The Perceived Effect on Teaching and Learning through the development of a Professional Learning Community for staff teaching English Language Learners

Author: Oscar Santos

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BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Department of
Education

Educational Administration

**THE PERCEIVED EFFECT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING THROUGH
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR
STAFF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

Dissertation
by

OSCAR SANTOS

submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted within a small urban high school that exclusively serves English Language Learners in the northeastern United States. The purpose of the study was to determine teachers' perceptions of learning from each other, student learning and school wide collaboration as a result of the implementation of a Professional Learning Community as a means of improving instruction.

The body of related literature provided the theoretical rationale for the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Major sections of the literature review included: the definition and elements that make up a Professional Learning Community, a review of the theoretical and recent research concerning best practices to support English Language Learners and a review of the research regarding teacher collaboration. Data were gathered from six participants through pre and post interviews, journal entries throughout the year of the study, field notes from announced and announced visits and teacher made documents collected throughout the year of the study. Key findings included participants' perceptions that: they learned both practical and adaptive skills from their colleagues, that peer observation aided teachers in improving their practice, that student learning and student motivation increased, that participants felt that they made stronger relationships with students and that collaboration increased as a result of the implementation of the Professional Learning Community.

Current research asserts that schools that implement purposeful and well planned

Professional Learning Communities that provide time, space and training may foster teacher ownership that can be used as a powerful vehicle for improving teaching and learning and school wide collaboration. The study findings affirmed this.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: Lea, Jackson and Sofia. Thank you for your support and love. To my siblings: Jesus, Idaliz, Zunilda and Jennie for teaching me the true meaning of teamwork, to my mother for sacrificing every thing to give me the opportunity to learn and to my teachers: Ginny Dunn and Mirta Torres; thank you for believing in me. Finally, I dedicate this work to all the wonderful teachers and students that I have had the pleasure to teach and learn from throughout my career.

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Chapter One

Overview of the Study

Introduction

The current demographic shift of public schools in the United States has resulted in an opportunity and a challenge to do school differently in order to meet the needs of our diverse student populations. One of the fastest growing changes in public education in the United States today is the emerging populations of students from many different countries who come to the United States public schools with very little or no English (Hurley, 2003). This group of students is identified as English Language Learners.

The number of newly arrived immigrant students has been increasing at a rapid rate in the last twenty years (Jamieso, Curry and Martinez, 1999). While it is very difficult to have an accurate number on the number of ELL students in the country, recent data from the Office of English Language Acquisition (OLEA) of the US Dept. of Education indicate that nationwide in the 1999-2000 school year approximately 4.4 million school children K-12 were designated as English Language Learners. According to OLEA, the number could be much larger because many states use different ways to identify and account for newly arrived students that speak very little or no English. Recent data indicates that the number of ELL students has grown nearly 105% since 1989 while the growth of mainstream students since the same time has grown at a very slow rate of 15% (National Clearinghouse for ELL, 2002).

The unique challenges and opportunities that English Language Learners present to school systems are vast and multi-faceted. English Language learners enter schools at

various different grade levels. The range of backgrounds of English learners in upper elementary, middle, and secondary schools is phenomenal and seldom recognized. Unfortunately, programs designed to help these students are often based on the assumption that all the students are alike (Freeman and Freeman, 2002). This has an even greater impact at the high school level, as the impact of older ELL students on US schools continues to grow. High schools across the country find the challenges of educating ELL to be more pressing than middle and elementary schools because high schools have less time to meet the challenges and close the linguistic and educational gaps that many ELL present (Fleischman and Hopstock,1993).

On the other hand, having an infusion of diversity in languages, cultures and perspectives that English Language Learners present to school peers at all ages across the United States is an excellent opportunity to foster and create intentional multicultural exchanges that enrich and prepare students for life in this more interdependent world of the 21st century. The infusion of ELL students provides this opportunity to schools across the United States. This is an opportunity that the United States can seize to support the rapid changes of the new global and interdependent economy of the 21st century (Freidman, 2005).

The idea that newly arrived immigrants primarily establish roots in major cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles and remain there for extended periods of time is no longer the case. English Language Learners are the fastest growing population of students across the United States. Since 1990, the number of children from immigrant families has grown seven times faster than that of their counterparts from U.S. born families (Teaching Immigrant and Second language students, 2004). ELL populations in

more traditionally homogenous places, such as states like Indiana, Nebraska, and Minnesota, have experienced some of the highest percentages of newly arrived students in their school districts. Many of these states have had historically low immigration rates and, as a result, they have little institutional infrastructure to accommodate the recent influxes of newcomer families (New Gen, 2002).

Since English Language Learners encompass such a broad range of students from different countries, different social classes and different schooling experiences, schools have had a hard time identifying student needs and student placement. Research supports the fact that oral language tests fail to measure students' ability to read and write. In these cases, research supports that assessments should include more holistic approaches to determine student strengths and weaknesses such as information from the teachers, information from parents, and evaluation of records and appraisal of student's academic level (Carasquilo and Rodriguez, 1999).

The initial assessment process, if there is one, is further complicated by the fact that many of the newly arrived students do not have the social capital and family support systems to help them understand and acclimate to a new way of life (Collins, 1989). Children from immigrant families are more likely than their peers to live in poverty, to be behind in grade level, and to live in overcrowded housing (New Gen, 2002).

Many schools across the country are not specifically designed to meet the needs of students who are new to the country. Some of the challenges to better serve and prepare students for life beyond high school and productive citizenship are the lack of programs; support networks to help families and students, and the lack of properly certified and

trained teachers to meet the needs of the newly arrived students. These challenges pose an educational and societal challenge for the country.

In 2004, the national high school drop rate for all students was 10.3% (United States Department of Education, 2006a). The percentage of English Language Learners that did not complete high school was over 40% (OLEA and New Gen, 2004). The disproportional high number of English Language Learners leaving school without a high school diploma is further evidence that different educational approaches must be taken to address the challenges that this diverse student population presents to public education in the United States.

Schools across the nation that continue to operate in a very traditional manner face the challenges that DuFour and Eaker (1998) describe as a factory model which is "woefully inadequate for meeting the national education goals of today's goals that call for all students to master rigorous content, learn how to learn, pursue productive employment and compete in a global economy" (p. 83). They argue that schools must embrace a new "conceptual model to meet the challenges of education today" (p. 83).

The challenge of educating ELL students for the 21st century economy is further complicated by the fact that as a country we have not been able to meet the challenge of getting students to succeed on a broader scale in our public schools with students who are born and raised in the United States (Ferguson, Howard et. al., 2004). Now we are presented with the challenge and the opportunity of meeting these goals for a diverse group of students who are entering our public schools at such an increasingly fast rate that it is changing the landscape of America. These figures and facts create a backdrop

against which Freire International High School's Professional Learning Community can be viewed and possible solutions can be created.

Site of the Study

The Charleston Public Schools is a PreK-12 school system located in a metropolitan urban setting in Barrington County. Charleston is a historic city with a population of almost over 600,000 people. According to the 2000 United States Census, Charleston is a minority-majority city. The demographic make up of the community consists of 47% White-non-Hispanic, 24% African American, 17% Hispanic, 8% Asian, 1% Native American and 3% other. The median income of a family in Charleston in 2000 was $44, 200, which is much less than the average family income for the rest of the state, which is $78,000 for a family.

Charleston is divided into thirteen boroughs. The school district is comprised of four zones: East, West, North and South. Each zone has a deputy superintendent and an assistant superintendent. The deputy and assistant deputies are responsible for overseeing 35-40 PreK-12 schools. The district high schools are magnet schools. There are thirty district high schools that differ in size and admission process. There are some exam schools that are open to all middle schools students as well as many schools within schools with a specific career focus such as engineering, business, social justice and public service.

