my deepest gratitude. You and I share a passion for learning and your leadership, mentoring, and friendship has made this action research possible. You have listened, guided, and encouraged me so much that I cannot imagine doing this without you.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to Fullan and St. Germain (2006), “A successful school improves because it is always learning” (Fullan & St. Germain, p. 4). The question becomes, how can principals ensure that not only are students experiencing new learning but also that teachers are attaining new knowledge and continuing to improve their practice? This study, conducted in an elementary school in a large district in Central Kentucky, sought to determine the structures and practices that might contribute to strengthening a culture of professional learning in an already high-performing school. The action involves the implementation of practices believed to be key to the success of professional learning.

Data sources included information gleaned from documents (e.g., teacher meeting notes and agendas), comments by study participants during interviews, and observations of teachers working collaboratively. Ongoing professional learning is critical to student success and school improvement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2008). Thus, it is important for school leaders to have a clear understanding of what structures and supports need to be in place to facilitate a culture of professional learning.

In the first chapter, I present my case for conducting this action research study, including the context for the proposed action, a detailed description of the challenge of leadership practice addressed, a synthesis of the relevant literature that informed the design of the study, and an overview of the research methodology. In the second chapter, I provide greater detail about the data collected and how it was analyzed. The third
chapter presents study findings as well as recommended at the school where study was conducted.

**Study Context**

Maplewood Elementary School (Maplewood) serves students in Kindergarten through Grade 5 who live in the downtown area of Lexington, Kentucky. Despite nearly a decade of being recognized as a high-performing school based on state accountability-test scores, evidence of achievement gaps remain because Maplewood has a diverse student body that includes (a) those that are highly gifted, who generally are children from middle- to upper-class families, and (b) those who often perform lower academically, who generally are children from families that are less affluent due to various barriers such as lack of economic resources (Chiu, 2007; Parcel & Dufur, 2001) and low parental involvement (Barnard, 2004; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007).

Among Maplewood’s student population are 36% who qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. Among that subgroup, 58.7% of students did not reach a proficiency level in reading on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP), the 2016 end-of-year assessment. Also, 62.5% did not reach a proficiency level in mathematics. Maplewood’s overall KPREP score was 69.5, dropping 2.9 points from the previous year’s score of 75.4, which fell within the 94th percentile across all Kentucky schools. Further, Maplewood did not meet the target score of 73.6 for all students scoring in the range of Proficient or Distinguished for the combined reading and mathematics score; only 69.7% of students scored at least proficient for the combined reading and mathematics score in 2016. Also, as displayed in Table 1.1, when the scores of gifted students are removed from the schoolwide scores, approximately only
one third of Maplewood’s regular students scored in the range of Proficient or Distinguished for reading or mathematics. Aligned with the school district goals, the school community’s shared goal includes reducing the number of students scoring at the Novice level in reading on KPREP by 50% by 2020.

Table 1.1

Maplewood KPREP Scores Compared with Gifted/Talented (G/T) Scores Removed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Third Graders</td>
<td>With G/T Scores Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Novice:</td>
<td>20.70</td>
<td>20.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Apprentice:</td>
<td>7.60</td>
<td>7.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Proficient</td>
<td>23.90</td>
<td>23.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Distinguished</td>
<td>47.80</td>
<td>22.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Prof. or Dist.:</td>
<td>71.70</td>
<td>45.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Fourth Graders</td>
<td>With G/T Scores Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Novice:</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Apprentice:</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Proficient</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Distinguished</td>
<td>38.40</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Prof. or Dist.:</td>
<td>64.40</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Fifth Graders</td>
<td>With G/T Scores Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Novice:</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td>14.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Apprentice:</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>9.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Proficient</td>
<td>29.50</td>
<td>25.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Distinguished</td>
<td>46.70</td>
<td>9.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Prof. or Dist.:</td>
<td>76.20</td>
<td>35.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Proficient and Distinguished Schoolwide:</td>
<td>70.76</td>
<td>33.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because district zones were redefined for 2016-2017 and beyond, Maplewood lost approximately 90 students from the previous year, many of whom were from families
with a higher socioeconomic status. Thus, it is anticipated that Maplewood teachers may see an increase in the overall percentage of students who have not reached reading or mathematics proficiency. Additionally, for the 2017-2018 schoolyear there will be approximately 25 fewer gifted third graders: The district chose to discontinue funding for Maplewood’s third grade gifted cluster, which may likely affect the overall percentage of students who have not reached reading or mathematics proficiency.

Bluegrass County Public Schools (BGCPS), the district in which Maplewood is located, is in its third year of implementation of the state’s new evaluation plan. The Teacher Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (TPGES), a recently revised framework for teacher evaluation, requires teachers to reflect on their practice, create professional growth plans, seek opportunities for ongoing professional development, set goals for student academic growth, analyze student-growth data, administer a student-voice survey, and participate in observations conducted by a peer and the principal. During the first year of TPGES implementation, teachers at Maplewood complied with the requirements to create an individualized professional growth plan, but acknowledged during informal interviews that they did not revisit their plan again or locate professional growth opportunities they needed in order to meet their professional growth goal. Teachers participated in a professional learning community (PLC) that involved the principal meeting with teachers in grade-level teams to discuss student-growth progress toward mastery of standards and results of overall student-assessment data. The PLCs however did not function as teacher-facilitated communities of practice (CoP) focused on members’ professional development needs (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Wenger, 1998).
Maplewood’s principal has determined that it is essential to strengthen the school’s culture of professional learning in order to address the student-learning gaps. She perceives that being recognized as a high-performing school has perhaps kept teachers from realizing the need for ongoing reflection and improvement of professional practice. Although she is proud of the students’ overall success, she sees the need for teachers to participate in regular professional collaboration in order to address fully the needs of Maplewood’s struggling learners.

**Challenge of Leadership Practice**

Essential transformations within a school culture ensure organizational learning take place at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Collinson & Cook, 2007). With the recent implementation of TPGES, teachers at Maplewood are experiencing changes in their organization and environment, but they have not evidenced changes in their professional practice.

In addition to new demands for teaching are the required documentation of student-learning interventions associated with Response to Intervention (RtI) initiative and required components of the TPGES. Informal interviews with teachers revealed that they feel buried by perceived frivolous paperwork and requirements to prove themselves. They view some components of the evaluation system, such as a professional reflection, growth plan, and reporting students’ classroom growth data, as taking time away from meaningful work with students. Teachers reported feeling they have little time left in the day for collaborative analyses of student work or improving instructional strategies.

According to Danielson (2009), it is “not sufficient that teachers be expert in their work; they must, as members of a profession, constantly seek to improve their skills” (p.
Unfortunately, few teachers at Maplewood actively seek opportunities for professional learning to enhance their practices. A review of Maplewood teachers’ professional growth plans for the 2015-2016 school year revealed that (a) approximately 85% of Maplewood’s teachers identified the same area for growth activity or goal that they had used in the previous year, (b) only 20% of those plans included personal learning as a professional goal, while (c) the remaining 80% of the plans described processes or projects teachers would undertake in order to improve their practice—but none described ongoing professional learning. Interviews with teachers indicated that they did not feel they had the time to explore or identify opportunities for their own professional development. Further, with all of the additional work required for implementation of TPGES and RtI, they felt they could barely keep up with everyday classroom demands.

Since 2011, Kentucky has administered the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey every two years to all of the state’s certified teachers as a way to provide data to facilitate localized school improvement. Data from the 2015 TELL Kentucky survey revealed that while 97% of Maplewood teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they work in PLCs was to develop and align instructional practices, only 66.7% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices. During an interview with Maplewood’s principal, she revealed that she hoped to strengthen the school’s culture through focusing on professional learning.
Role of the Researcher

After teaching at Maplewood for eight years and participating in the district’s first-year implementation of TPGES as a teacher, I am now in my second year working as the assistant principal and TPGES coach, tasked with assisting teachers through each step of the process. My job description requires that I provide leadership in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and planning. These responsibilities include assisting staff in identifying professional development needs and creating long-range professional development plans, as well as participating in and facilitating ongoing professional learning. However, teachers at Maplewood feel considerable stress due to expectations of their improving accountability test scores and implementing requirements in the new TPGES. Finding time for them to reflect on their instructional effectiveness and professional growth seemed impossible. Hence, my goal for conducting this action research was to determine what conditions might contribute to facilitating a culture of professional learning in an already high-performing school.

Literature Review

Support for these ongoing cycles of reflection and growth appear in Collinson and Cook’s (2007) fundamental assumptions regarding organizational learning in schools: (a) Inquiry is crucial to the success of a school’s organizational learning; (b) organizational learning depends on the shared understandings of the group members; and (c) those shared understandings can be examined to help promote the growth of the organization. This shared knowledge comes about through ongoing collaboration. The literature supporting organizational learning requires a closer look at the use and effectiveness of
CoP and PLCs. After borrowing concepts from both models, I operationally defined the term PLC as it works for the context of my study.

Organizational Learning

The concept of organizational learning was presented by Argyris and Schön (1978) with the terms single-loop learning and double-loop learning. The term single-loop learning refers to solving organizational problems through small alterations in the way things are done, whereas double-loop learning requires a higher level of thinking that includes not only solving the problem but also making significant adaptations to the work while learning about the problem-solving process (Burke, 2014; Collinson & Cook, 2007). Although the TPGES system was designed and implemented for the purpose of facilitating teacher professional growth and effectiveness, principals must also know how to create the conditions that foster professional growth (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Marzano, 2003). Among recommendations for creating conditions that foster growth is securing teacher support and building a readiness for change (Fullan & St. Germain, 2006; Choi & Ruona, 2011). When tackling the issue of the limited teacher professional growth among teachers, principals must keep in mind Argyris and Schön’s (1978) idea of double-loop learning and learn about the process for solving that problem while also addressing the causes.

Maplewood teachers’ inactivity in the area of professional learning might be remedied by first allowing them to see the need for change (Lewin, 1997; Schein, 1987). Lewin described unfreezing within an organization as conditions that support modifications of organizational members’ beliefs and attitudes about current conditions and needed change. When organizational members view change as necessary, then
adoption of change is more likely to be successful (Lewin; Schein, 1987). For example, having teachers analyze current student data to determine the number of students at Maplewood who are still not proficient readers may help them see the need for change.

The organizational-development approach to change is a conscious and planned decision to improve the development of individuals in order to improve the organization (Choi & Ruona, 2011; Collinson & Cook, 2007), which thus includes promoting a culture of professional learning. An organization in which learning thrives can potentially transform into a learning organization, which is defined by Senge (2006) as one that evidences (a) personal mastery, (b) shared vision, (c) mental models, (d) team learning, and (e) systems thinking. When members of an organization continue their own learning, the organization will more likely be able to overcome challenges and implement change (Rosenholtz, 1989; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994). Thus, the assumption upon which this proposed study is based is that if teachers at a high-performing school (Maplewood) do not continue to learn and grow professionally, they will have a more difficult time sustaining student success.

Bolman and Deal’s four-frame model of organizations (2008) includes the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. The structural frame is built on the assumption that an organization’s purpose is to achieve specified objectives; thus, it is important for leaders to use an appropriate means of coordinating and controlling the talents of individuals in the organization. Additionally, when problems in an organization’s structure appear, these problems may be solved with a thorough analysis and restructuring of the organization.
The human resource frame of organizations focuses on the feelings and relationships among people involved. This frame is built on the assumption that organizations exist to serve human needs (rather than the reverse) and that organizations and people need each other. The first assumption in the political frame is that organizations are coalitions of individuals who have common interests but differ in their values, beliefs, information, and interests. Another assumption in this frame is that among the most important decisions are those that involve the distribution of scarce resources. Because of scarce resources, power is the most important asset: Power gives individuals and groups access to important decision-making arenas regarding the distribution of resources.

The symbolic frame is based on the idea that the symbols of an organization can help shape its identity and provide a sense of cohesiveness. When an organization has its own story, ceremonies, and rituals, these not only provide feelings of unity but also give an organization a sense of direction.

Research on high-performing schools suggests that schools that develop cultures of collaboration and professional inquiry have greater success in improving student learning than those that do not (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2008). When a school’s goal is to simply raise test scores, teachers tend to be at a loss for what to do next when their efforts do not achieved desired results. However, if the goal is for teachers to collaborate, to ask, and to answer questions regarding their students’ understandings or how to clear up misconceptions, teachers can learn and improve their practice (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Schmoker, 2000).
Communities of Practice and Professional Learning Communities

Introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), the concept of a community of practice (CoP) is based on a social theory of learning in which members of an organization engage in organizational learning through mutual engagement, negotiated meaning, and a shared repertoire. Those within a CoP value the expertise of other members and build relationships that allow them to learn from one another (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Wenger, 1999). The practice is the skills, approaches, or techniques in which group members hold a shared desire to develop (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

According to the model recommended by Hord and Sommers (2008), a PLC within a P12 school evidences shared values, shared leadership, collective learning, supporting conditions, and shared personal practice among participating teachers. Alternately, according to DuFour (2005), PLC members focus on ensuring students learn through a culture of collaboration among teachers, attention to student-learning results, and hard work and commitment. Not only do PLCs appear to improve school culture by encouraging quality collaborative instructional practices (Caprara et al., 2006; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Talbert, 2010), but also research suggests that well-planned PLCs can improve student achievement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

An important question arises: How does a CoP differ from a PLC? Wenger’s (2008) concept of a CoP focuses on the shared practice of a group of people and how they learn to enhance their practice further through regular interaction and learning from one another. Somewhat similar to a CoP, a PLC composed of teachers working at the same school emphasizes collaborative work, but differs due to the work—close attention to student learning progress—and collective desired outcome of higher student
achievement (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). Table 1.2 summarizes the characteristics of the three models described.