Charleston Public Schools has a student body of approximately 56,000 students. The enrollment by school levels and populations of each level is represented in Table 1.

Table 1.1 Charleston Public Schools Enrollment Breakdown

Schools	Population
10 (K0-K2)	4,912
60 (K-5), 20(K-8)	25,082
30 (9-12)	19,742
20 (K-12 special schools)*	5,551

*Specialty schools include schools specifically designed for alternative education, special education, exam schools, and international schools.

The population of students serviced in the Charleston Public Schools (Table 2) is heavily made up of minority students. Although 47% of the population of school aged children in the Charleston Public Schools are White-Non Hispanic according to the 2000 United States Census, only 15% of White-Non Hispanic students made up the student population. In addition to this, 20% of the student population is students with disabilities, 20% of the student population is English Language Learners, and 70% of Charleston Public Schools students are eligible to receive free and reduced meals (65% free and 5% reduced).

Table 1.2: **Racial/Ethnic Percentages for Charleston Public Schools students**

Race of Students	Percentage
African American	40%
Hispanic	30%
White	15%
Asian	08%
Other	07%

Although the majority of students in the Charleston Public Schools are from many diverse backgrounds, the majority of teachers in the Charleston Public Schools are white. Table 3 represents a huge discrepancy in the representation of minority teachers (40%) to the population of minority students (85%).

Table 1.3 **Racial/Ethnic Percentages for Charleston Public Schools teachers:**

Race of teachers	Percentage
African American	25%
White	60%
Hispanic	10%
Asian	05%

The majority of the students that enter high school in Charleston public schools come from the middle schools within the district. Because Charleston is a relatively large city, many students from different states and different countries immigrate to Charleston.

Data from Charleston's 2005 enrollment indicates that 10% of the high school students were new to Charleston public schools. The majority of the students that enter Charleston public schools for the first time as high school students are recently arrived immigrants from various countries.

These countries include: Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cape Verde Islands, China and Vietnam. The five most common languages among these students are: Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese, Cape Verdean Creole and Vietnamese. Table 4 provides the country of origin and number of the newly arrived high school students to the Charleston Public schools in 2005 along with the percentage breakdown that each group represents. The total number of newly arrived students of high school aged English Language Learners was approximately 2500 students.

Table 1.4

English Language Learners in the Charleston Public High Schools in 2005 by country of origin, number of students and percentage breakdown

Country of Origin	Number of Students	Percentage of ELL High School Population for the District
Dominican Republic	682	28%
China	165	5%
Vietnam	236	9%
Haiti	181	7%

Cape Verdean Creole	204	8%
Guatemala	122	5%
Honduras	87	3%
El Salvador	131	6%
Albania	68	2%
Ethiopia	53	2%
Somalia	76	4%
*Other(Iraq, Kurdistan, Cameroon, Guinea, Burkina Fasao, Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Mexico, Egypt, etc)	495	21%

*Students from these countries comprise 1% or less of the ELL population to the Charleston public schools in 2005.

Focus of the Study

Paolo Freire High School is a small inner city high school that was specifically designed to meet the needs of English Language Learners. The school, which was originally opened as a program in 2003 to "teach students English" so that they could transition into a "regular" high school setting was converted into a full diploma granting four year high school in 2004. This change came about as a result of new leadership and support from the school district as they embraced the challenge of the rapidly growing number of ELL students to the district. Freire International is the only public school in the district that is specifically designed to meet the needs of 100% ELL students.

Freire truly is an international school. It is a small high school with a total student population of 200 students from 45 different countries and with 23 different languages. In many ways, the student needs are just as diverse and extensive as the student population. Some students come to the school with low literacy in their native languages, others come with high literacy and very little English, and others come with low literacy in their native language and very little to no English.

Although the population and the student needs at Freire High were very different from many of the district's other high schools, Freire High had been structured in a very similar fashion to other district high schools. This traditional model operated in a manner in which content area teachers were organized together with little to no communication with other subject area teachers and where there was very little collaboration in terms of looking at student work and sharing of practices. There had been an absence of content-based team sharing and cross-curricular sharing practices and there had been an absence of targeted content based sheltered English Instruction resulting in less than desirable student learning for students at Freire High School.

As a result of this perceived problem, Freire High School had gone through a redesigning process of creating a Professional Learning Community that focused on shared vision, collective inquiry, collaboration, experimentation, continuous improvement and results orientation to create a learning organization that was more interdependent and student centered. The high school redesign was shaped by the formation of a professional learning community in which teachers worked together to share curricula, instructional practices and common students. The redesign was spearheaded by the formation of a house system; wherein a group of interdisciplinary

content area teachers were provided with daily time and support built into the school day to share practices, plan curricula and look at student data for a cohort of common students to support teaching and learning in a more interdependent manner. The redesign also provided time for content area teaches to meet on a regular basis to align and support content alignment among the houses. This team-based approach of alignment and professional learning was the engine that guided the accommodations to meet the needs of a diverse, untraditional student body. Thus, the house system served as a vehicle to support the emergence of a Professional Learning Community to help redefine the way this school met the needs of a very untraditional student body.

Some of the Professional Development that was offered at the school to support the emergence of an authentic Professional Learning Community were: on going workshops on team building to help build trust and communication among teachers, professional support from an outside consultant to help create a shared vision and mission and a covenant for the school, ongoing workshops on best practices for English Language Learners such as: Accountable Talk, providing more explicit directions to scaffold instruction, looking at student work to inform teaching practices, reading in the content areas and differentiated instruction to prepare lesson plans that focused on oral development and academic language development. The Professional Development was made available to all staff. The headmaster, outside consultants, teacher leaders, district personnel and the enrollment of classes and workshops were all part of the Professional Development that was and continues to be in place to support the growth of this Professional Learning Community.

In addition to the formation of a Professional Learning Community the school was redesigned into a house system. Through the house system, teachers were provided with time every day to plan lessons, analyze data, plan field trips and other learning activities that extended beyond the classroom such as looking at student data and student work to inform their practice. In addition to the daily PLC planning time, staff came together once a month to work as content PLC teams and came together once a month as a whole staff for school wide Professional Development. This house structure also provided opportunities for teachers to visit each other on a rotating schedule so that they could reconvene and provide each other with feedback on their teaching practice on a regular basis.

The house system at Freire International was composed of three houses. The primary focus of House I was to establish a strong foundation for newly arrived students through targeted sheltered instruction and intentional social and emotional support. This was done through intentional socialization of schooling. It also provided a strong academic foundation to support academic language development and engagement of parents. House II built on much of the work that took place in House I. In addition to this, House II focused on preparing students for more rigorous instruction and preparation for standardized and state testing such as MEPA and MCAS. The Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) is a language test that all ELL students must take every year to determine language proficiency. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System is a state test that all students must pass in order to receive a high school diploma. The MCAS test is administered in English and it measures understanding of Math and English. House III students remained in the same house for two years. This was done

intentionally so that teachers could work longer to help prepare students for life beyond high school and post secondary education. House III students are older and thus have some of the same challenges as House I and II students which are further complicated with the acclimation process of moving from being a new comer to transitioning to being a more mainstream student.

While the needs of each house were different, they were also the same because they built on each other. The Professional Development to support the emergence of a Professional Learning Community was made available to all teachers. The best practices to support the acquisition of academic language development such as Accountable Talk, providing directions, reading in the content areas, looking at student work protocols, leveled questioning, writing in the content areas and oral production were provided with a continuum in mind to help support all teachers.

With the extensive research on Professional learning Communities, this study focused on the premise that getting teachers to work interdependently could increase the possibility of meeting the needs of this diverse population. This redesign could come about if teachers, administration, and the greater community were able to increase their ability to work together as a learning organization wherein the team learning enhanced the learning for the whole (Senge, 1994). In order for this to succeed, it required a paradigm shift in terms of collaboration, instruction, redesigning of structures, and persistence. The project aimed to help the school serve as a change agent by developing the skills and capacity of teachers to address the challenges that the diverse student population exhibited.

Besides looking at the importance of building professional learning communities to support ELL students, this study also examined the importance of school structures and redesigns, which in this case were done through the house system to address the challenge of doing school differently for a diverse group of students. This study did not only serve to help guide and understand what are the elements that may help teachers work more interdependently to meet the needs of students; it may have also shed light on the challenges which may impair academic success for ELL students.

As part of the implementation project, teachers worked more closely together, shared common practices and curricula, and looked at student and teacher work more critically. In essence the school attempted to create and sustain a stronger professional learning community that supported teaching and learning for students and teachers. If this was done well, ultimately, student attendance, engagement, academic achievement, and learning would increase. This interdependent approach was supported through the implementation of a PLC. The PLC was designed to provide explicit opportunities for growth for teachers to share curricula, assessments and practices to improve teaching and learning for adults and students.

Significance of the Project

There are a number of reasons why it is imperative that educators across the country work to address the challenges and opportunities that the growing number of English Language Learners present to the United States public education system. If education is the means to a better life, "education must serve as the potential equalizer for the under served children of our society" (Fullan, 2004, p. 3). English Language Learners across

the United States are one of the most underserved populations in the United States. As mentioned earlier, many English Language Learners come from homes with high degrees of poverty, low family literacy rates, and lack of social capital. This challenge is further coupled by the fact that ELL students have linguistic challenges that schools across the country have not addressed successfully. Some of these challenges are the lack of programs and lack of highly trained teachers to meet the social, academic, and emotional needs of this growing population. This having been established, "A high quality public school system is essential, not only for parents who send their children to these schools but also for the public good as a whole" (Fullan, 2004, p. 3).

With the demographic shift that is taking place in the United States, what it means to be an American is becoming a more complicated question to answer. School aged English Language Learners are enrolling in public schools across the country at seven times the rate of U.S. born children. In the near future, if this trend continues to persist and the underachievement of ELL students continues to increase, this achievement gap will have adverse effects on the entire country as underperforming students will compose the numeric majority in America (Howard, 2005; Ferguson, 2005).

This nation cannot continue as a global economic powerhouse if the preponderance of its citizens and workforce are undereducated. In addition to the economic challenges that the underachievement of English Language Learners posses to the country, the greater challenge is providing opportunities for English Language Learners to become responsible, informed citizens. If we strive to be a moral and responsible country, this must take place through educating all students so that they can be productive citizens for their times (Starratt, 2004).

The challenge of educating and preparing newly arrived immigrants for productive citizenship is something that has taken place quite unevenly through the history of American public education. The challenge that this current wave of newly arrived students presents to our public schools is that we now operate in a highly technical and more advanced society. The factory style education of the 1900's is not relevant to the current economic reality of the developed world. This concept is best explained by economist and best selling author, Thomas Friedman, who describes our current economy as "flattened" (Friedman, 2005). In the "flat" world, English Language Learners who have not had a strong academic foundation will not be able to participate. Students need academic and thinking skills that allow them to participate in this fast paced global marketplace that is increasingly connected, information-based, and competitive (Friedman, 2005).

The teaching profession has been one of the most autonomous professions in organized work. In fact, for the longest time there has been an ongoing debate whether teaching is a profession or a vocation (Tomlinson, 2003). American Public Schools were originally designed according to the concepts and principles of the factory model of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). This having been established, for the longest time our education system has operated in a very independent linear factory model approach where teachers impart knowledge to students but seldom do they have the time, opportunities or capacity to teach and learn from each other (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, 2004).

The fact that many teachers have not been trained and/or socialized to view schools through this lens is a strong indicator that this is not the direction that schools have gone.

The other major challenge to this view on education has been challenged by the accountability and high stakes testing of present day schooling. This having been established, "if schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff" (Newman & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37).

In recent years there has been a strong movement toward the concept of Professional Learning Communities to help move schools forward. This move has helped teachers learn how to learn from each other by making their practice more public through the encouragement and fostering of a culture of sharing successes and challenges. Through effective PLC's teachers are able to share best practices, visit each other, look at student work, and genuinely learn from one another (Little, 1994; Barth, 1991; Fullan, 2003).

Thus the significance of this project is that it used structures and directions currently being promoted as educational best practices and applied them within an ELL school environment for the purpose of improving models for effective ELL education. This recent phenomena of using schools as a place of learning for adults to help improve teaching and learning has come about through effective leadership in schools and through the necessity of teachers having to work more closely together to meet the multiplicity of demands that are placed on students and teachers.

Significance of the Study

This study measured perceptions of the effect and impact that the school redesign and the development of Professional Learning Communities had on perceptions of teacher growth in their ability to learn from each other. The study also measured teacher perception of student learning of academic language and content learning. The study also measured teacher perception of teacher collaboration as a result of the emergence of a Professional Learning Community. Thus the significance of this study was significant.

Theoretical Rationale

The major topics that were researched to support this study were: the concepts of shaping and viewing schools as professional learning communities; best practices to support acquisition of academic language for English Language Learners; and the structural aspects of school redesign that help foster and sustain collaboration in schools.

The increased demands of high stakes testing and accountability have pushed educators and schools to work more interdependently. In describing effective schools Newman, King, and Youngs (2002) place a strong emphasis on school capacity through professional learning as the key to success. They believe that "the knowledge, skills and dispositions of individual teachers are obviously important and can make a difference in individual classrooms" (2002, p. 95). Little (1999) makes the point that individual teachers cannot do enough to provide academic success for students. The impact in academic success for schools truly occurs when the organization changes as a whole and not simply through individual efforts. As a result, the training of individuals or small teams is not enough. For this reason schools must create school wide professional

learning communities (Fullan, 1995; DuFour & Eaker, 2004). This school wide explicit and intentional approach to ensure that the organization as a whole moved forward was essential in the development and the sustainability of effective schooling for students and teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The formation of professional learning communities is one of the most purposeful and encompassing approaches to create a paradigm shift that impacts organizational growth from within the organization (DuFour & Eaker, 1995; Fullan, 1999; Covey, 1989; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Little, 1994). Covey suggests that the best way to initiate this process is "to begin with the end in mind by describing, articulating and being clear about the characteristics of a professional learning community, the conduct and habits of mind of the people who work in it and its day to day functioning" (1989, p. 95). The clarity and explicitness about the characteristics and habits that make a professional learning organization allows the people in the organization to institutionalize "the way we do things here" as the norm for the organization. Through authentic professional learning communities, "the way we do things here" mindset fosters a culture of collaboration that provides more opportunities for greater success for any organization.

The concept of professional learning communities in the context of Freire High School was also supported by a plethora of literature, best practices and research on instructional models and practices that support the acquisition of academic language for English Language Learners.

Jim Cummins' (1981, 2000) extensive research on language development provides in depth understanding and insight on the different languages that ELL learn and the roles that schools play in developing and in some cases hampering academic language

development. Cummins describes these languages as BICS (Basic Interpersonal, Communicative Skills) or conversational language and CALPS (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) or academic language. BICS does not require a great deal of sophistication in language development and CALPS or academic language requires higher order language development and sophistication. Cummins and Collier's (1989) research shows that it takes English Language Learners much longer to acquire academic language than conversational language.