Table 1.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott, &amp; Snyder, 2002)</td>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>• Shared mutual engagement, negotiated meaning, and shared repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Formal or informal distributed leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities (Hord &amp; Sommers, 2008)</td>
<td>Learning Organization</td>
<td>• Shared beliefs, values, and vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Shared and supportive leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Collective learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Shared personal practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, DuFour, &amp; Eaker, 2008)</td>
<td>Learning Organization</td>
<td>• Common mission, vision, values, and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaborative culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Collective inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Action and continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study focuses on strengthening the culture of professional learning at Maplewood with the ultimate goal of improving learning for all students. For this study, I use the term PLCs, although ideas are borrowed from both PLC and CoP models displayed in Table 2.1. PLC is the term used by FCPS to indicate professional collaboration among teachers at grade levels, at the school level, and even between schools. PLCs at Maplewood are defined in this study according to the Hord, Roussin, and Sommers (2010) definition of PLCs as learning communities that occur regularly and consistently (a) within grade-level teams as teachers work to improve their practice to meet their students’ needs and (b) among all certified staff members coming together to share learnings from the smaller groups and to realign with the school’s goals. This means that grade-level teams, with assistance from Maplewood’s principals, would
acquire new professional learning to improve their practice, implement their new learning, and then report back to the whole group about what they are learning about how to improve their students’ learning.

**Successful PLC Practices**

Effective PLCs must be well-planned and focused on members’ professional development needs if they are to bring about school improvement (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008 Wenger, 1998). A successful PLC must be built on a strong foundation, receive ongoing support, and be evaluated for effectiveness.

**Establishing strong foundation.** The PLC process must begin with a strong foundation that includes establishing a shared vision (Blanchard, 2007; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kotter, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Senge et al., 1994), assessing the school’s current reality (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006), defining the group’s focus, and ensuring that all members understand the components of the PLC process. Examining student data can help teachers and principals develop a clear picture of the school’s current status, identify areas where change is necessary, and help them organize for collaborative work (Boudett, City & Murnane, 2010). Guided by the schoolwide focus (Blankstein, 2004), grade-level teams can begin professional collaborative inquiry (Danielson, 2011) to determine their unique learning needs. A final key component of preparing to implement a PLC is ensuring that teachers understand the PLC process that consists of (a) shared leadership, (b) collective commitments, (c) support from administrators, (d) meetings that are ongoing and regular, and (e) continuous assessment of instructional effectiveness (Blankstein, 2004; DuFour et al., 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hord et al., 2010; Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002).
Shared leadership can be practiced at schools where administrators support and develop teacher leaders, facilitate learning for everyone, participate with teachers in professional development as learners, and allow teacher leaders to lead and participate actively in decision making (Hord, 1997; Hord & Sommers, 2008; King & Newmann, 2000; Phillips, 2003). Research advises that a top-down directive from administrators is not an effective way to encourage a culture of collaboration (Bailey, 2000; Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1996). Instead, the use of shared leadership can improve the chances for a successful PLC (DuFour et al. 2008).

Making commitments to each other and following a process of collaborative inquiry can help teachers gain trust in each other and in the practice of working as a PLC. Commitment making as professionals can further strengthen the development and maintenance of a collaborative culture and give teachers a clear understanding of the values that are identified as important to the whole group (Champy, 1995; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 1996). Examples of commitments might be to keep focused on the common purpose, to participate actively in the learning process, and to share and celebrate successes. In a mixed-methods case study of teacher learning within collaborative teams, researchers found that the group’s setting of expectations for participation and contribution to the team were key to teachers’ learning (Meirink, Imants, Meirjer & Verloop, 2010). During their research, Little, Gearhart, Curry and Kafka (2003) studied how schools used analyzing student work as the basis for professional development. They reported that the use of protocols or procedural steps as being essential for organized group discussion and to encourage participation.
Providing ongoing support. Part of the commitment that administrators should make to teachers when implementing and sustaining PLCs is to allocate sufficient time for professional learning and collaboration, to provide professional development opportunities that teachers need, and to participate actively in the collaborative learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Phillips, 2003). During their case study, Sabah and Cook-Craig (2010) focused on how participants develop an organizational learning methodology to implement evidence-based practices; they assert that members of learning communities must believe that administrators are strongly committed to supporting their work.

When considering how to allocate time for PLCs, principals must consider that consistency and frequency of meetings between colleagues, whether in small groups or whole groups, appears to be key factor in the success of PLCs (Hord & Sommers, 2008; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2003). In an investigation of collaborative practice in school settings to determine expectations of support from administrators and to determine barriers to collaborative practices, Leonard and Leonard (2003) found that clear expectations and the support from administrators was critical to the success of collaborative efforts.

Evaluating effectiveness. Just as the PLCs meetings themselves should be ongoing and consistent, a regular assessment of their effectiveness is also necessary (Guskey, 2003). This requirement can be achieved through inclusion of critical reflections on teaching practices within small group PLCs as well as through regular sharing of personal learning and analysis of change in student learning with the school’s

**Purpose of the Action Research and Guiding Questions**

My theory of action is that if Maplewood can cultivate a collaborative community of professional learners that is fostered by inquiry and input from administrators and teachers and related to instructional practices and student success, then teachers and staff members will share a purpose that leads to more effective practice and higher levels of learning among educators and students. I used the teachers’ professional growth goals required by TPGES to create opportunities for professional learning based on both teachers’ individual growth goals and the school’s shared goal to reduce the number of Novice readers. Teams of teachers directed their own learning based on their students’ needs, growing in their profession as a result.

Throughout this study, I used practices recommended in the literature regarding professional learning in an attempt to systematically strengthen the professional learning culture at Maplewood. These practices include (a) establishing a shared vision with a defined focus, (b) providing evidence of the necessity for change, (c) ensuring that teachers understood the components and processes of PLCs, (d) generating shared values and commitments, (e) creating structured processes for collaborative inquiry within grade-level teams, (f) providing opportunities for shared leadership, and (g) allowing time for reflection and sharing of personal practice within small groups and also in the whole group. Thus, my research was guided by the following questions:
1. What new or improved practices were successfully implemented that can enhance the culture of professional learning among teachers in a high performing school?

2. What changes were evident as a result of the new practices?

**Research Methods**

Frequently used in education to improve practice, action research is a systemic process used by reflective practitioners in an environment where they can carry out an investigation themselves (Johnson, 2002; Sagor, 2011; Stringer, 2014). Self-study, an essential part of action research, can bring about change in the way a practitioner thinks and feels (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). With action research, school leaders can more clearly understand problems of practice, determine solutions, implement those solutions, collect data to determine if the solutions worked, and continue the cycle in the context of where they work to improve their own practice (Calhoun, 1993; Sagor, 2011; Stringer, 1993).

Although I conducted this self-reflective research independently, all Maplewood classroom teachers of Kindergarten through Grade 5 as well as special area teachers, specialists, and interventionists with teaching certifications participated in this study. That is, all study participants were members of a grade- or content-level PLC who participated in professional learning and took part in small- or whole-group sharing of learning and outcomes.

**Action Plan**

This action plan utilized components of successful PLCs including practices to (a) build a strong foundation, (b) provide support during the process, and (c) evaluate the
effectiveness of PLCs. Building a strong foundation for PLCs requires a shared vision among those involved with a defined focus, evidence of the necessity for change, an understanding of the PLC processes, and values and commitments. The support required for a schoolwide PLC includes shared leadership by administrators and teacher leaders, clear structures for working and learning together during PLC meetings, and time allocated for collaborative inquiry. To evaluate a school’s PLC, there must be time allocated for reflecting individually and in groups, sharing of personal practice, engaging in professional learning activities, and evaluating student learning progress within small groups and also in the whole group.

**Building a strong foundation.** Before the start of the 2016-2017 school year, Maplewood staff participated in a professional-development session focused on the characteristics of effective teams and worked together to create new mission and vision statements. A professional-development session about the key components and research related to the success of PLCs soon followed; grade-level teams then participated in the development of collective commitments to each other (i.e., norms) for this process. Shortly after this session, teachers reviewed school assessment data showing student performance with gifted students’ scores removed. The purpose for their reviewing this modified dataset was for them to realize that some students at Maplewood are underperforming and to develop next steps for improving student learning. In grade-level teams, teachers were directed to choose and refine their group focus, which was to be aligned with the school’s goal of reducing the number of Novice readers. Schoolwide, teachers chose to focus on the skill of summarizing.
Supporting an ongoing PLC. Considering the lack of time in the workday for teachers to meet together, the weekly faculty meetings were restructured to focus solely on developing a schoolwide PLC. The first Tuesday of each month at Maplewood is dedicated to committee meetings (e.g. school improvement, program review, School-Based Decision Making Council).

The second Tuesday of each month was dedicated to reading research and sharing instructional practices. Topics of study emerged through feedback from teachers regarding personal instructional struggles and from common areas for growth observed through daily informal walk-throughs. The principal, teacher leaders, and I located articles and planned activities.

The third Tuesday, Teachers Leading Teachers (TLT), was devoted to professional development created from teachers’ learning needs based on feedback from teachers and from common areas for growth observed through daily informal walk-throughs. For TLT, the principal and I worked together to identify and select teacher leaders to share instructional activities or strategies that other teachers could use in their classrooms. Regardless of topic, all learning was related to the school goal of reducing the number of Novice readers and increasing the number of Proficient readers on the Kentucky accountability tests.

Once a week during teachers’ grade-level planning time, grade-level teams met to determine whether they needed to change instruction to meet student needs by analyzing student data from common formative assessments. For most of those meetings, teams met with either the principal or me as they examined student work and determined next steps required to support higher levels of student learning.
Evaluating the PLC. The fourth Tuesday was for teachers to Celebrate, Pause, and Reflect (CPR). To evaluate the success of the PLC, this whole-group meeting was a time for individual teachers or teams to share their successes and struggles in the classroom, discuss new learning, and to reflect through journaling, about their change in practice. Table 1.3 begins on the following page and extends to top of the next page.

Table 1.3
Successful PLC Practices and Related Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful Practices</th>
<th>Actions Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building a strong foundation for PLCs:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up a system for shared leadership</td>
<td>• Teacher leaders were confirmed for each grade level team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide evidence of the necessity for change</td>
<td>• Teachers analyzed disaggregated student KPREP data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a shared mission with a refined focus</td>
<td>• The whole group came together to refine the schoolwide focus by creating meaningful common mission and vision statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build shared knowledge of school improvement by ensuring understanding of the components and processes of PLCs</td>
<td>• The whole group reviewed research related to the success of PLCs and refreshed their understanding of essential components of a PLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate shared values and commitments</td>
<td>• Grade-level teams developed collective commitments for their PLC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful Practices</th>
<th>Actions Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing support during the PLC process:</td>
<td>Principals:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create structured processes for collaborative inquiry within grade-level teams</td>
<td>▪ Assisted teachers with the development of a professional growth plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Chose literature studies to support learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Established PLC schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Provided teachers with details about all meeting expectations (e.g. the focus of meetings, what to turn in, and when to meet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ensured that teachers received training in the development and analysis of formative assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ensured that teams knew how to create goals to measure student growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Secured teachers leaders to lead TLTs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Ensured that teachers received peer observation training and facilitated observations schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Participated in the learning process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluate the effectiveness of PLCs
| Allow time for reflection and sharing of personal practice | Established a schedule for whole-group sharing of learnings and success |
| | Allocated time for teachers to reflect on their professional learning |
| | Interviewed teachers about the PLC process |

Participants and Roles

All 23 full-time certified teachers at Maplewood participated in the schoolwide PLC process because the principal wanted to strengthen the culture of professional learning at Maplewood. Seven teacher leaders were evenly distributed among grade-level teams; two of those teacher leaders accompanied the principal and me to a three-day PLC conference during the spring of 2016. Although I was the only researcher collecting and
analyzing data, I shared in-progress findings with the principal whenever it was appropriate to assure the project goals would be achieved.

**Data Sources**

This action research study required the triangulation of qualitative data such as personal observations and reflections, PLC shared values and commitments, meeting attendance and minutes, the sharing of learning and success, reflection pages given to teachers after each professional development session, and interviews.

To keep a record of personal observations and reflections, I maintained a research notebook regarding all evidence related to my engagement with Maplewood’s PLC, such as occasions when I observed teachers discussing student data and success outside of regularly scheduled meetings as well as comments made regarding the positive or negative aspects of our professional learning. Grade-level teams created collective commitments for their PLC, and I created a form on which PLC teams submitted their meeting attendance and what they worked on during their grade-level PLC. Because I sought to understand the teachers’ experiences and perceptions, I asked teachers questions during grade-level PLC meeting times, regarding any new strategy they had tried or personal learning they had experienced. I made note of the teachers or grade-level teams who volunteered to share their learning and success with the rest of the group, as well as which teams or teachers analyzed student data together and any conclusions they may have reached. I developed interview questions for focus groups to evaluate Maplewood’s PLC process.
Summary

By conducting this qualitative action research involving the participation of 23 teachers in a PLC, I hoped to understand what structures and practices contribute to developing a culture of professional learning in an already high-performing elementary school. After implementing practices identified in the literature as contributors to the success of professional learning, I collected and analyzed data gathered throughout the process to gain understanding about which practices were implemented successfully and produced the desired outcome—a schoolwide PLC focused on continuous professional learning among all teachers. In Chapter 2, I provide greater detail about the data collection and analysis processes used.
CHAPTER 2

ACTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Despite being recently recognized as Proficient school according to the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP), when the scores of the gifted students at Maplewood Elementary School (Maplewood) are removed, the data shows that only 34% of the regular students scored proficient in reading and only 35% achieved proficient in mathematics. Further, only 27% of the regular students at Maplewood achieved the Novice level in reading on the most recent accountability test. The premise upon which this action research was designed is that if Maplewood teachers do not continue to grow professionally, they will have a more difficult time sustaining student success. However, when members of an organization continue to learn, the organization is more likely to be able to overcome challenges (Rosenholtz, 1989; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994).

Purpose of the Action Research and Guiding Questions

Through this qualitative action research, I sought to develop a culture of professional learning among teachers within a high-performing elementary school. After implementing recommended practices that have emerged from research on professional learning communities (PLCs) and communities of practice (CoP) as models that support professional learning among members, I collected and analyzed diverse data sources generated throughout the implementation phase to identify practices that produced the desired outcomes. The purpose of this study was thus to determine which practices can be successfully implemented to contribute to a culture of professional learning at Maplewood.
Employing strategies borrowed from multiple researchers in the field of professional learning (DuFour et al., 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Senge, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002), I studied the behaviors and perceptions of teachers as we collectively tried to cultivate a community of professional learners. The practices reported in the literature that strengthen professional learning among teachers and cultivate a high-functioning PLC include (a) establishing a shared vision with a defined focus, (b) providing evidence of the necessity for change, (c) ensuring that teachers understand the components and processes of PLCs, (d) generating shared values and commitments, (e) creating structured processes for collaborative inquiry within grade-level teams, (f) providing opportunities for shared leadership, and (g) allowing time for reflection and sharing of personal practice within small groups and also in the whole group. My action research was guided by the questions below:

1. What new or improved practices were successfully implemented that can enhance the culture of professional learning among teachers in a high performing school?

2. What changes were evident as a result of the new practices?

**Research Methods**

This study was conducted using action research methodology (Johnson, 2002; Sagor, 2011; Stringer, 2014) because I am working in the school where the action was implemented and am seeking to enhance the culture of professional learning at Maplewood. Although I conducted this self-reflective research independently, this initiative affected the entire professional community, which included all regular classroom teachers (Kindergarten through Grade 5) and special area teachers, specialists,
and interventionists with teaching certifications who work at Maplewood. Because this PLC implementation was a schoolwide professional growth initiative, they are all participating members of a grade- or content-level PLC and took part in small-group and whole-group sharing of learning or successes. The methodology section below provides greater detail about the context of this study, the action plan, data collected, data analysis, and limitations of the study.

**Research Context**

During the third year of TPGES implementation across the Commonwealth of Kentucky, teachers at Maplewood have experienced organizational change due to modifications in the teacher-evaluation process, but at the time this study was developed, they had not yet demonstrated professional growth. Many teachers felt overwhelmed by the multiple components of the evaluation system and requirements to prove their competency as P12 educators. They viewed the detailed requirements of TPGES (e.g., engaging in regular professional reflection, developing and implementing a professional growth plan, providing detailed explanations about their students’ growth data that they are collecting, preparing for multiple observations by peers and administrators) as taking valuable time away from attending to the needs of their students. Although the recently implemented evaluation plan was intended to facilitate teacher reflection and growth, Maplewood teachers reported having little time left during the workday to collaborate with colleagues regarding their continuing professional development.

My theory of action was that requirements for TPGES can be less time-intensive for teachers by embedding them into newly created PLCs. Doing that would make the
TPGES more meaningful to teachers and aligned with school goals. Table 2.1 illustrates how the components of TPGES can be embedded into the PLC process.

**Table 2.1**

**PLC Processes Aligned with TPGES Components**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLC Processes</th>
<th>TPGES Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>During the foundation building phase:</strong></td>
<td>• Reflection: Teachers worked with their teams to reflect on their own professional practice to determine their learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-level teams worked to refine their focus for their own professional learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Throughout the PLC process:</strong></td>
<td>• Professional growth plan: Principals assist teachers to develop a growth plan that included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals supported teachers in their professional learning</td>
<td>▪ Studies of literature to support learning needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Plans for PLCs including details regarding the focus of meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Training in the development and analysis of formative assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Training in the creation of goals to measure student growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Professional learning facilitated by colleagues during TLTs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Opportunities to teach colleagues during TLTs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Training in peer observations; learning from observations of colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer observations: Principals ensured that teachers received training to be TPGES peer observers, and facilitated observations by creating schedules for observing and allocating time for post-observation conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student growth goal setting and analysis: Grade-level teams analyzed formative assessment data and student progress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLC Processes</th>
<th>TPGES Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Through the evaluation of the PLC process:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC came together to reflect and share</td>
<td>• Student growth goal setting and analysis: All teachers meet together to share student progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional growth plan: All teachers meet together to reflect on and share their own learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers’ individual reflections about their professional practice were completed with their team members as part of the process of building a strong foundation for the PLC and took place at the beginning of the new academic year (2016-2017). Grade-level teams compared their reflections to determine next steps for professional growth to reach a consensus on learning topics to meet their needs. After this process of teacher reflection and determining next steps for professional growth, I assisted teams in writing their professional growth plans for TPGES.

For the 2016-2017 schoolyear, the goals for student growth were aligned to the school goal of reducing the number of Novice readers and increasing the number of Proficient readers, particularly among regular students. Having a schoolwide reading focus on student growth goals allowed for more consistency in professional learning plans. Because each non-tenured teacher and all teachers in the summative year of their three-year evaluation cycle are required to have a peer observation, all teachers who had not yet had peer observation training were certified in conducting peer observations. When teachers observed their colleagues as part of their PLC, that observation also counted as their required peer observation for PGES.
Action Plan

All components of the TPGES were embedded into and aligned with the PLC process. Each part of the PLC process provided data intended for use in answering the questions guiding this action research. The actions to establish a community of practice at Maplewood and the data related to those actions are summarized in the following table.

### Table 2.2

**Actions to Establish a Community of Practice at Maplewood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confirm teacher leaders for each grade-level team</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Aug 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss findings from student-data analysis</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>May to Oct 2016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine schoolwide focus</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Sep 2016</td>
<td>Meeting agenda Post-PD reflection pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refresh understanding of essential components of and research related to the success of PLCs</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>Sep 2016</td>
<td>PLC meeting notes including collective commitments (included on all future PLC meeting notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make commitments to each other (PLCs); determine learning needs</td>
<td>Teacher leaders working with grade-level teams</td>
<td>Sep 2016</td>
<td>PLC meeting notes including collective commitments (included on all future PLC meeting notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop professional growth plans</td>
<td>Principals meet with grade-level teams</td>
<td>Sep 2016</td>
<td>Professional growth plan drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule PLC meetings</td>
<td>Principal creates and shares with teams</td>
<td>Sep 2016 to Mar 2017</td>
<td>Schedule of planned meetings PLC meeting notes Observations made during meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze student work and progress during common planning</td>
<td>Principals meet with grade-level teams</td>
<td>Monthly Sep 2016 to Mar 2017</td>
<td>Schedule of planned meetings Attendance list PLC meeting notes Observations made during meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure teachers are trained as certified peer observers</td>
<td>Principals and untrained certified teachers</td>
<td>Oct 2016</td>
<td>Training certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure teachers are trained in development and use of formative assessments</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>Oct 2016</td>
<td>Training agenda Post-PD reflection pages Observations made during training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that teachers are trained in the analysis of formative assessments</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>Nov 2016</td>
<td>Training agenda Post-PD reflection pages Observations made during training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate peer observations</td>
<td>Principals and certified teachers</td>
<td>Oct. 2016 to March 2017</td>
<td>Dates of peer observations conducted Teacher observation notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in the literature study every second Tuesday</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>Monthly Sept. 2016 to March 2017</td>
<td>Literature study agenda Post-PD reflection pages Observations made during literature study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure teachers and outside guests to lead TLTs every third Tuesday</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>Monthly Sept. 2016 to March 2017</td>
<td>TLT agenda Post-PD reflection pages Observations made during training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in CPR every fourth Tuesday</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>Monthly Sept. 2016 to March 2017</td>
<td>CPR agenda Teacher reflection pages Documentation of sharing of experiences or learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate the PLC process</td>
<td>Principals and all certified teachers</td>
<td>March 2017</td>
<td>Teacher interviews conducted at the end of the PLC process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Role of the Researcher

Table 2.2 displays the scope of actions, participants, and data collection during the PLC initiative throughout the 2016-2017 school year. My responsibilities as the
researcher were to (a) attend professional development activities with teachers, (b) meet with small PLCs within the school, (c) facilitate grade-level meetings where student data were reviewed, and (d) participate in grade-level meetings where data were analyzed. My goal was to determine if this initiative produced the desired professional learning among teachers, learn if attendance was simply their compliance, and identify disinterest among the teaching staff. I used data from PLC meeting agendas and notes to determine the nature of the work done in PLCs and created and collected teacher reflection pages from participants in each whole-group meeting and professional-development session that I conducted or observed. I completed formal observations during the PLC meetings throughout the year and conducted focus-group interviews with selected teachers near the end of the school year to gather their perceptions about the PLC process.

**Data Sources**

Qualitative research typically includes data gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis (Merriam, 1998; Sagor, 2011). Because several data sources may be used to inform more than one guiding research question, the use of different data sources helps the qualitative researcher to validate findings through triangulation (Craig, 2009; Patton, 1990; Sagor, 2011). In this study, qualitative data sources included observations of PLCs in action, PLC-generated documents, written reflections by teachers after each professional development session, and transcriptions of interviews with teachers.

**Document review.** Documents such as meeting agendas, grade-level PLC meeting notes, mission and vision statements, and grade-level team collective commitment pages were used as evidence of common themes from personal
observations, reflections, and interviews. The observation and reflection notes assisted me in the collection of these documents, and documents were collected in an organized manner. For example, teachers were informed that turning in meeting agendas and notes after each PLC meeting was an expectation and critical to the evaluation of the PLC process. These documents provided evidence as to the frequency and consistency of the planned PLC components. Another example of using these supporting documents for data collection was when the document was used to help clarify a participant’s comment from an observation or interview.

Observations. To gather evidence to support the teachers’ interview responses, I conducted observations throughout the year. In addition, I used these observations to gather evidence to support the questions that guided this study: (a) What new or improved practices were successfully implemented that could enhance the culture of professional learning among teachers in a high performing school, and (b) What changes were evident as a result of the new practices? I made notes on the form to conduct observations as a follow-up to any comments regarding PLCs. For example, if a teacher stated that he or she felt that PLCs were not a good use of teachers’ time, I made sure to observe that team’s PLC meeting to see if that was true of that particular team. To record specific observation data related to the PLC practices to be implemented and the research study questions, I created a PLC observation instrument. This observation instrument is presented in Appendix B.

Interviews. Conducting interviews was one method I used to obtain a clearer understanding of teachers’ perceptions of changes in their instructional and reflective practices as well as implementation of the PLC process as a whole.
interview questions correspond to the research questions and are aligned with the PLC process. The interview prompts included open-ended, and follow-up questions were posed when clarification was needed or to gain more information. The interview protocol was reviewed for clarity and content by members of my dissertation committee, the principal at Maplewood, and doctoral students from the University of Kentucky. When necessary, changes were made to the interview questions when teachers asked for clarification. See Appendix A for the interview protocol.

The interviews were conducted with small groups of teachers near the end of the study. The meetings accommodated the teachers’ schedules, with time slots that were before, during, and after school (i.e., between 7:15 AM and 4:00 PM). I recorded the interviews using a tape recorder and took notes, and the transcribed the interview recordings. Following the interview, each teacher was asked to review the transcription of his or her interview. This helped to ensure the accuracy of the data. The interviews provide me better understanding of the perceptions among teachers at Maplewood about the PLCs and the practices implemented during this initiative.

**Data Analysis Strategies**

The data collected from this action research was analyzed in an ongoing, comparative manner using a process (e.g., coding, categorizing) that helped me identify themes or patterns of responses among the teachers across the general PLC practices implemented (Craig, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sagor, 2011; Yin, 1994). Results from the teacher interviews and documents were similarly analyzed for evidence of how PLC practice implemented influenced teachers perceptions and practices.
The various data collected were also organized and assembled by date, data
collection method, research study question, and interview question. This helped me to
identify change and growth over time. Using these results, I was able to identify
emerging themes and patterns.

In addition, data gathered through teacher interviews, meeting observations,
personal notes and reflections, and documents were combined, compared, and analyzed
across all six PLC practices for emerging themes and patterns. Themes were categorized
using the research questions as a framework.

To help me organize this process, I created a matrix (i.e., Excel spreadsheet)
according to the identified themes to illustrate frequency of responses and different data
sources (Craig, 2009; Sagor, 2011). The matrix’s design also helped me organized to
identify and categorize each data source by research study question. Dates were used to
identify when specific data sources were recorded.

The first portion of the implementation of the PLC process occurred in May 2016,
at the end of the previous school year, and continued through the following school year
from August 2016 to March 2017. Documents collected during this time were dated and
stored in chronological order.