Since the majority of ELL do not have the social capital to have had exposure to academic language in their native language and in the target language, it makes it harder for ELL students to acquire academic language (Cummins, 1981, 2000). Collier and Thomas (1997) conducted extensive research on over 700,000 language minority students and as a result of the research identified that the three most important predictors in students gaining academic proficiency are:

1. Using cognitively complex academic instruction in students' first language for as long as possible as well as in the target language.
2. Using current approaches to teaching, including cooperative learning groups studying thematic units to teach the academic curriculum through two languages,
3. Changing the social cultural context of schools to value students' cultures and languages and to create a warm, safe, supportive learning environment (p. 62).

Gerten and Jimenez' (1994) research concluded "that effective instruction for language minority students challenges students, encourages their involvement, provides them with opportunities for success, and includes scaffolding with a variety of graphic organizers to draw on their background knowledge and give them access to content" (p. 87). In addition to high quality effective instruction to support acquisition of academic language, Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) conclude that students' perceptions of themselves

as confident learners comes through adult behaviors and expectations which is accomplished through "professional development and advocacy communication and action in which teachers must be involved in ongoing sustained professional development that encourages both collaboration and individual reflection" (p. 32).

Before schools can begin to reap the benefits of "joint work," where teachers can "develop the capacities to pose tough questions, challenge assumptions, and even disagree openly over matters of practice while cultivating trust and mutual respect" (Little, 2003, p. 4), there needs to be an explicit intentional plan, systems, and structures that enable this type of learning to take place on a regular basis. Little (1999) argues that in order for authentic learning communities to exist, schools must "organize time, teaching responsibilities, and other aspects of teachers' work in ways that demonstrably enhance opportunities for teacher learning, both inside and outside the school" (Little, p. 235).

Research supports the fact that "traditional arrangements of 'cellular' classrooms, individualized teaching assignments, and occupational norms of personal autonomy tend to obscure both the commonalities and differences among teachers and to place structural and cultural constraints on teacher communication" (Little, 1999, p. 238-39). Redesigning schools to counter a culture of independence presents a leadership challenge that is challenging to take on. The benefits of providing structures such as small schools, houses, teams, and other school within school arrangements give teachers the opportunities to have a common basis for discussion, planning, assistance, assessment and greater opportunity for teacher growth (Little, 1999, 2003).

The rapid demographic shift that has been taking place throughout schools in the United States as a result of the infusion of English Language Learners is an excellent opportunity to merge the ideas of professional learning communities with the fastest growing and, in many cases, the hardest to reach population of students in the United States. The concept of professional learning communities has gathered a great deal of traction as one of the most powerful ways to move schools forward (DuFour, & Eaker; 1998, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Fullan, 1993, 1997; Little, 2003). Freire High School presented the opportunity to use the model of a professional learning community with a target population that exclusively served English Language Learners to impact teaching and learning for all.

Design of the Study

This study was designed as a qualitative case study that evaluated how the implementation of a school-wide redesign through the emergence of Professional Learning Community at Freire High School contributed to the enhancement of collaboration and best practices for a school that exclusively served English Language Learners.

The case study was used because of the potential that this study had to "help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or objective" (Abramson, 1992, p.190 cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 33). In addition to this, "for teaching purposes, a case study need

not contain a complete or accurate rendition of actual events, rather the purpose is to establish a framework for discussion and debate" (Yin, 1994, p. 2).

The data collection methods utilized in this qualitative study included interviews, journals, and field notes of observations. Pre and post interviews with participants were used to gain insight into these participants' perceptions of: a) their learning and/or teaching from each other as a result of the implementation of the PLC, b) student's learning as a result of the implementation of the PLC, c) collaboration as a result of the implementation of the PLC. Participants kept additional data from reflective journals. Participants were provided with monthly time during the school day to respond to journal entries about their perceptions of growth, student learning and collaboration. Field notes were taken of announced and unannounced observations of teacher meetings throughout the year of the study with different houses and content teams. Teacher made documents and artifacts were collected. These different data sources provided triangulation to enhance the study's internal validity (Merriam, 1998).

The sample was guided by the fact that the "investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Chein, 1981 p. 52). Teachers from the entire school were presented with an opportunity to participate in the study. As a result of the number of teachers that choose to participate in the study, six teachers were selected as participants for the study.

Research Questions

The major research questions for this study were:

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?

Limitations of the Study:

One of the limitations of the study was that six teachers at Freire International High School served as the participants in the study. As a result, not every teacher's voice and insights were used to inform the analysis.

Another limitation of the study was the time period that the study took. The study was completed in one academic year. The main focus was to capture the teacher's perceptions of how the emergence of a Professional Learning Community supported teacher growth, student learning and school-wide collaboration. Some of these changes may take more time to develop.

Another limitation to the study was that participants had history that encompassed past collaborations and relationships that had been in existence prior to the emergence of a Professional Learning Community. Thus all findings related to the emergence of a Professional Learning Community at Freire International High School could not be solely attributed to the implementation of a Professional Learning Community. Lastly, a final limitation may have been the potential for bias that the researcher may have brought to the study. The researcher was the headmaster at the study sight and person that initiated the implementation of the professional learning community.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap: Gap between Latino and African American students and their white peers which is highlighted through examinations of standardized test scores, grades, educational attainment and drop out rates

Academic Language: Language used in formal contexts for academic subjects.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS): Face to face conversational fluency, including mastery of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP): Language proficiency associated with schooling, and the abstract language abilities required for academic work.

Content -Based ESL: An instructional approach in which content topics are used as the vehicle for second language learning.

English Language Development (ELD): Stages of language development often used to identity learning

English Language Learners (ELL): Children or adults who are learning English as a second or additional language

ESL: English as a second language. Used to refer to programs and classes to teach students English as a second (additional) language

Home language: The language or languages spoken in the student's home by people who live there.

House system: System of schooling where common teachers are organized to serve a cohort of common students through a scholastic experience

L1: First language. A widely used abbreviation for the primary, home or native language.

Language minority: In the United States, a student whose primary language is not English.

Language proficiency: An individual's competence in using a language for basic communication and for academic purposes.

Limited English Proficient (LEP): A term used to refer to a student with restricted understanding or use of written and spoken English.

Native language: An individual's first, primary, or home language.

Professional Learning Community (PLC): Community or team of individuals with common goals and values working together, sharing learning to accomplish the set goal(s).

Sheltered instruction (SI): An approach to teaching that extends the time that students have for receiving English language support while they learn content subjects.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The challenge of educating English Language Learners impacts the entire United States public education system. English Language Learners are the fastest growing population of students in the United States (New Gen. 2002). Despite the fact that this is the fastest growing group of students across the country, we have not been able to address the achievement gaps that exist between English Language Learners and mainstream students. One of the reasons why this gap exits and continues to grow is because in many ways we have not come to terms with the fact that English Language Learners are not a homogeneous group of students (Freeman and Freeman 2002). This diverse and large group of students requires an education that supports the acquisition of language and content in a seamless manner. This type of instruction can not be achieved through a one size fits all approach to learning.

Another reason why this achievement gap between English Language Learners and mainstream students exists is because of the shortage of high quality trained teachers (Walqui, 2000). Because teachers have not received the proper training to address the needs of ELL and because schools are not accustomed to working interdependently to address student learning, this gap continues to grow. Despite these facts, there are structures and practices that can help minimize the challenges that many English Language Learners face on a daily basis. One way to help address this challenge is

through the formation of professional learning communities in which explicit collaboration and the implementation of best practices in working with English Language Learners is examined in a continuous and supportive manner.