I summarized conclusions by creating bulleted facts, such as the percentage of
teachers who volunteered to share their learning or success, or the frequency of that
occurrence. After summarizing my conclusions, I shared preliminary findings with
selected professional staff members at Maplewood to ascertain the credibility of those
tentative findings by asking if they agreed or disagreed with the findings.
Quality Assurances

Three types of quality checks were used within this study, which helped to ensure an accurate presentation of the data. My dissertation committee members provided feedback regarding the appropriateness of the data collection and analysis. I also requested the assistance from my professional colleague, the principal at Maplewood with whom I work closely, and from some fellow doctoral students to review my data-analysis strategies. I shared the findings with the Maplewood staff to help verify the data collection and interpretation, and my principal conducted a member check of the preliminary study report.

Conclusion

Through this action research study, I hoped to identify structures and practices that can contribute to building a culture of professional learning within a high-performing school. By implementing specific practices based on professional and research literature about PLCs and CoPs, which are integral to the success of professional learning among teachers, and then by collecting and analyzing data from the process, I hoped to understand which practices were successfully implemented. In Chapter 3, I report the study’s findings, reflect on those results, and discuss that I lessons learned during the process.
CHAPTER 3
RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTION

According to Fullan (2001), “Collaboration is powerful, which means it can be powerfully bad as well as powerfully good” (p. 132). Based on what occurred at Maplewood, it might also be true that lack of collaboration could be powerfully bad.

During the years prior to conducting this action research study, the principal decreased the number of weekly faculty meetings, especially those that were held for the purpose of sharing information about day-to-day operations in response to teacher complaints about lack of time in their day. She chose instead to communicate with teachers via a weekly electronic mail message. Although her decision to limit the number of faculty meetings was a response to teachers’ complaints about time, it produced the unintended consequence of significantly reducing opportunities for teachers to engage in collaboration and reflection with peers.

With limited structured time to communicate as a schoolwide professional learning community, teachers’ differing opinions and concerns did not become evident until conflict erupted at the end of the 2015-2016 schoolyear. Unaware of the magnitude of their frustrations regarding unresolved issues, the principal and I were planning the implementation phase of this action research that was designed to enhance professional learning at Maplewood.

In the narrative that follows, I hope to illustrate clearly why it was essential to focus intentionally on using time during the school day to enhance professional learning among teachers in order to build the foundation of a schoolwide PLC. I describe the structures we put in place and the teachers’ experiences evidenced through triangulation of data such as meeting agendas, teacher reflection pages, observations, field notes, and
teachers’ comments during interviews. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 provide an overview of the findings from data analysis, and I also chronologically present findings through details of the actions implemented. After answering the research questions, I present recommendations and implications for practice and policy. Following a discussion about my role as a school leader and researcher while conducting this action research, the chapter concludes with my reflection of lessons learned about organizational leadership, leading organizational change, and conducting action research.

**Purpose of the Study**

This action research study explored the impact of the implementation of practices intended to enhance professional learning among teachers. The study took place at Maplewood Elementary School (Maplewood), which has consistently been ranked among the top performing elementary schools in the district. It is also the school where I am completing my second year as the assistant principal and building-level coach for the Teacher Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (TPGES), Kentucky’s recently adopted teacher evaluation model. Although the school has not achieved any less than a proficient designation for the past five years, the teaching staff has not sustained a formal process for learning together. During the eight years prior to my administrative position, I served as a teacher at Maplewood. Although faculty meetings included some professional-learning activities, most information shared was informational. The principal, currently completing her fourth year of service, recognized the need to facilitate individual teachers’ professional growth and to strengthen staff professional learning as a whole.
When designing my action-research project, I hoped to determine the structures and practices that can contribute to a culture of professional learning in a high-performing school by implementing specific practices that are found in the research about professional learning communities (PLCs) and communities of practice (CoP) to be vital to the success of professional learning. My goal was to understand which PLC practices were successfully implemented by collecting and analyzing data from the process.

The TPGES has been viewed by teachers as a barrier to their professional learning because of the time required to provide evidence for each of the TPGES components. The system requires teachers to reflect on and evaluate their practice in the areas of planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Next, they are required to create a professional growth plan and seek opportunities for ongoing professional development for documentation. Teachers must also choose an area of focus for student academic growth, provide reasons for choosing that academic area, set goals for student academic growth, describe in detail how they will assess student growth, and then analyze and provide evidence of student-growth data. Additionally, teachers administer a student-voice survey to their students and participate in observations conducted by a peer and the principal.

As the school’s TPGES coach, I hoped to streamline the process, which teachers often see as unrelated to student learning, by helping them to see the connection between the district evaluation plan and their own professional learning. I assisted teachers with writing their professional growth plans, facilitated their training to become peer observers, and helped arrange classroom coverage so they could observe their peers’ classrooms. I also helped teachers choose a student growth goal by identifying an area of
need that we viewed schoolwide, which was also aligned with the schoolwide goal of reducing the number of readers scoring at the novice level in reading on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (KPREP), the commonwealth’s accountability system. All classroom teachers chose to focus on the skill of summarizing for their student growth goals, and I helped them write their growth goal statements. With the goal of growth in reading and a specific focus on summarizing, we were better able to provide relevant schoolwide professional learning and often concentrated on this area during grade-level PLC meetings.

Data Collection

I set up a structure for schoolwide PLC meetings that would be focused on professional learning and for smaller grade-level PLC meetings for teachers to analyze student data and reflect on instructional strategies collaboratively. I collected reflection sheets that teachers completed at the end of each schoolwide PLC meeting, and I observed grade-level PLC meetings between August 2016 and March 2017. During the entire process, I kept field notes about my observations and perceptions about the professional-learning process my principal and I implemented. I conducted small focus groups to ask teachers a set of questions near the end of the schoolyear. I organized and analyzed all of the collected data throughout the study to ensure that I had enough information to answer the research questions for this study.

1. What new or improved practices were successfully implemented that could enhance the culture of professional learning among teachers in a high performing school?

2. What changes were evident as a result of the new practices?
Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I stored evidence of the work we were doing in a binder, organized by date. This included agendas from the schoolwide PLC meetings, teacher reflection pages from those meetings, observation notes from grade level PLCs, responses from teacher interviews, and field notes that included my own personal reflections and observations. To begin data analysis, I first created an Excel matrix with notes from each piece of evidence organized by date. I looked for repeated themes among teacher reflection pages after each schoolwide PLC meeting and made note of the percentage of their occurrence. Next, I searched for common themes throughout all of the schoolwide PLC meetings.

I also created a matrix organized by the following practices found in the literature to strengthen professional learning among teachers and cultivate a high-functioning PLC: (a) establishing a shared vision with a defined focus, (b) providing evidence of the necessity for change, (c) ensuring that teachers understand the components and processes of PLCs, (d) generating shared values and commitments, (e) creating structured processes for collaborative inquiry within grade-level teams, (f) providing opportunities for shared leadership, and (g) allowing time for reflection and sharing of personal practice within small groups and in the whole group. I used this matrix to determine which PLC practices had been addressed or experienced in the schoolwide PLC meetings. The following tables provide an overview of the PLC practices that were evident in the planned schoolwide PLC meetings.
Table 3.1

*Schoolwide PLC Actions and Evident PLC Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Evident PLC Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “Characteristics of Effective Teams”</td>
<td>8/9/16</td>
<td>◦ time to refocus&lt;br&gt;◦ team-building&lt;br&gt;◦ what successful schools do&lt;br&gt;◦ mission and vision statements</td>
<td>◦ a shared vision/focus&lt;br&gt;◦ evidence of need for change&lt;br&gt;◦ understanding PLCs&lt;br&gt;◦ shared commitments&lt;br&gt;◦ time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “Back to School Required Training”</td>
<td>8/16/16</td>
<td>◦ Code of Conduct&lt;br&gt;◦ TPGES deadlines&lt;br&gt;◦ new process for communication and problem solving</td>
<td>◦ a shared vision/focus&lt;br&gt;◦ understanding PLCs&lt;br&gt;◦ time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “TLT”</td>
<td>8/23/16</td>
<td>◦ ELL student progress and data&lt;br&gt;◦ identification of gifted students&lt;br&gt;◦ arts integration</td>
<td>◦ a shared vision/focus&lt;br&gt;◦ understanding PLCs&lt;br&gt;◦ shared leadership&lt;br&gt;◦ time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “Professional Learning Communities: Why do we need a PLC and how does that relate to our mission and vision?”</td>
<td>9/13/16</td>
<td>◦ components and processes of a PLC&lt;br&gt;◦ grade-level teams wrote collective commitments</td>
<td>◦ a shared vision/focus&lt;br&gt;◦ evidence of need for change&lt;br&gt;◦ understanding PLCs&lt;br&gt;◦ shared commitments&lt;br&gt;◦ structure for grade-levels&lt;br&gt;◦ shared leadership&lt;br&gt;◦ time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Evident PLC Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “TLT”</td>
<td>9/20/16</td>
<td>• Maplewood’s writing program</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• hands-on science</td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/ reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “CPR”</td>
<td>9/27/16</td>
<td>• celebration of KPREP scores</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• reflection of problem solving from Communications Team</td>
<td>• evidence of need for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• journal reflections</td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/ reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “5 Key Strategies for Formative Assessment”</td>
<td>10/11/16</td>
<td>• research brief about formative assessment; teachers collaborated to discuss</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• analysis of KPREP scores</td>
<td>• evidence of need for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• structure for grade-levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/ reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “Creating Formative Assessments” (TLT)</td>
<td>11/11/16</td>
<td>• review of previously read article</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• grade levels shared formative assessments they use</td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• steps for creating formative assessments</td>
<td>• shared commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• structure for grade-levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/ reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Evident PLC Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “Analyzing Formative Assessment Data”</td>
<td>11/29/16</td>
<td>• analysis of team formative assessment data</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• evidence of need for change</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• structure for grade-levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “Small Group Purposeful Talk about Learning”</td>
<td>1/10/16</td>
<td>• book chapter reading on use of high level “seed” questions to facilitate student to student conversation about their learning</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “TLT”</td>
<td>1/17/16</td>
<td>• Google Classroom for formative assessments&lt;br&gt;• Sway presentations</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “CPR”</td>
<td>1/31/16</td>
<td>• celebration of teacher learning and student success&lt;br&gt;• recognition of staff for accomplishments&lt;br&gt;• journal reflections</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwide PLC: “TLT”</td>
<td>2/21/16</td>
<td>• vocabulary development for students in trauma (poverty, loss)&lt;br&gt;• Google Classroom and assessments using Google Forms&lt;br&gt;• student motivation</td>
<td>• a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• evidence of need for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Purpose/Outcomes</th>
<th>Evident PLC Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Schoolwide PLC: “CPR” | 2/28/16 | - celebration of teacher learning and student success  
- results of teacher interviews and changes seen in Maplewood’s PLC  
- journal reflections | - a shared vision/focus  
- evidence of need for change  
- understanding PLCs  
- shared commitments  
- structure for grade-levels  
- time for sharing/reflection |
| Schoolwide PLC: “Levels of Questioning” | 3/14/16 | - review of Danielson framework regarding questioning and discussion  
- analysis of level of teacher questions from informal walk-throughs | - a shared vision/focus  
- evidence of need for change  
- understanding PLCs  
- structure for grade-levels  
- time for sharing/reflection |

### Table 3.2

**Most Evident PLC Practices in Maplewood’s Schoolwide PLC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results in Percentage of Occurrence (Number of times evidenced /15)</th>
<th>PLC Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>a shared vision/focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>evidence of need for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>understanding PLCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27%</td>
<td>shared commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>structure for grade-levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>time for sharing/reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used the same PLC practices to analyze responses from teacher interviews by making note of comments teachers had made that would apply to any of the PLC.
practices. Finally, to analyze the work we completed in grade-level PLC meetings, I recorded the times I had heard comments related the following evidence: (a) a shared mission, focus, or goals, (b) understanding the need to grow and change, (c) a structured process for inquiry, (d) honoring shared values and commitments, (e) the role of the teacher leader, (f) reflecting or sharing of personal practice, and (g) changing personal practice. In Table 3.3, data is presented with grade levels labeled by letter to protect teachers’ identities by making the small grade-level teams less easily identifiable.

Table 3.3

**Observations from Grade-Level PLC Meetings and PLC Practices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Times Observed per Grade Level</th>
<th>Percentage of Occurrence (evidenced during 3 observations of PLCs at each grade level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A shared mission, focus, or goals</td>
<td>3 3 2 2 3 3</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the need to grow and change</td>
<td>2 1 2 2 3 3</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A structured process for inquiry</td>
<td>0 2 3 2 2 3</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honoring shared values and commitments</td>
<td>0 1 3 1 3 3</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the teacher leader</td>
<td>1 2 1 2 1 3</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting or sharing personal practice</td>
<td>3 3 3 3 3 3</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing personal practice</td>
<td>1 1 2 2 1 2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: Letters A through F are pseudonyms for small-group PLCs*
Results

During the spring of 2016, Maplewood’s principal and I had the opportunity to attend a district-wide conference on the topic of PLCs. This conference could not have been more appropriately timed since I had been researching PLCs that year and had recently passed my qualifying examination during which I submitted my proposal for this action research. School principals were asked to invite teacher leaders to the district conference, and my principal chose two teachers who were effective leaders and highly respected among staff members to accompany us. Both are veteran teachers, and each has served on the School-Based Decision Making Council (SBDM) at Maplewood. Both teachers are well respected within our school and were excited to be asked to accompany us to the three-day conference.

Most information presented at the conference was not new for me because I had been researching the literature for recommended strategies to enhance the culture of professional learning at Maplewood. I had been refining my action research plan, including considering first steps—the best way to begin learning together as an organization. I was delighted to share this learning experience with my colleagues because they began to recognize areas we needed to strengthen and discuss how we would get there. As we developed our plan during the conference, they began to take ownership of the process we would follow and were determined to play a role in the implementation of the plan. Although the principal was fully aware of my action research proposal, I told the two teacher leaders only that I had focused my research on the topic of professional learning. I did not tell them about my proposed action research plan at
that time because I did not know what effect that knowledge would have on their genuine enthusiasm to enhance professional learning at Maplewood.

The four of us left the conference eager to share what we had learned and initially planned with the rest of the teaching staff, and we worked together to develop a broad outline of what we hoped to accomplish during the following school year. We agreed to continue to gather ideas about what would work in our school, and we set a date to meet during the weeks before the new school year to finalize our plan.

The events that followed had the potential to bring the plans to enhance professional learning to a screeching halt. The day after the students’ last day of school, at the end of May, the principal and I had planned a day for teachers to work in their classrooms and then meet in the school’s library after lunch to reflect and share ideas for the next school year. Several of our special area teachers were leaving, and we thought it would be a good opportunity to brainstorm ideas for any new programming. We planned an ice cream party and to send good-luck wishes with outgoing staff members, several of whom were moving to a new elementary school opening in the fall of 2016. Two teachers were beginning their new roles as school guidance counselors, one teacher was about to have twins, and for various reasons there were eight staff members leaving. Emotions were high. Our principal was not able to be at school that day because her mother who was gravely ill had been taken by ambulance to the hospital that morning; sadly, she died just before the 2016-2017 school year started. Our principal had endured an extremely tough year, taking time off from work to take her mother to appointments and sit by her bedside. What does this have to do with PLCs?
According to Bolman and Deal (2008), organizational culture “is built over time as members develop beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that seem to work and are transmitted to new recruits” (p. 277). The story I shared in the preceding paragraphs has everything to do with the culture of our school. After what had felt like a successful school year, my first as an assistant principal, everything seemed to fall apart on that emotional, last day of the 2015-2016 school year. Maplewood is a small school, and I failed to realize that with eight outgoing staff members and the announcement that we were considering new ways of doing things, the school’s culture appeared to be changing—and the staff was not ready for it.

During that final meeting in the library, as we were supposed to be sharing ideas for the coming year, there were frustrations voiced that neither the principal nor I knew about and did not anticipate. For over an hour, the conversation that was supposed to be a reflection and discussion about next steps became a complaint session during which teachers reported not feeling heard or supported by the administrators. I was surprised and disappointed. In the principal’s absence, I had wanted to carry out successfully her plans for the last day, particularly gathering feedback that would help us in planning for the upcoming year. I also became concerned because the teachers were those who I would be asking to sign consent forms to participate in my action research. Further, these were the same teachers I had served and collaborated with over the previous nine years as a peer. I was completely blind-sided by their comments and felt that my principal and I had let them down. Where had we gone wrong?

In the days that followed, I relived the closing-day experience and thought deeply about what my principal and I should have done and what we needed to do going
forward. Teachers called and emailed me—some to apologize, some to commiserate, others to stand their ground as they continued to complain. As I processed all that had been said, my feelings boomeranged through anger, resentment, failure, disappointment, resignation, and eventually determination. I finally realized this was a problem that could be fixed, and my principal and I would fix it. We spoke frequently over the summer, sharing ideas about how we could ensure better communication and develop a process for problem solving going forward. I was aware now more than ever that the foundation for our professional learning together would need to be firmly in place, meaning that we would need to refocus our mission and vision and provide evidence for the necessity for change.

**Building the Foundation**

Among one of the most significant problems a school leader can solve is to provide effective structures for communication (Kikoski & Kikoski, 2004). My principal and I realized that Maplewood had a wounded culture for many reasons, most due to ineffective communication structures. Thus, we began to address cultural needs by identifying where breakdowns in communication occurred, realizing finally that ours was the lack of a formal process to identify and solve problems. We began by establishing a Communications Team. I composed and sent an electronic mail message to all teachers to advertise our need to form a team composed of teacher leaders who wanted to have a voice in decision making and wanted to assure their colleagues’ voices would be heard.

In early June, the principal and I met with six teacher leaders, several of whom had been spokespersons during the contentious discussion at the end of the previous schoolyear. The Communications Team began by establishing our purpose for the team,
making commitments to each other, and outlining how we would operate. We would meet on the third Monday of each month, and then would report back to the entire school community the following Wednesday. With the teachers’ input, I designed a form on which teachers could voice concerns and provide possible solutions and then purchased a locked box that would be located in the teachers’ workroom. We would address concerns written on the forms, along with any other issues brought to the attention of team members.

With that plan in place, my principal and I spent several days during the summer carefully planning our staff’s first back-to-school meeting. We knew that we needed to begin the year on a highly positive note, by helping the teachers remember why we were all there in the first place, and to build the foundation for enhancing our culture of professional learning. We believed the first day of the new school year could make or break our plans, and we wanted everything to flow just right.

Symbolic items and events, such as rituals and ceremonies, are essential to an organization’s culture and can help promote a sense of solidarity (Bolman & Deal, 2008). To help define, actually to reconstruct Maplewood’s culture, the first faculty meeting agenda consisted of a welcome-back breakfast, an ice-breaker activity that would lead to learning about the importance of teamwork, and then a joint development of a new mission statement and vision statement. The principal ordered school t-shirts for every staff member, and our school bookkeeper ordered and filled goodie bags with the most coveted teacher supplies. After placing a colorful tablecloth on each of school library tables, I added chocolates and attached cards with quotations about education at every table. The principal and I provided a breakfast buffet. When the teachers arrived, they
were extremely appreciative and enthusiastic about the new school year. I described our initial efforts to heal the wounded culture at Maplewood because we had to begin the 2016-2017 school year with a healthy culture for many reasons, particularly because we could not launch our PLC initiative, which is the basis of my action research, considering the way we closed the previous school year. I do not believe we could have moved forward with our initiative if we had left this step out.

**Answering the Research Questions**

Through this action research, I sought to answer the questions: *What new or improved practices were successfully implemented that can enhance the culture of professional learning among teachers in a high performing school? What changes were evident as a result of the new practices?* To determine if the PLC practices were successfully implemented, I considered whether their occurrence was ongoing and regular and if the themes occurred multiple times in teacher reflection pages, observations, or interview comments. Table 3.4 displays an overview of the successfully implemented practices and the changes that were evident.

**Table 3.4**

*Successful PLC Practices and Changes Evident as a Result of the New Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLC Practices</th>
<th>Changes Evident as a Result of New Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building a strong foundation for PLCs:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a shared mission with a refined focus</td>
<td>• schoolwide focus set the tone that Maplewood would be a learning organization; the shared mission and vision appeared on every schoolwide PLC meeting agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided evidence of the necessity for change</td>
<td>• staff understood why we were trying to enhance professional learning; brought initial buy-in</td>
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</table>
Table 3.4 (continued)

| Explained the components of PLCs | • expectations were clear to all staff from the beginning |
| Generated shared values and commitments | • relationships were built and communication was enhanced within grade-level teams |

Providing support during the PLC process:

| Structured processes | • schedules and structures for PLCs provided consistency |
| | • importance of PLCs was recognized by teachers because of the support and participation of school leaders |
| | • teachers recognized that the schoolwide PLC meetings respected their time and were relevant |
| | • teachers engaged in new learning by reading literature, participating in TLT, collaborating, and reflecting |
| | • teachers appreciated the time saved with the assistance with development of a professional growth plan and student growth plan |
| Shared leadership | • teacher leaders were used to lead PLCs which increased teacher engagement |

Reflecting on the effectiveness of PLCs

| Time for reflection and sharing of personal practice | • communication and collaboration improved schoolwide |

Strong Foundation for PLCs

As described above, we had to ensure that the culture at Maplewood was ready for professional learning; thus, we spent the first three months of the new schoolyear carefully building the foundation for PLCs. For guidance in building the foundation, I focused on the following practices found in the literature to strengthen professional learning among teachers and cultivate a high-functioning PLC: (a) establishing a shared vision with a defined focus, (b) providing evidence of the necessity for change, (c)
ensuring that teachers understand the components and processes of PLCs, and (d) generating shared values and commitments.

**Shared vision and focus.** The first schoolwide PLC was planned for both certified teachers and classified staff members, including our special education and kindergarten assistants. Feedback from this first meeting was all positive. Teachers reported that after this meeting, they felt that everyone was on the same page, and they were energized to get to work.

I placed nametags on the tables to ensure that we separated teams of teachers who typically worked closely together to allow everyone the chance to get to know other members of the school community. I used this practice later for each schoolwide PLC meeting. We reviewed our old mission and vision statements, and small groups worked together to reach consensus on what we wanted to become as a school going forward and how we would get there. Taking the essential statements from each group, I found commonalities and condensed their words to form our new mission and vision statements, which I shared at the following meeting. After they were approved, the mission and vision statements appeared at the top of each schoolwide PLC meeting agenda and also on Maplewood’s website. The first time they were on the meeting agenda, the staff read the mission and vision statements aloud together. To begin several of the schoolwide PLC meetings, the principal focused the staff by directing everyone to read over the mission and vision statements.

I determined that creating a shared vision and focus was a successfully implemented PLC practice. Regarding changes seen in Maplewood’s PLC, one of the teachers commented, “We have been working together on the same thing – to do what’s
best for kids and to close gaps.” Creating a shared focus is not only symbolic and can provide organization members with a sense of unity but also the cornerstone to building the foundation of learning together by setting the tone that Maplewood would be a learning organization. When asked about changes seen in professional learning at Maplewood, one teacher commented,

> It’s geared more toward looking at student performance and figuring out causes, or what’s going on in their brains. We’re trying to figure out how [students] learn to perform at a higher level—that’s beginning to take place here. My team teacher asked if I’d talked to [another teacher] about a particular student I was having difficulty with. I did and watched how [the other teacher] interacted with her. Now I have applied some of the same techniques, and I am beginning to see a change in that student—it made a difference.

Moving student learning forward was the motivation for Maplewood’s professional learning, and creating a mission about how we would best serve students was crucial to the success of enhancing the culture of professional learning.

**Evidence of the necessity for change.** Part of building a foundation for the PLC required us to make sure all teachers understood our current reality; thus, one of the schoolwide PLC meetings included looking at KPREP data together. To provide evidence of the need for change, teachers reviewed KPREP scores of all third through fifth grade students, and then the scores of only the regular students (i.e., scores for gifted students were deleted).

Among comments from this meeting were, “Oh, this isn’t good.” “Well, this is eye-opening.” Several teachers pointed out that Maplewood’s overall percentage of proficient students may decrease the following year due to the district’s recent decision to discontinue funding the self-contained gifted classroom for third graders at Maplewood,
requiring gifted third graders to remain at their assigned neighborhood school until the fourth grade, when they are officially identified as gifted.

At the same meeting that Maplewood’s KPREP scores were shared, we also planned an activity in which the teachers would read a research brief about key strategies for formative assessment. On feedback forms that 22 of the teachers completed at the conclusion of that meeting, 6 teachers commented that they did not understand the data and 8 teachers wished for more time to collaborate and discuss. This led me to believe that we should have presented the research brief and the data discussions at separate meetings. Additionally, we should have provided a more clear explanation or a key to help teachers understand the data they were given. There simply was not enough time during that meeting to go into greater detail about the data to keep our meeting time to an hour as planned.

It was important for Maplewood teachers to see evidence of the need for change early in the PLC process by looking at schoolwide student data. Lewin (1997) described unfreezing within an organization as conditions that support changes of organizational members’ beliefs and attitudes about current conditions, and change is more likely to be successful when organizational members view change as necessary. Attention to the need for change was given most often during the schoolwide PLC meetings, with the hope that by securing buy-in from the teachers they would began to understand why we were trying to enhance our culture of professional learning in the first place. Overall, this PLC practice was successfully implemented; however, because the grade-level PLCs at Maplewood showed less change overall than the schoolwide PLCs, I believe that in the future more focus in grade-level PLCs should be placed on analyzing student
performance, discussing any changes that need to be made to instruction, and then following up on those changes.

**Understanding of the components of PLCs.** This practice was successfully implemented at Maplewood to enhance the culture of professional learning. During the first schoolwide PLC meeting of the year, I explained to the staff that successful schools must learn together and then briefly outlined our PLC plan for the year. During a later PLC meeting, teacher leaders helped to facilitate a staff discussion about the components of a successful PLC and the changes that could be made at Maplewood. Data collected from that meeting provided evidence that teachers believed they were part of a PLC, but their limited understanding of PLCs was defined by their participation in meetings with Maplewood’s principal in which they shared student data. No groups discussed professional learning as a component of PLCs. Teachers learned that successful PLCs include meetings that provide professional learning, are ongoing and regular, and supported by leadership. When asked about the structures that had been helpful in facilitating the PLC process at Maplewood, one teacher responded,

*It was helpful that you all explained PLCs on the front end. The explanation was different than what we had been used to, but also the expectations were made really clear.*

After being asked about any changes that had occurred in Maplewood’s PLC, another teacher said,

*Our school leaders supported and really pushed our PLCs. I think that was important. It’s more structured and relevant to our needs, too. It follows a predictable structure. The outcomes are set for meetings, we know what to expect, our time has been respected—that’s a change.*
The schoolwide PLC meetings were structured so that teachers knew when we would be reading together, learning from colleagues, or celebrating and sharing our success. These rituals eventually became part of what we do regularly at Maplewood.