Despite the fact that English Language Learners, as a whole, lag behind mainstream students in achieving academic language development and school achievement, the implementation of authentic professional learning communities, collaborative teams, and the consistent implantation of best practices are ways to support students to acquire academic language and achieve higher success in school. This study sought to identify how the elements of a professional learning community, teacher collaboration and the implementation of best practices can address these challenges. Through the formation of a PLC a cohort of the same teachers worked with a cohort of the same students to establish a professional learning community that was based on enhancing collaboration and best practices to address the challenges that many ELL encounter in their schooling experiences.

In order to address the challenge that this rapidly increasing population presents, it is essential for schools to re-examine practices and beliefs to help create a paradigm shift to help meet the needs of linguistically challenged students. Schools have to work more interdependently to identify best practices to support ELL students. Research has shown that the best way to get schools to work more effectively with all students is through the formation of authentic learning communities in which collaboration and best practices drive teaching and learning (Little, 1994).

With this in mind, it was imperative to study how a school that was exclusively designed to serve 100% ELL could use the formation of a professional learning

community, collaboration and best practices to view perceptions of teacher practices and beliefs in teaching and learning for students and themselves. Thus, this chapter provides a review of the literature to its three major research themes: professional learning communities, collaboration and best practices for English Language Learners.

Professional Learning Communities

Defining a Professional Learning Community

Social science literature provides a variety of definitions as to what is considered a "professional learning community". DuFour and Eaker (1998) make it explicit that before one is able to identify a professional learning community, it is essential to be explicit about what is a professional. According to DuFour and Eaker, "A professional is someone with the expertise in a field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base" (p.XI-XII).

DuFour and Eaker go on to further define learning "as an ongoing action and perpetual curiosity" (p XIII.). In their explanation of learning, they refer to the Chinese, who define learning through the representation of two characters: the first means "to study" and the second means "to practice constantly". They caution that many schools operate as though their personnel know everything they will need to know the day they enter the profession. This is not the case with schools that function as professional learning communities. Schools that operate as professional learning communities recognize that its members must engage in the ongoing study and constant practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement.

Researchers outside and inside the field of education offer many similar perspectives on the power of professional learning communities as the best path to organizational improvement. This sentiment is echoed by Covey (1996) when he states, "Only organizations that have a passion for learning will have enduring influence (p.149). Drucker (1992) states, "Every enterprise has to become a learning institution [and] a teaching institution; organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the twenty-first century" (p.108). Fullan, (1993) articulates, "the new problem of change, is what would it take to make the educational system a learning organization--expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work, not just in relation to a new policy, but as a way of life" (p.4). Newmann & Wehlage (1995) add to the understanding of professional learning community by expressing, "If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional learning community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff (p.37). Darling-Hammond (1996) makes explicit references to the fact that in order for schools to be successful "schools must be restructured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching and teach for understanding" (p.198).

With such resounding support for the creation of learning communities to help guide the work of school and organizational improvement it is essential to be able to describe the characteristics of a professional learning community, the conduct and habits of mind of the people who work within it, and its day-to-day functioning. Covey (1989)

contends that the best way to articulate a successful process for building and creating

something new "is to begin with the end in mind" (p.95).

With such an urgent emphasis on the importance of making schools more

interdependent to meet the multiplicity of challenges that schools face on a daily basis, it

was essential to clearly articulate the elements that constitute a professional learning

community. In 1997, Shirley Hord coined the phrase "professional learning community"

in her research of the literature in which she described these communities as having five

characteristics:

1. Supportive and shared leadership

2. Shared values and vision

3. Collective learning and application

4. Shared personal practice

5. Supportive conditions

The US DOE (2000) similarly synthesized the research and created a criterion for

excellent schools, capturing the essence of professional learning communities in six

principles:

1. Common mission, vision, values, and goals

2. Ensuring achievement for *all* students; creating systems for prevention and intervention

3. Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning

4. Using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement

5. Gaining active engagement from family and community

6. Building sustainable leadership capacity (p. 56)

DuFour and Eaker (1998, 2004), based on their extensive work with schools also described the elements that constitute a professional learning community:

1. Shared Vision, Mission and Values

2. Collective Inquiry

3. Collaborative Teams

4. Action orientation and experimentation

5. Continuous improvement

6. Results orientation

Having provided a review of the elements that constitute a professional learning community, it is relevant to review the collective characteristics of a professional learning community from multiple resources within this review of the literature.

Shared Vision and Values

Senge (1994) articulates that organizations and communities that want to excel and address challenges in a successful manner must create a sense of shared vision. Senge goes on to articulate, "When there is a genuine vision, (as opposed to a vision statement) people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to" (p.9). As a result of an authentic shared vision "teams truly learn and not only are they producing extraordinary results, but the individuals are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise" (p.10). The idea of professional learning communities is set on the reality that "team learning is vital because teams, not individuals are the fundamental learning unit in modern organizations. It is where the rubber hits the road; unless teams can learn, the organization cannot learn" (p.11).

In the process of establishing a professional learning community where the mission and values of the community are clearly articulated, DuFour and Eaker (1998, 2004) challenge communities to begin with these essential questions:

- Why do we exist?

- What are we here to do together?

- What is the business of our business? (p.58)

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) further stress that "successful schools are places in which teachers pursue a clear shared purpose for all students' learning "(p.30). In order to authentically achieve that common purpose where all students are learning it is essential for schools to be able to answer the following questions: "What is it we expect our students to learn? How will we fulfill our collective responsibility that this learning takes place for all students?" (p.35). When communities can begin to answer questions such as these, they are well on their way to establishing a shared understanding that professional learning communities have.

In the process of moving towards a stronger understanding of the importance of a clear vision to establish a professional learning community, Kotter (1996) adds that vision is "essential to a successful change process" (p.68). Senge (1990) contends "you cannot have a learning organization without shared vision" (p.209). The importance of shared vision having been established as an essential element to create professional learning community, Smith (1994) provides five scenarios for implementing a vision within organizations:

1. Telling: which entails an announcement of what the vision is;

2. Selling: which entails the process of attempting to sell people of what the vision is;

3. Testing: which entails checking to see if what was said and sold is taking place;

4. Consulting: which entails touching base with others to see if what has been said, sold and tested is taking place, and;

5. Co-creating: which entails a collective process of making meaning of the vision together.

This process entails, "the boss and the members of the organization, through a collaborative process, building a shared vision together" (Senge et al., 1994, p.314). In order for this co-construction of vision to take place members must be in an environment "where it is safe for people to create visions, where inquiry and commitment to the truth are the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected- especially when the status quo includes observing aspects of the current reality people seek to avoid" (Senge, 1994, p.162). In the process of co-constructing a vision it is essential that others create their own vision. Senge warns leaders to keep in mind that "the vision of the leader is not the vision of the organization" (p.200). If an organization is to reach a shared vision there needs to be space and time to "co-construct" the shared vision.

Once schools have "co-constructed" a shared vision it is essential that they identify the elements that will make that shared vision a reality. Lezotte (1997) articulates the characteristics of effective schools that function as professional learning communities. These schools have:

- Safe and orderly environment

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- Climate of high expectations for success

- Instructional leadership

- Clear and focused mission

- Opportunity to learn and student time on task

- Frequent monitoring of student learning

- Effective Home school relations (p.71)

In addition to articulating the steps and conditions that must be present to establish a shared vision to build a professional learning community it is equally important to address why it is important to have a shared vision. DuFour and Eaker (1998) put forth these reasons to identify the importance of a shared vision:

1. Shared vision motivates and energizes everyone

2. Shared vision creates proactive orientation

3. shared vision gives direction to people in the organization

4. shared vision establishes specific standards of excellence

5. Shared vision creates a clear agenda for action (p.84)

The production of a shared vision is a first step in operating towards a professional learning community. A shared vision becomes a reality when the values of the vision are evident in the behaviors that the members of the community enact on a consistent manner Senge (1994). Senge further makes this explicit by stating, "values are best described in terms of behavior: If we operate as we should, what would an observer see us doing?" (p.302). Thus observable behaviors become the driving force for the values of the community. Deal, Kennedy, Peters and Waterman (1982) articulate that the most important structural element in any organization is the formation of clear values to drive

the stated goals. Louis, Kruse, & Marks (1996) believe that "clear shared values and norms, collectively reinforces and increases the likelihood of teacher success" (pg.181). Through the creation of shared vision professional learning communities can then begin the process of collective inquiry (DuFour and Eaker, 1998, 2004).

Collective inquiry

The review of the literature indicated that authentic professional learning communities work collectively to address challenges and reinforce learning for the organization (Hord, 1997; Fullan, 2003; US Dept. of Education, 2000; Senge, 1994). Ross, Smith and Roberts (1994) refer to the collective inquiry process as "the team learning wheel" which consists of four steps:

Public Reflection: In this step, members of the team talk about their assumptions and beliefs and challenge each other gently but relentlessly

Shared Meaning: In this step, the team arrives at common ground, shared insights

Joint planning: In this step, the team designs action steps, an initiative to test their shared insights

Coordinated Action: In this step, the team caries out the action plan to reach collective success (p.26).

When teams accomplish the coordinated action stage they operate as a learning community. This process allows team members to benefit from what Senge (1994) calls "the deep learning cycle……the essence of a learning organization" (p.18).

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998) the engine of improvement, growth, and renewal in a professional learning community is collective inquiry. Through this sense of

collective inquiry people are able to "question the status quo, seek new methods, test methods, and then reflect on the results" (p.25). Little, Gearhart, Curry, and Kafka, (2003) extend the concept of collective inquiry by grounding this process of collective inquiry through looking at student work. They view this form of collective inquiry as an opportunity to establish a process "to foster teacher learning, support for professional community, and the pursuit of school reform" (p.1).

Through this process of collective inquiry Little, Gearhart, Curry, and Kafka (2003) found that teachers were able to find "A balance between comfort and challenge" (p.4). They further articulated, "Recent literature describes 'teacher learning communities' as those in which teachers develop the capacities to pose tough questions, challenge assumptions, and even disagree openly over matters of practice while cultivating trust and mutual support" (p.4).

In summary Little, Gearhart, Curry, and Kafka, (2003) found that looking at student work has the potential to expand teachers' opportunity to learn, to cultivate a professional community that is both willing and able to inquire into practice, and "to focus school-based teacher conversations directly on the improvement of teaching and learning."(p.7).They also found that through collective inquiry teachers can begin to establish authentic collaboration to reinforce organizational learning that extends beyond one classroom.

<u>Collaborative Teams</u>

Another essential element of a professional learning community is the importance of working as teams (Fullan 2003; Senge, 1994; Little, 1994, et al.). Covey (1996) states that truly effective teams strive for interdependence. "To get to interdependence teams move from the following stages:

- Dependence: I or we count on others

- Independence: I or we count on self

- Interdependence: We count on each other" (p.143).

According to Covey (1996), teams that get to interdependence do so through a collective process of collaboration that extends beyond individual work.   DuFour and Eaker (1998) further support this process by stating "the basic structure of the professional learning community is a group of collaborative teams that share a common purpose" (p.26). Dukewits and Gowing (1994) also stress the importance of teams. After working with over 150 teams over an eight year period, they concluded that effective teams are characterized by:

1. Shared beliefs and attitudes

2. High levels of trust that in turn result in open communication, mutual respect for people and opinions, and a willingness to participate

3. The belief that they had the authority to make important decisions and a willingness to assume responsibility for the decisions they made

4. Effectively managed meetings with clear operational norms, or ground rules, agendas developed with input from all, defined roles for members, and minutes to provide continuity.

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5. Ongoing assessment of and discussions regarding the functioning of the team.

   The establishment of effective teams does not happen by accident. Darling-Hammond (1995) articulates that before teams can become effective there needs to be some prerequisites in place for team learning to take place. These include:

1. Time for collaboration must be built into the school day and year: We must move away from the factory model and provide time for teachers to talk about teaching and learning

2. The purpose of collaboration must be made explicit

3. School personnel need training and support to be effective collaborators

4. Educators must accept their responsibility to work together as true professional colleagues (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

   The prerequisites that Darling-Hammond (1995) puts forth for effective team learning to take place were further supported by Louis, Kruse, & Marks (1996). They state, "Schools that are successful in implementing significant change regard collaborative time for teachers as a critical resource--an essential tool that enables teachers to enhance their individual and collective effectiveness" (p.125). This effective use of time, one of the most sought after resource in schooling is essential in building organizational capacity to reach the desired results and goals of the team. DuFour and Eaker (2004) state "Teams are most effective when they are clear about the results they are to achieve. This clarity of purpose is enhanced when teams are provided with clearly stated performance goals that indicate what the team is to produce or accomplish."(p.123) .They further articulate, that providing a team of teachers with explicit questions to

consider and tasks to accomplish will give team members the sense of direction and the confidence they need as they begin to work together (DuFour and Eaker, 2004).

Stenberg (1996) concludes that professional responsibility is essential for team achievement because "successful people accept responsibility for their lives. They are self-motivated; above all they have a sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control." (p.129). This sense of self-efficacy and drive for success among individuals helps build organizational responsibility (Stenberg, 1996). Sagor, (1997) further supports the importance of responsibility for team learning by summarizing that what is true of individuals is true of organizations. No factor in a school change is more important than the faculty's sense of self-efficacy. Through the intentional practice of authentic collaboration, the practice of team learning and responsibility become stronger and thus provide more confidence for teams to take action to address problems of practice. (Little, 1994, 2003).

Action Orientation and Experimentation:

In order for professional learning communities to flourish, they require action and experimentation (Fullan 2003; Senge, 1994; Little, 1994, et al). "Professional learning communities are action oriented. Members of such organizations turn aspirations into action and visions into reality. Not only do they act. They are unwilling to tolerate inaction" (DuFour and Eaker, 1998, p.27). Members of a professional learning community recognize that learning always occurs in a context of taking action, and they believe engagement and experience are the most effective teachers. Even seemingly chaotic activity is preferred to orderly, passive inaction. Members of a professional

learning community challenge each other to accomplish more for the greater good of the organization (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

As a result of putting these actions into practice, communities start seeing changes "by acting in new ways, members of a PLC acquire new experiences that lead to new awareness. Gradually, this heightened awareness is assimilated into fundamental shifts in attitudes and beliefs, which, over time, transform the culture of the school" (DuFour and Eaker, 2004, p. 4). Fullan (2001) concludes that as a result of new actions "the extent to which the school's programs for students and staff are coordinated, focused on learning goals, this results in sustained growth over a period of time" (p.64). Fullan further articulates that "the shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning is a 'powerful coherence-maker', thus the process of changing the culture of any organization begins by changing the way in which the people of that organization behave" (p.65).

Continuous improvement:

Professional learning communities strive for continuous improvement over an extended period of time by using data to guide improvement (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). A persistent discomfort with the status quo and a constant search for a better way characterize the heart of a professional learning community. Continuous improvement requires that each member of the organization is engaged in considering several key questions:

- "What is our fundamental purpose?

- What do we hope to achieve?

- What are our strategies for becoming better?