**Shared values and commitments.** Writing collective commitments was a successfully implemented PLC practice not only because it helped to build relationships, provided a sense of unity, and enhanced communication between grade-level members at the time they were written but also because PLC members did not appear to hold each other accountable for following them in grade-level meetings. When we instructed the staff on the essential components of a PLC early in the schoolyear, the teacher leaders who facilitated that meeting explained the importance of mutual accountability and making commitments to each other. We provided examples and a graphic organizer for each grade-level team to record their collective commitments, which are presented in Table 3.5. I later typed and inserted these at the top of each grade-level PLC notes page.

**Table 3.5**

**Maplewood’s Collective Commitments**

| Kindergarten | • Be honest and open for change  
|              | • Accept each other and share the workload  
|              | • Bring new ideas to the table  
|              | • Support our paraeducators  
| First Grade  | • Make “Kid First” decisions  
|              | • Help each other keep a positive outlook  
|              | • Support each other’s efforts to improve student achievement  
|              | • Use each other’s feedback in a positive way  
| Second Grade | • Commit to meeting during planning bi-monthly  
|              | • Share ideas, plans, trips  
|              | • Plan and discuss assessment calendar  

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Commitments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Grade</strong></td>
<td>• Continuous open communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Share responsibilities when possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue discussing our assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Grade</strong></td>
<td>• Collaborate regarding student performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop our strengths through professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shared experiences with community leaders and professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be respectful of each other’s ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Delegate responsibilities and come prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fifth Grade</strong></td>
<td>• Always plan what is best for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Share the workload and responsibility for materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be available for student problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicate clearly and honestly with each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide a safe and confidential space for conversation (a support system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts/Special Areas</strong></td>
<td>• Honor our unique visual and/or performing arts programs and our unique student population both individually and collectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work collaboratively with classroom teachers to ensure all students are integrating their arts skills into all curriculum areas at high levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Acknowledge individual strengths of our team members and utilize each other’s talents, showing respect and value for one another’s time and discipline area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Education</strong></td>
<td>• Make decisions that are in students’ best interests, not what is best for me/my schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaborate with grade levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support grade-level teams, sharing research based strategies and implementation with fidelity and modeling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When teachers came to their grade-level meetings with no student data to analyze or no plan for what they wanted to discuss, I determined that merely writing the commitments was not beneficial to the team: PLC members were not holding each other accountable for commitments made. For guidance, I returned to research and professional literature. Meirink, Imants, Meirjer, and Verloop (2010) found that setting
expectations for group participation and contribution to the team were essential for teachers’ learning. Further, when student work analysis is used as the basis for professional development, use of protocols or procedural steps have been identified as essential for organized group discussion and to encourage participation (Little, Gearhart, Curry and Kafka, 2003). I determined that future work would focus on enhancing professional learning in the grade-level PLCs, which required a change in the terminology from “collective commitments” to “expectations for grade-level participation and contribution.”

**Support During the PLC Process**

One of the most successfully implemented PLC practices at Maplewood was ensuring ongoing support for the teachers. I intended to streamline the TPGES to be more aligned with our PLC process and thus made sure teachers understood how the two would go hand in hand. In addition to providing support through clear structures, expectations, and guidelines, I planned opportunities for teacher leadership that would further support and enhance Maplewood’s culture of professional learning.

**Assistance with TPGES.** I gave teachers a list of TPGES requirements along with deadlines for each portion to be completed. The first assignment was for teachers to reflect on their practice, and then teams would collaborate to determine areas for growth. This reflection was to be used to write their professional growth plans. I provided the teachers an example growth statement that I wrote using an indicator from the Danielson (2011) framework that focused on professional learning. This statement read,

*During the 2016-17 school year, I will impact student learning by actively participating in a culture of professional inquiry and by seeking out opportunities for professional development to enhance content knowledge and pedagogical skill. I will actively assist other educators, and I will seek feedback on my*
teaching from both colleagues and administrators. New learning will include how to create, analyze, and diagnose formative assessments, and how professional learning teams can contribute to this process. I will know if I have accomplished my objective if I enhanced my content knowledge and pedagogical skill and facilitated student growth.

I told the teachers that they could use this indicator for their professional growth plan; however, if after their reflection, they would like to choose an indicator other than professional learning, they could. Prior to the deadline for designing a professional growth plan, I held help sessions with each grade-level team to discuss areas for growth and to assist teachers with writing a professional growth statement. When I met with teachers, some explained that could not think of any area for growth, one teacher scored herself “exemplary” in each area, and others said they needed to grow in so many areas they could not pick one. All teachers but one chose to use the example growth statement I provided rather than writing their own. The teacher who wrote his own had not met the deadline and was given assistance writing a growth plan more specific to his needs. One teacher commented,

Thank you so much for helping with this. This makes it so much easier and takes one more thing off our plates. We want to learn. It isn’t that we don’t want to learn and grow—I do. We just get behind and don’t have time to think about this. It is so much easier if someone just tells me what I need to do, what to focus my time on.

Some of the early work in grade-level teams also focused on writing student growth goals, as required by TPGES. Teachers are required to develop a growth goal statement in an area of their choosing, but I wrote a growth goal statement for them in the area of summarizing. As I had done with the professional growth plans, I informed teachers that they could write their own statement or use the one I was providing. All of the regular classroom teachers, the special education teachers, and the three
interventionists chose to use the statement I had written. Only the five special area teachers wrote their own student growth goal statement, which was appropriate to their content. The student growth goal statement that I wrote read appears below:

For the current school year, my students will make measurable progress in the area of *Summarizing key details and ideas of complex text*. All students will improve by at least one level in two or more criteria from the English Language Arts Enduring Skills Rubric. In addition, 70% of students will achieve a score of Level 3 (Meets Expectations) or above on the criterion on the English Language Arts Enduring Skills Rubric.

Again, teachers thanked me for helping them write the student growth goal statement, although several teachers asked me why this was necessary. I explained that there was a level of compliance within the TPGES, but setting a student-growth goal and learning together to move student learning forward are perhaps one of the most important components of the TPGES. One teacher said,

Why do we even have to do this? Does it seem fake to you? Since we didn’t write it, and you wrote it. But I have so many different student goals that I focus on daily, I just don’t write it out. But thank you for writing it because that isn’t something I would normally do.

The same teacher later told me, “I’ve actually learned more about student growth and proficiency goals this year than before.” As a staff, we are still in the compliance stage of TPGES, but hopefully that will improve as grade-level PLCs continue to be a focus at Maplewood.

**Structured processes of the schoolwide PLC.** Providing a structure for the schoolwide PLC was a successfully implemented practice that enhanced the culture of professional learning at Maplewood. Expectations for meeting together schoolwide were communicated on an agenda that included outcomes and success criteria for each schoolwide PLC meeting. These meetings were regular and ongoing, and the principal
and I both participated in the learning. When asked about changes seen in Maplewood’s PLCs, one teacher replied,

[Our principals are] enforcing and encouraging, talk a lot about PLCs, advocate and follow through with them taking place. In grade levels, we are beginning to see other areas we need to focus on. We communicate more [often], we have deeper thinking and awareness.

During one of the first schoolwide PLC meetings, I explained that the steps to forming a successful PLC would include understanding of our current reality, creating a shared mission and vision, and building a foundation of shared knowledge about what a PLC is and how it would function at our school. To understand our current reality, I pointed out that we had looked at schoolwide student data to understand the necessity for improvement. I also reminded teachers that weeks earlier we had written our shared mission and vision and that we had recently developed shared knowledge about what a PLC is and does. I explained that on the second Tuesday of each month we would come together to discuss best practices, which could be based on reading research together or sharing what they had experienced in classroom observations. The third Tuesday would be for Teachers Leading Teachers (TLT) and the fourth Tuesday would be to Celebrate, Pause, and Reflect (CPR). I also explained that grade-level PLCs would meet to review student data and determine next steps for improving student learning. Finally, I explained that we would evaluate our progress and determine whether or not we had seen any changes in professional learning at Maplewood.

One of the fall schoolwide PLC meetings, facilitated by the two teacher leaders who had accompanied us to the PLC conference, focused on creating formative assessments. In her weekly electronic mail memo, the principal asked grade-level teams to bring an example of a formative assessment they were using. The principal and I
attended this meeting, and each of us sat at a different table with a group of teachers. I had intended for each table to share ideas among themselves about formative assessments they used, but one of the teachers facilitating this meeting wanted to hear all of the ideas rather than just one from each table because she was afraid someone would miss something. When the first grade-level team was asked to share, they admitted they did not have anything to share and said they must have misunderstood what they were expected to bring. All other grade-level teams, special education teachers, intervention teachers, and arts teachers were asked to share. Fortunately, only two grade-level teams were unprepared to share. The teachers who felt unprepared to share later told me that they did not have confidence in what they had prepared to share and that discussing at their table first, before sharing out, would have made them feel more confident. One of those teachers said,

When we are teaching each other, it’s helpful. I love when others share, but I don’t want it to be me, not to the whole group. It gives me high levels of anxiety. Sharing around the table first just makes me feel better—I don’t know why! I did have something to share that day but…I don’t want to feel put on the spot.

Thirteen teachers submitted a reflection sheet for this meeting and out of those, five commented that they felt unprepared to share or did not know they were supposed to have something to share, although this had been communicated in the principal’s weekly electronic mail memo. All teachers commented on something they had learned, enjoyed, or benefitted from this learning experience.

Analyzing formative assessment data was the topic of the next schoolwide PLC meeting, and I asked two grade-level leads who had not previously helped to facilitate this meeting. The activities were intended to demonstrate the importance of analyzing student data across a grade level and discussing instructional strategies used by the
teachers whose students had reached mastery to ensure that students who did not master
the content could be retaught using a successful strategy. After this meeting, feedback
sheets from all teachers evidenced an understanding that within their grade-level team,
they would need to determine the strategies used by the teachers of the most successful
students in order to provide the most appropriate reteach for struggling students.

After the winter holidays, our schoolwide PLC topics began to focus on student-
to-student conversation about their learning and high level questioning. These topics for
professional learning were developed after informal walkthroughs the principal and I
were conducting daily. While visiting classrooms, we saw very few opportunities for
student discussion and teachers posing questions that were mostly based on recall of
factual information. Prior to the next schoolwide PLC, teachers read a book chapter (Cain
& Laird, 2011) about the importance of (a) providing opportunities for all students to
have conversations about their learning and (b) creating high level questions for small
group discussion help students stay focused on topics. Each table re-read a small portion
of the chapter and then summarized their learning. Since the schoolwide goal for student
growth was focused on summarizing, we facilitated the meeting by modeling strategies
that could be used to help students summarize. I also provided each teacher with a poster
that would help them create high level questions. Regarding changes seen in PLCs at
Maplewood, one teacher commented,

You made our learning relevant. You’re taking a look at school needs and
addressing them, but this seems more teacher driven too. Our time was used
efficiently, and you also used teaching strategies when teaching us. This doesn’t
feel like something extra since we do it at the faculty meetings, and it’s not “in
addition to” what we’re already doing.
When I initially reviewed teacher reflection pages from this meeting, I felt I had made a mistake in asking teachers to reflect on obstacles they would have to overcome in order to implement student-to-student discussion successfully, without having them also reflect on the benefits of encouraging student discussion. Teachers’ reflections mentioned that it would take more of their time to create the high level questions for their students to discuss, and they would have to carefully monitor the classroom for off-task conversation. I realized afterward that I should have also asked them to reflect on ways this strategy would help move their students’ learning forward or how they planned to implement it in their classroom. On the positive side, the closing reflection provided a way for teachers to communicate their concerns about this strategy, which the principal and I would continue to be looking for during classroom walkthroughs.

**Structured processes in grade-level PLCs.** During the first schoolwide PLC meeting in the Fall of 2016, the principal explained to teachers that they would need to let us know when they had formative student data to analyze and schedule a time that we could all meet to discuss the data. Only two teachers made arrangements to meet with us using that process; thus, we decided to schedule one day each week when the grade-level teams would regularly meet with us to discuss student progress. Initially, we asked that teams be prepared with student work to share, even if it was just a short exit slip. Some teams were consistently prepared. However, others would admit that they were unprepared, and thus, we used the time to answer their questions or discuss a topic of their choice. I gave teacher leaders the form I had created for them to plan what they would focus on for grade-level meetings. I copied the collective commitments teams had made to each other at the top of each grade-level’s form. The first time we used these
forms, I saw that teachers had viewed it as a checklist, rather than a menu of options they could choose to focus on. I had intended that they would use the notes page to focus their discussions and would turn in notes about what they had discussed, but this did not happen if I was not present.

At times grade-level PLC meetings focused on the topics learned in the schoolwide PLC. For example, during a grade-level meeting I observed teachers discussing student progress after they required students to participate in small-group discussion, which was one of the topics from the book chapter we read together in a schoolwide PLC meeting. One teacher commented,

After what we learned in our PLC about student-to-student discussion and high level thinking, I won’t let them write their thoughts until I know they have verbalized it first because what I’m seeing is that some of them can’t write it if they can’t say it. I saw a huge difference this week.

On the same topic, another teacher said,

I guess I hadn’t really thought of it. I mean, I know that I let students discuss their work but maybe I wasn’t posing very deep questions for them to talk about. I noticed that there are some students who just don’t ever say anything in their group and those are the students who aren’t performing very well. Yesterday I went around to each group and asked specifically if each student had gotten to share something. If they hadn’t, I told the group they weren’t done until they knew that [student name] had an answer and [student name] had an answer.