- What criteria will we use to assess our improvement efforts?" (DuFour and Eaker, 2004, p.21)

The ultimate goal for asking these tough questions is to make sure that all students learn. This concept is further supported by Marzano (2003) who believes that the quest for continuous improvements produces great results in schools regardless of the student population because "schools that are highly effective produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student backgrounds" (p.7). Lezotte (2004) further supports the power of professional learning communities that strive for continuous improvement to close the achievement gaps in schools by stating,

"the effective school research challenges the long-standing belief that only those who had won the genetic lottery were capable of high levels of learning. Compelling evidence was presented to support two bold new premises: first, 'all students can learn' and second, 'schools control the factors necessary to assure student mastery of the core curriculum'" (p.20).

Ultimately, the creation of a PLC does not call for the completion of a series of tasks, but rather for a process of continuous improvement and perpetual renewal. Members of professional learning communities do not feel that they are ever done. Having accomplished a set of goals they realize that new learning has uncovered things that that they can continue to work on. (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

Results orientation

In order for professional learning communities to move forward they must be results oriented (Schmoker, 2006). "Unless initiatives are subject to ongoing assessments on the basis of tangible results, they represent random groping in the dark rather than purposeful improvement" (Blanskstein, 2004, p.5). The ultimate goal of learning organizations is to continue to improve on the previous work that has taken place through

embracing creative tension which results in new learning for individuals and the organization (Senge, 1994).For this reason in the context of school settings, ensuring that all students learn cannot be left to the individual discretion of each teacher but must be systematically integrated into procedures that guarantee additional time and support for all students (Blankstein, 2004).

Professional learning communities that are successful in reaching desired results ensure the "identification of priority standards and focus on essential outcomes that all students must achieve (DuFour and Eaker, 2004, p.35). When they don't, and this is recognized through timely and authentic assessments, the response must be a collective response that incorporates shared learning and knowledge sharing time for teachers (DuFour and Eaker, 2004,). Results oriented professional learning communities use goals as measurable milestones that can be used to assess the progress in advancing toward a vision; thus they make visions more substantive. Schmoker (1996) argues "the most striking contradictory, self-defeating characteristic of schooling and our efforts to improve it is the absence of academic goals to drive the teaching and learning" (p.18).

Schmoker (1996) further articulates that goals are important because they give people opportunities to gather some results to sustain the effort needed to transform a school into a professional learning community. Goals create the short-term wins that fuel the change process. It is imperative for schools, departments and teams to identify student learning goals to help guide the work. Schools that do not identify student goals cannot participate in this type of learning. Reeves (2004) states that "schools with the greatest gains in student achievement consistently use common assessments to measure desired goals" (p.70). These assessments are used to "improve teaching and learning, not merely

to evaluate students and schools" (p.114-115). The common assessments provide teachers with explicit opportunities to collaboratively review common assessment and identify strengths and weaknesses in student performances and teacher practices.

Having provided a review of the literature on the elements of a Professional Learning Community, this next section provided a review of the literature on Professional Learning Communities in action. It also addressed steps and processes that schools can use to implement Professional Learning Communities.

Professional Learning Communities in action:

McLaughlin and Davidson (1994) address the fact that the term "professional learning communities mean different things to different people. To some it is a safe haven where survival is assured through mutual cooperation. To others, it is a place of emotional support, with deep sharing and bonding with close friends. For others it is a community for personal growth. For some it is simply a place to pioneer their dreams. In a professional learning community, all of these characteristics are evident. Educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth that allows members to work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone.

Nevertheless, one characteristic of a learning organization is a willingness to learn from its external environment, and it is this willingness that most educators and schools have not demonstrated. Saranson (1996) concludes that school personnel are remarkably uninterested in issues outside of their daily routines: "it is if they are only interested in what they do and are confronted with in their encapsulated classrooms in their

encapsulated schools" (pp. 329-330). This type of oppression to working in a professional learning community is common in schools (Saranson, 1996).In order to address the type of resistance that Saranson describes, Kanter's (1997)extensive research on successful individuals and organizations has established that the most successful people in any area look outside their narrow field for fresh perspectives and new ideas. This approach of looking beyond the individual is very much in line with the concept of establishing a professional learning community that can answer the following questions:

- How can we initiate, implement, and sustain a change process?

- How can we clarify, and communicate the purpose, vision, and values go our organization?

- How can we create collaborative processes that result in both individual and organizational learning?

Kanter's perspective is further supported by Sclechty (1997). He believes that schools must work as professional learning communities because "the demands of modern society are such that America's public schools must now provide what they have never provided before: a first rate academic education for nearly all students" (p.235). This first rate education can not be done if schools continue to operate on the assembly line factory mindset in which every teacher works individually and where students are not provided with explicit opportunities to reinforce what takes place in school to impact the learning on the whole for the young people (Tomlinson, 2003).

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) go on to explain, "When given the opportunity to make decisions for their school site, teachers have opted to focus on peripheral issues that do not directly address the quality of student learning" (p.8). This choice to not focus on

the most important aspect of the function of schools results in a school that does not function as a professional learning community. Experience with school reform has followed a particularly predictable pattern. The redesign process focuses on getting students to behave better, getting parents to become more involved in the school and getting the adults to feel good about their working conditions. Very rarely does the redesign focus on teacher practice and how teachers work together (Little, 1994).

Certainly student discipline, parental involvement and staff morale are important issues and should be a part of a school's comprehensive improvement effort, but it is imperative that these initiatives also consider what happens in the heart of the school's enterprise – the classroom. Unfortunately, restructuring seems to have left students virtually untouched by the restructuring movement. The excellence movement has been unable to make a real difference in the ability of American schools to meet the challenges they face (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). For this reason the implementation of Professional learning communities is essential to support effective teaching and learning.

A review on the research regarding school innovation led to the "profoundly discouraging" conclusion that "almost all educational innovations fail in the long term" (Perkins 1992, p.205). Fullan (1997b) writes that if schools do not face the reality that they must work on teaching and learning by focusing on building a professional learning community for teachers then "none of the current strategies being employed in educational reform result in substantial widespread change…The first step toward liberation, in my view, is the realization that we are facing a lost cause" (p.220).

As a result of the many challenges that school face, Levin (1994) argues that the

most important element that needs to be changed in school reform are the ways that

adults address the challenges that students face by working together. Levin, states,

"40 % of school aged young people live in poverty in the US. This is the highest of any
industrialized nation. 1/3 child in this country is born to a single mother. And 30% of
those single parents are teenagers. Children age 12-15 are the most likely group in
America to be victims of violent crime and over 4.000 children are murdered every year"
(p. 11).
 These frightening statistics calls for the urgency of creating professional learning

communities to collectively address the challenges that school children face.

With such alarming data and challenges that schools face, Rossi and Springfield

(1997) feel that schools would benefit from extending the concepts of professional

learning communities with the concept of "highly reliable organizations." These

organizations place a high value on setting goals and establishing benchmarks to support

progress by getting staff to work interdependently. Evans (1996), a strong proponent of

using clear and measureable goals to achieve a mission, advocates "one thing at a time"

to accomplish constancy and clarity. He advocates that organizations and communities

need to:

1. be fanatical about the positives of the project

2. systematically drop what should *not* be pursued

3. provide a sense of urgency to the focused area

4. provide continuous feedback using data

5. stretch out time lines to meet the goal (p. 25-26)

Evans goes on to further explain, "Effective school leaders help their school community

succeed by first personally defining their core, making meaning for their organization

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around core values, and core purpose, and continually clarifying and focusing on priorities that are aligned with that purpose" (p. 26).