During grade-level meetings, when teachers were not asking each other probing questions, I asked, How were you successful getting students to master this standard? How did you teach it? The conversations then focused on changing practice based on new learning by teachers. When asked about this strategy during an interview, as teacher replied, “The set, regular, times to meet in grade-levels were good, but I think some of the teams are meeting more regularly than others. They are stronger at analyzing student data together than others.”
This teacher was correct, and the teacher leaders played an important role in the eventual success of grade-level PLCs. Some teams are more comfortable working together, and some teacher leaders are more experienced than others. My observations of grade-level meetings led me to believe that not all grade-level teams are quite ready to function successfully as grade-level PLCs: Teachers needed more regular practice participating in inquiry-based conversations. My assessment was confirmed during an interview when I asked a teacher if she has grown professionally as a result of participating in the schoolwide PLC. She responded, “Yes, we are more focused and intentional about our assessments and what they mean. But sometimes for our grade-level meetings I feel like we are just coming up with stuff to talk about.”

Even when grade-level teams had no student data to review and discuss, I assured they met by asking questions about student-learning progress. I wanted them to get in the habit of meeting weekly, even if for only a short time. I perceived that keeping open and regular communication among teachers was critically important to assuring success of our enhanced culture of professional learning. Going forward, I shall identify protocols, or procedural steps, for them to use while analyzing student work. I believe expectations for what must be accomplished during grade-level meetings need to be clear and written. Also, the principal and I will hold training for the grade-level leaders regarding what successful grade-level PLCs look like and what the expectations are.

**Shared leadership.** School leaders can enhance PLCs by distributing leadership responsibilities, developing teacher leaders to facilitate learning for all, participating with teachers in professional development as learners, and allowing teacher leaders to lead and participate actively in decision making (Hord, 1997; Hord & Sommers, 2008; King &
Newmann, 2000; Phillips, 2003). The use of shared leadership was a successfully implemented PLC practice for Maplewood’s schoolwide PLC. From the beginning of the 2016-2017 schoolyear, teacher leaders helped to present the new PLC process to the entire staff, and teachers regularly lead the TLT sessions. When asked about changes in PLCs at Maplewood during an interview, one teacher responded,

The TLTs are my favorite part. I remember several years ago we used to have other teachers share. The principal would ask you to do it, but I don’t remember peers leading for a while. I like learning from other teachers and getting to see what strategies they’re using in their classrooms.

When asked about Maplewood’s PLC, another teacher said,

PLCs are working together to share ideas to benefit the greater good with a specific objective. We are using teachers as experts to share. We don’t have time to go into classrooms to see what everyone is doing, so to hear from others who share, it’s helpful when everyone shares what they use. Then you know if you want to go observe.

It was important that the teachers recognized the benefits of teachers leading and were enjoying learning together. Many teachers commented on the way we read together in the schoolwide PLC and discussed how they could use the new information in their classrooms. For example, below is the response by a teacher when asked about what had helped facilitate the PLC process.

Having the different presenters was great. Actually, I think when we presented it made others feel more comfortable too. Hopefully we’ll see more people step up. I think our leadership committees, like the Communications Team, are really making a difference. I also liked reading and then sharing at the table – was that called a jigsaw? The interaction, reading, collaborating, working with a group and then being able to take that back to the classroom without having to think too much about it, that was really good. Teachers sharing what they know, it’s nice to hear from others. We’re getting tools we can implement immediately—tomorrow.

My goal is the expand this area by offering more training for leaders of grade-level teams, to ensure that the time during the grade-level PLCs is used most effectively.
Reflection on the Effectiveness of PLCs

The importance of providing teachers with time to collaborate, to share student learning and success, and to reflect on their practice cannot be emphasized enough. This was evidently a successfully implemented PLC practice because during interviews, teachers stressed the importance of meeting to learn together. One teacher explained why.

We are discussing together how to get to the root of barriers in student learning and find ways to help – that’s beginning to happen. In our whole-group PLC when we share at our table and discuss struggles we’re having, that’s really something new to see. I’m starting to know who to go to for help and I know that it’s ok to ask.

Conversation is essential when teachers are collaborating and developing shared understandings about their practice while engaging in a professional learning community (Rosenholtz, 1989; Yankelovich, 2001). At the end of each month, we took time to celebrate, pause, and reflect during our CPR sessions.

CPR. It was not until the end of January 2017 that we seemed to hit our rhythm, with teachers understanding that the schoolwide PLC structure would not go by the wayside. The cycles of reading and discussing instructional strategies together, teachers leading the whole group during TLT, and then taking time to celebrate, pause, and reflect at the end of the month became an expected routine. These meetings, like the rituals and ceremonies Bolman and Deal (2008) describe as important to the symbolic frame, are beginning to become embedded into the professional culture at Maplewood. When asked about what helped facilitate the PLC process at Maplewood, one teacher said, “I liked all the structures. It’s important to celebrate because I think we often look at the worst parts of things and how we need to improve.”
For the CPR meeting at the end of January 2017, teachers entered the library to lamplight, relaxing music, and snacks at each table—an environment the principal and I created intentionally to evidence that Maplewood teachers are appreciated and celebrated. Hearing teachers eagerly sharing their successes at each table made me realize that we had made somewhat of a breakthrough. Each teacher shared around her or his table, and then one teacher from each table reported these successes to the entire group. As we had each month, we concluded the CPR meeting with reflective journal writing, but this time I was surprised at how long some of the teachers wrote in their journals.

For the CPR meeting just prior to conclusion of data collection for this action research, I decided not only to celebrate our PLC success but also to reexamine the successful PLC practices. I realized from data I had analyzed that we had spent the majority of our time on the schoolwide PLC. Although the mission and vision statements were printed on every agenda presented at each meeting, they deserved to be revisited. I also wanted to remind teachers that they evidenced the necessity for change after we had reviewed KPREP data together earlier that year. Finally, I shared with them what I had learned thus far by conducting this action research. I explained that I had determined that we needed to strengthen the grade-level PLCs by offering differentiated learning within the schoolwide PLC. I then asked if any corrections needed to be made to my findings. Reflection pages written during this meeting indicated that no corrections needed to be made to the initiative. According to one teacher, “We have been following through in PDs and using staff for trainings. In grade-levels, we are doing that but I would like to see more foundational things to close gaps—get down to basics and focus on that.” Another teacher wrote,
Our PLCs have been ongoing, we’re learning from each other as a team. But it is inconsistent with grade-levels. Some are really working together, some more than others. Now we need more next steps, like “this is what you should do next in your classroom.”

When school leaders are trying to create and then maintain a positive school culture, it can be tricky to balance the celebration of success with reminding teachers why they need to enhance their professional learning. Nonetheless, it is important to take time to celebrate success and reflect.

**Recommendations**

The PLC that developed at Maplewood is more aligned with Wenger’s (2008) concept of a CoP, which focuses on the shared practice of a group of people and how they learn to enhance their practice further through regular interaction and learning from one another, rather than a PLC composed of teachers at the same school engaged in collaborative work that pays close attention to student learning progress and higher student achievement (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002). While I found that most of the PLC practices were implemented successfully, the findings from this action research lead me to recognize aspects of professional learning at Maplewood that still require improvement. The areas for improvement include developing professional expertise among the teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 2, differentiating the professional learning, and using protocols or procedural steps to analyze student data within the grade-level PLCs.

It is my goal to develop effective teacher leaders in Kindergarten through Grade 2 by offering additional training specific to their needs. No teachers from the primary grades volunteered to lead any of the TLTs and often commented about being unprepared for meetings. Next year, I am planning to hold vertical PLC meetings for a leadership
team consisting of teacher leaders from each grade level. We shall focus on what they need to do to lead their grade-level PLC and how they can collaborate to facilitate the TLT sessions.

Additionally, the principal and I plan to offer more differentiated learning opportunities. We did not provide learning that was specific to the needs of the less experienced primary teachers. I learned from conversations with and observations of the primary-level teachers that they did not yet feel confident speaking to the whole group or leading their grade-level PLCs.

Now that we have built a strong foundation for the schoolwide PLC at Maplewood, it is time to focus on the work that happens within the grade-level PLCs. As previously mentioned, we are developing protocols for the grade-level PLCs to analyze student work. Additionally, we will meet with grade-level teams only twice a month, giving the teams more time to reflect on their learning, student progress, and what they would like to discuss. As a school, we need to continue to enhance our culture and develop our own rituals and celebrations. If collaborating through inquiry regarding how to help students succeed, can become one of the ways we do things at Maplewood, then we can expect continuous improvement.

Implications of Findings for Practice and Research

Through using weekly faculty meetings for schoolwide professional learning, we were able to enhance the culture of professional learning at Maplewood by providing structured time for teachers to share and reflect on their instructional practice. School leaders should never underestimate the power of communication and collaboration. Rather than limiting faculty meetings to save teachers time, school leaders should expect
a schoolwide PLC to meet multiple times each month for professional learning and
reflection.

Maplewood teachers perceived that TPGES requirements were too time-
consuming, but I assisted them with writing a professional growth plan and student
growth plans and helped facilitate classroom observations. This not only saved the
teachers time, but also it helped me to plan professional learning that was aligned with
the schoolwide student growth goal of summarizing, which was linked to the schoolwide
goal of reducing the percentage of students scoring at the novice level in reading.

I do not believe it was the intention of the TPGES for coaches to craft teachers’
professional growth plans and student growth goal statements; hence, I perceive the
design may need to be reconsidered. I understand that the purpose for creating and
implementing TPGES was to give the teachers ownership of their evaluations; however,
the teachers I work with do not view this as an advantage but rather as additional
pressure. When given the choice to write their own professional growth plan or student
growth plan, the teachers I work with preferred to use what I had already written for them
to save time. To plan a lesson in which all students will be cognitively engaged in
appropriately leveled instruction—while remaining fully aware of the classroom
environment, ensuring high levels of rapport, communication, and behavior management
in a rich culture of learning with just the right formative assessment during each lesson
that allows for further planning so the cycle can continue each day—leaves no time for
any added personal reflection. When teachers say they do not have time for anything else,
what they may mean is that they do not have the cognitive energy to make one more
decision or reflection. I believe it is important for school leaders to help teachers identify
their professional learning needs as determined from schoolwide student data, informal walkthroughs, formal observations, and interactions. As long as teachers can see the relevance in what they are learning, they are willing. Maplewood teachers do reflect daily as they monitor student engagement and learning and make adjustments to their lessons.

Completing Action Research as a Participant-Leader and Researcher

Some aspects of leading implementation of this research and completing the action research dissertation as a participant-leader and participant-researcher were challenging, but my learning and experiences far outweighed the difficulties. At the start of the study, I was apprehensive about having the teachers sign the consent forms because I knew at that time I would have to explain to them what I was researching. I wondered if the fact that their professional learning was being studied would make this process seem contrived for the purpose of my dissertation. I also wondered that once the teachers found out that this study would conclude at the end of the schoolyear, if they would not see the process as a true means for ongoing school improvement. I feared that they might not put as much effort into improving their professional learning if they did not see the process as authentic. I dreaded asking the interview questions, speculating that either teacher responses would be negative and they would not have experienced change, or that they would provide answers they thought I wanted to hear. As it turned out, I felt that teachers’ responses during the interview were genuine: Few responses were negative nor did they seem crafted for my approval. Conducting action research in one’s own school might be viewed as a limitation, for example, if a negative working relationship exists between the researcher and other staff members. This was certainly a concern I had
after the events at the end of the previous schoolyear, so it was crucial to strengthen communication and develop a process for problem solving.

As with writing any form of dissertation, carefully collecting and analyzing data was time consuming, and I worried that the deadlines for completing the dissertation were not the best timelines for collecting the most informative data of my study. Although I stopped collecting data in early March 2017 for the purpose of completing this dissertation, I continued collecting teacher reflections after each schoolwide learning session and as well as observations and notetaking during grade-level PLCs in order to better understand what structures and processes need to be introduced next year for continuous improvement.

I have been extremely lucky to have maintained an excellent working relationship with my principal, who trusted and supported me in this work. She ultimately wanted to do what was best for the school, but she also genuinely wanted to help me complete the action research and dissertation. She kept me on track when my enthusiasm began to wane, commenting that we needed to maintain our momentum and that she did not want to be blamed for my not pushing forward. Because we share a passion for learning and teaching, we have been united in our desire to improve the culture of professional learning at Maplewood. Despite this close partnership, I realized that conducting action research as the assistant principal at Maplewood had an effect on some of our plans. Without holding the ultimate decision-making authority, there were a few times when I would have done things differently, but I had to acquiesce to what the principal wanted to do. Fortunately, because I do not bear the full responsibility of all aspects of running the school as a principal must, I was free to devote more time to planning professional
learning for Maplewood’s teachers. Overall, I learned how to be more effective in my role at Maplewood. Fortunately my topic was closely matched to my job description and the findings will help us continue to improve as adult learners.

**Reflection**

In alignment with Bolman and Deal’s (2008) four frames of organizations, the most significant lesson I learned from this experience as a school leader is the importance of paying close attention to people, the aspects of organizational culture that are important to them, and structures and processes that make their work more enjoyable and manageable. When planning organizational change, such as the enhancement of a school culture through professional learning, I learned that it is important to first ensure that the school is ready for change. Lewin (1997) described *unfreezing* within an organization as conditions that support a change in organizational members’ beliefs and attitudes about current conditions. My principal and I had to take extra steps and time to build the foundation for learning together by refocusing our vision and preparing for change.

After we built a strong foundation for learning together, it was also important to maintain the structures we had put into place. Keeping the schoolwide PLC meetings consistent and ongoing gave the credibility to the learning community. Enhancing Maplewood’s culture of professional learning was so much about repairing the culture, trust, and communication. An organization that lacks structures for communicating does not have a healthy culture. When members of an organization feel that their voices are heard, organizational structures are understood, and expectations are clear, they can get into a routine, and finally learn together. Continuous cycles of improvement are essential for successful PLCs, and Maplewood teachers are now ready for enhanced professional
learning as we take next steps to improve the process of learning together in grade-level teams.
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

Initial Review

Approval Ends
October 2, 2017

IRB Number
16-0771-P4S

TO:
Ann Ingram
Educational Leadership
1085 Higbee Mill Road
Lexington, KY 40503
PI phone #: (859) 797-0642

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

SUBJECT:
Approval of Protocol Number 16-0771-P4S

DATE:
October 7, 2016

On October 3, 2016, the Non-medical Institutional Review Board approved your protocol entitled:

Enhancing the Culture of Professional Learning in a High Performing School

Approval is effective from October 3, 2016 until October 2, 2017 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#Prresponsibilities]. 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 Tubergen, PhD/ah
Chairperson/Vice Chairperson

APPENDIX B: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?
You are being invited to take part in a research study investigating what practices and structures might contribute to strengthening a culture of professional learning. You are being invited to take part in this research study because ongoing professional learning is critical to student success and school improvement; thus, it is important for school leaders to have a clear understanding of what practices and structures need to be in place to facilitate a culture of professional learning. Ongoing professional learning is an expectation for all Bluegrass County School teachers, and therefore, it is also an expectation that all teachers at Maplewood Elementary School (Maplewood) will be part of a learning community. The approximate number of subjects to be enrolled in this study is 26.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?
The person in charge of this study is Ann Ingram, who is a doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky. She is being guided in this research by Professor Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, PhD, in the Department of Educational Leadership Studies at the University of Kentucky.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
By doing this study, I hope to contribute to the knowledge of enhancing the professional learning culture in a high performing school.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?
This action research study is being conducted at Maplewood by Ann Ingram in order to assess impact of the professional development initiative (i.e., enhancing the culture of professional) launched during the 2016-2017 academic year.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?
You are asked to participate in focus-group interview(s) or individual interview(s) conducted by me during your planning period or after the regular school day. The length of the focus-group interview or individual interview depends on comments shared by participants. The goal is to complete all interviews within 60-90 minutes. You are welcome to leave the focus group prior to its end, if needed.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Most teachers enjoy talking with their peers about topics they often do not discuss during their daily practice, which may be a benefit to your participating in a focus-group interview or an individual
interview. Your contributions during the interview(s) will provide perspectives on practices and structures that contribute to strengthening a culture of professional learning at an elementary school.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**
No. If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

**IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?**
You do not have to participate in any interviews conducted by Ann Ingram for her action-research study. However, as a teacher at Maplewood, you are expected to participate in all professional activities related to the school initiative (i.e., strengthening a culture of professional learning).

**WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?**
There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**
You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?**
As a focus-group participant, your identity will be known to all other participating teachers. Prior to beginning the focus group, I shall ask that everyone present protect the confidentiality of all involved by not disclosing who was present and by not sharing any portion of the comments made.

I shall make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your comments will be combined with those from other teachers taking part in the study. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I shall write about the combined information I gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. When I publish the results of this study, I shall keep your name and other identifying information private.

I shall make every effort to prevent anyone from knowing that you provided information, or what that information is. This focus group will be recorded and transcribed for analysis, but neither the digital recording nor interview transcription will be shared with another person. I am the only researcher engaged in this study.

I shall keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require me to show your information to a court (e.g., authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else). Also, I may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure I have conducted this study correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.
CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?
If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. I may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions you are given, or if I find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you. You only need to contact me (Ann Ingram) to explain that you no longer wish to continue. At that time, data collected from you would be shredded.

WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?
There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues, according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?
Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Ann Ingram at Maplewood or via electronic mail addresses to ann.ingram@g.uky.edu or ann.ingram@fayette.kyschools.us. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. I will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

______________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____________________________________
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____________________________________
Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent

Date

Date

Date
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teacher Name: ______________________ Date: ________________

I have some questions for you that will help me evaluate the process we used to enhance our culture of professional learning. Don’t worry if you don’t know how to answer. I am not evaluating you; I’m evaluating Maplewood’s culture of professional learning and I want to know what practices you think we implemented successfully and if there were any changes as a result of those practices. It is ok to say you don’t know, but any information you can give me, even if it’s general, will help me.

1. Tell me about what you know about a Professional Learning Community and what you know or think about professional learning at Maplewood.

2. Have you noticed any changes in professional learning at Maplewood?

3. Can you tell me about any specific things you think were especially helpful in facilitating the professional learning process at Maplewood? Are there any structures in place you feel are not helpful?

4. Tell me how you’ve grown as a teacher this year (any differences you see in yourself as to how you make decisions about instruction) as a result of engaging in a professional learning community.

5. Do you consider engaging in a Professional Learning Community to be an important part of your practice? If so, why? If not, why not? (Can you give a SPECIFIC EXAMPLE?)

6. Is there anything else you want me to know about the PLC process?
### Maplewood Elementary will be

*a school where ALL students are critically thinking problem solvers who demonstrate perseverance, independence, responsibility, and strong moral character. While ensuring that students feel safe, loved, and excited about school and learning, Maplewood teachers will partner with students and families to close achievement gaps.*

Our mission is to be an exemplary learning community. We build the foundation of this community through meaningful relationships, intentional and engaging learning, clear communication, and a collaborative commitment to coaching students to be valuable contributing members of the global community.

### Topic: Professional Learning Teams

**Date:** September 13, 2016  
**Location:** Maplewood Elementary Library  
**Participants:** Certified Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Ella Walsh, Kate Boyd, Ann Ingram, and Lena Sims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential Questions</td>
<td>Why do we need professional learning teams? How does this relate to our mission and vision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success Criteria</td>
<td>Our team will be successful if we leave today with collective commitments to our professional learning team (grade-level and school-wide).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Norms | - Positive attitude  
- Collaborative spirit  
- Focused attention  
- All voices heard, all opinions respected  
- Limit sidebar conversations  
- Put away technology |

### Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Something to share, celebrate, laugh about?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3:10 | Focus on our vision and mission  
  Share agenda, outcomes, norms  
  - Today’s PD Introduction: Walsh  
  - Video introduction and what to listen for: Boyd *(notes sheet for your own notes)*  
  - Explanation of chart paper activity: Walsh  
  - Facilitating sharing from tables: Boyd  
  - PLCs at Maplewood: Ingram |
| 4:00 | Closing/shared commitments: Walsh |
APPENDIX E: SCHOOLWIDE PLC MEETING REFLECTION FORM

Teachers as Reflective Practitioners

Faculty Meeting 11/15/2016

Schoolwide PLC: Creating Formative Assessments

Name (Optional)_________________________

Ideas that were helpful to you:

Suggestions (for improvement or future learning together):

Essential Ideas: (leaving with a plan to ACT)
**Schoolwide PLC:**

**Teachers Leading Teachers**

**Date:** February 21, 2017  
**Location:** Maplewood Elementary Library  
**Participants:** Certified Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Peggy Smith, Kenzie Lopez, Maggie Vicks, and Jane Long</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Success Criteria**

Our team will be successful if we leave today with...

- an understanding of how poverty affects vocabulary development;
- ideas for how to hold students accountable for homework completion and offer reinforcement;
- a formative assessment created in Google docs.

**Norms**

- Positive attitude
- Collaborative spirit
- Focused attention
- All voices heard, all opinions respected
- Limit sidebar conversations
- Put away technology

| Agenda                  | 3:00 Revisit norms  
|-------------------------|---------------------|
|                         | Introduction: Mrs. Sims  
|                         | Mrs. Smith: Poverty and Vocabulary Development  
|                         | Mrs. Vicks and Mrs. Lopez: Homework Club  
|                         | Mrs. Long: Google Docs formative assessments  

*Complete the feedback sheet!*

---

**Maplewood Elementary will be**

* a school where ALL students are critically thinking problem solvers who demonstrate perseverance, independence, responsibility, and strong moral character. While ensuring that students feel safe, loved, and excited about school and learning, Maplewood teachers will partner with students and families to close achievement gaps.

**Our mission is to be an exemplary learning community. We build the foundation of this community through meaningful relationships, intentional and engaging learning, clear communication, and a collaborative commitment to coaching students to be valuable contributing members of the global community.**
**Maplewood Elementary will be**

*a school where ALL students are critically thinking problem solvers who demonstrate perseverance, independence, responsibility, and strong moral character. While ensuring that students feel safe, loved, and excited about school and learning, Maplewood teachers will partner with students and families to close achievement gaps.*

---

**Schoolwide PLC: CPR (CELEBRATE – PAUSE – REFLECT)**

**Date:** February 28, 2017  
**Location:** Maplewood Elementary Library  
**Participants:** Certified Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Lena and Ann</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Success Criteria**

Our team will be successful if we leave today with...
- A time to collaborate and reflect;
- A clear picture of our PLC progress and current reality

**Norms**

- Positive attitude  
- Collaborative spirit  
- Focused attention  
- All voices heard, all opinions respected  
- Limit sidebar conversations  
- Put away technology

---

| Agenda | 3:00 Revisit norms  
Table Talk: Share successes in your classroom  
**Celebrate:** Certificates, MAP data, PLC progress  
**Pause:** What is an activity or strategy you’ve been using that has *all* of your students actively learning?  
**Reflect:** Looking forward to next year: What are your top learning priorities?  
4:00 Closing: Reflective Journal Writing |
|--------|------------------|

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## APPENDIX H: GRADE-LEVEL PLC OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence of a shared mission/focus/goals</th>
<th>Evidence of understanding the need to grow/change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of using a structured process for collaborative inquiry as a team (who is learning/who is not/what can we do)</td>
<td>Evidence of honoring shared values and commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the teacher leader</td>
<td>Evidence of reflecting, sharing, changing of instructional practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: GRADE-LEVEL PLC MEETING NOTES TEMPLATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade-Level Team Meeting Notes</th>
<th>Grade-level team:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>In attendance:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time (Start and Stop):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>Purpose/Goal(s) for This Meeting:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Team Norms: All members of the team agree to the following norms, and all members agree to politely hold each other accountable for adhering to the following:

**CHOOSE FROM THE FOLLOWING TOPICS TO GUIDE YOUR TEAM AND RECORD YOUR NOTES ON THE BACK:**

**INSTRUCTION**
- What does high-quality instruction look like? What types of instructional practices are most likely to help students successfully master essential standards?
- How are we ensuring consistently high-quality instructional practices throughout our grade level/school?
  - _____Sharing lesson plans
  - _____Observing each other’s classrooms
  - _____Piloting new resources and evaluating their impact on student learning

**CONTENT**
- What are the essential standards that students must acquire to be successful at this grade level and in future grades?
  - _____Defining essential standards by quarter/unit.
  - _____Reviewing essential standards from previous or next grades.
  - _____Reviewing curriculum maps
  - _____Identifying content and standards that are most problematic for students

**ASSESSMENT**
- How are we assessing students’ mastery of essential standards? How are we ensuring consistent assessment practices throughout our grade level/school?
  - _____Developing a common assessment
  - _____Reviewing assessments/questions across classes
  - _____Sharing and analyzing common assessment data

**INTERVENTION and ENRICHMENT**
- How are we, as a grade level, supporting students who do not initially master essential standards? How are we, as a grade level, challenging students who easily and quickly master essential standards?
  - _____Developing intervention lesson plans
  - _____Creating lists of students in need of interventions or enrichment
### Team Meeting Notes

**Analyzing individual assessment items from benchmark assessments**
- Analyzing student assessment data
- Developing data-analysis tools
- Identifying patterns in student assessment data in common assessments

**Identifying patterns in student assessment data in common assessments**

**Grading**

*How do our grading practices reflect mastery of essential standards, ensure consistency across our grade levels, and ensure a logical progression of rigor from grade to grade?*

- Reviewing graded student work samples from previous grades
- Sharing and analyzing graded student work
- Sharing and analyzing quarterly grading distributions

**Note-taker:**
REFERENCES


VITA
Ann Elizabeth Ingram

EDUCATION

University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
Principal Certification, 2012 – 2015

Georgetown College, Georgetown, KY
Gifted Education Endorsement, 2007 – 2009

Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, TN
MEd, Curriculum and Instruction, 2002 – 2003

University of North Alabama, Florence, AL
BS, Major in Psychology, minor in Chemistry, 1994 – 1996

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2007 – Present  Maplewood Elementary School, Lexington, KY
2014 – 2015  • Assistant Principal and Teacher Professional Growth and Effectiveness System Coach (TPGES)
2007 – 2014  • Grade 4 Teacher, Gifted and Talents Students
• Building Assessment Coordinator (BAC)
• Program Review Coordinator, Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP)

2004-2005  Meadowthorpe Elementary School, Lexington, KY
• Teacher, Grade 2-3

2003-2004  Chester County Middle School, Henderson, TN
• Teacher, Grade 5, Language Arts and Social Studies

LEADERSHIP

Coordinator Extended School Services (ESS), Maplewood Elementary (2012 – 2014)
Member, Principal’s Advisory Council, Maplewood Elementary (PAC) (2012 – 2015)
Recipient, Kentucky Association of School Administrators Scholarship (2013)
Teacher Representative, School-Based Decision Making Council, Maplewood Elementary (2009 – 2013)
Member, Fayette County Gifted and Talented Advisory Council (2012 – 2016)
Resource Teacher and Mentor, Kentucky Teacher Internship Program (2012 – 2016)
Academic Challenge Coordinator, One Community One Voice (2008 – 2012)