The power of using values to drive goals is further supported by Kruse, Louis and Byrk (1994) who state that the ultimate goal is to create an authentic learning community that has a "sense of *collective* urgency and control over *organizational* conditions that is embodied in the *community* of professional learning communities" (p. 52). This change of conditions can be facilitated by providing opportunities and building a "school-based learning community" that has the following characteristics and elements in place:

1. Reflective dialogue among teachers

2. Detribalization of practice

3. Collective focus on student learning

4. Collaboration

5. Shared norms and values (p. 53)

In addition to implementing "a school-based learning community," Newman and Wehlage (1995) offer the four "circles of support" process to effectively implement a community of learning for teachers and students. This "circles of support" include:

1. student learning

2. authentic pedagogy

3. school organizational capacity

4. external support

Their study concluded that schools that implemented the "circles of supports" for creating Professional Learning Communities were most successful in creating successful schools that had the following:

- teachers pursuing a clear, shared purpose for all student learning

- teachers engaging in collaborative activity to achieve their stated purpose

- teachers taking collective responsibility for student learning (p. 53).

Another approach that has had a great impact on helping create and advance the development of professional learning communities is relational trust. Barth (2001) articulates, ultimately, if adults are going to work together effectively in an interdependent manner "the relationship among adults in the schoolhouse has more impact on the quality and the character of the schoolhouse—and on the accomplishments of youngsters—than any other factor" (p.105). This paradigm shift will also require "Human resources—such as openness to improvement, trust and respect, teachers having knowledge and skills, supportive leadership, and socialization—are more critical to the development of professional learning than structural conditions" (Kruse, Louis, and Bryk, 1994, p. 8)

Bryk and Schneider (2002) expand on Barth's concept of relational trust by putting forth four components of relational trust that assist the creation of an authentic learning community:

1. Respect: listening carefully augments a sense of respect and builds trust

2. Competence: acting on what was heard

3. Personal regard for others

4. Integrity: alignment of words, actions, and ethics (p.62).

Byrk and Schneider (2002) feel that the concept of relational trust must be introduced, modeled and championed by the school leader. "In general, the effective leader will create relational trust through showing a genuine regard for the professional role, interest

in the concerns of others, awareness of their personal interests, and a willingness to act on those concerns toward an ethical outcome" (p.63).

In the context of the study at Freire International High School, the challenge of creating a professional learning community entailed many of the major themes that were articulated from the review of the literature. The research indicates that there are different approaches to create an authentic professional learning community. Despite the different ways to create a professional learning community, the research was clear that certain elements such as: shared vision, collective inquiry, collaboration, action and experimentation and results orientation are necessary to establish an authentic Professional Learning Community.

Collaboration

Defining the Stages of Collaboration

Having provided a framework for what is a Professional Learning Community and a framework to create authentic learning communities, the following review of the literature focused on collaboration. While collaboration and team work are essential elements of a professional learning community, this review expanded on authentic collaboration in a school setting, what authentic collaboration looks like in a school setting, and the impact that authentic collaboration has in school settings. Thus, "the emphasis should be on restructuring how people work together. That's what ultimately has an effect on the classroom" (Cambron-McCabe, 2003, p. 8).

Central to the success of schools is a collaborative culture that focuses on teaching and learning. (Barth, 2001; Driscoll, 1998; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996; Hord, 1997a,

1997b; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996), when it comes to collaboration, there are four types of collaborative cultures that exist in schools:

- Individualistic

- Balkanized

- Contrived Collaboration

- Collaboration

Individualistic: In this type of learning environment, teachers are accustomed to developing their own practices and techniques for classroom management and may not consider the relevant experience of colleagues. Teachers view each other as separate entities without a common purpose. This culture is very reminiscent of most school cultures. In this type of culture, teachers often regard the intrusion of other adults in their classrooms as an intrusion of their privacy. This approach is further supported by what Heinberger (1996) refers to as the "lone wolf approach." In this type of environment teachers work alone and feel that it is their responsibility to guard their classrooms against from any outside "interference" from others.

Balkanized: In this type of environment, teachers often work in small cliques that fragment the staff. This fragmentation of the staff often leads to less than idealized learning for students and adults. In a balkanized school environment, small group of people align themselves with a particular technique or ideology, pitting themselves against other groups that that hold opposing ideas. This culture often leads to a fragmentation of the school community because the members of this exclusive group form their own loyalties that are often times not congruent with the school as a whole.

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This balkanized culture is hard to address, because, the motivations behind the cliques are not clearly articulated at particular issues or staff members (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Contrived Collegiality: In this culture, teachers appear to be collaborating. They spend time on committees and in meetings, but they actually don't focus on deeper issues related to teaching and learning. Often times in instances where contrived collaboration is present, the structures have been put in place for adults to meet and take part in collaborative actions. Although the structures and time has been provided, when contrived collaboration is exhibited, the cultures and mindsets that impair authentic collaboration have not been addressed. Because the mindset and the behaviors have not been addressed, meetings often take place without intentional purpose to examine practices, challenge beliefs, look at data and other practices that impact teaching and learning. Often times, contrived collaboration leads to surface learning that rarely leads to opportunities to challenge each others' beliefs and approaches to teaching and learning (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

Collaborative: A collaborative culture is the ideal culture to support authentic learning for students and teachers. "In a collaborative culture, teams of highly skilled individuals comprise a teaching staff. Each of these individuals is fully committed to learning by becoming active learners themselves" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996, p.52). In this environment teachers work continuously with their colleagues to change their teaching strategies and better mange their classrooms. They recognize their crucial role in the educational process and know that they can meet the challenges confronting them only by solving problems in concert with their professional colleagues. Teachers in collaborative

cultures use data to discover ways to improve teaching and learning. They count on each other for support by questioning practices and strategies before they implement them. They seek constructive feedback to improve their craft. Collaborative cultures lead to authentic learning for teachers and students. (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996).

In addition to Fullan and Hargreaves, Judith Warren Little (1994) shares her perspective on collaboration. Little identifies four stages of collaboration. They include:

- Story telling

- Aiding

- Sharing

- Joint work

Little (1994) describes "story telling" and scanning as coincidental interactions such as a parking lot meeting or a general suggestion that may come up during a conversation. This type of coincidental talk rarely leads to any type of authentic sharing. This talk rarely provides opportunities for educators to question objectives, purpose and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Little describes "aiding" as a more concerted effort to discuss practice which may come about in the hallway or in the teachers' room when a teacher brings up a challenge to a colleague as a means to get support with a strategy or an idea to get a quick fix solution to a problem. This form of collaboration rarely follows a process. This conversation or aiding may or may not have an impact on what the teacher may decide to do to address the challenge. This type of collaboration is not supported by a protocol or process to help implement a change of practice that may result in a sustained manner of doing the work.

Little describes "sharing" as a form of collaboration which consists of pooling of ideas without critical examination of beliefs and outcomes for the sharing. This type of collaboration may take place during a staff meeting to support the "dog and pony show" of perceived collaboration. This process may be viewed as a contrived collaboration which Fullan and Hargreaves describe in their research.

Little's (1994) description of authentic collaboration is described as "joint work." This practice "consists of a strong sense of interdependence that comes about through shared responsibility critical review, collective commitment to improvement that comes about through structured protocols such as Critical Friend's groups, and peer observations" (p.503). As a result of this practice, teachers are able to question their beliefs, strategies and outcomes that are supported by protocols and work that is recorded, and work that can be reproduced and checked for outcomes to shape and analyze the effectiveness of the practice.

Little (1994) goes on to further explain that in order for teachers to collaborate effectively, they must be provided with support to do this well. She views the idea of collaboration without a purpose as worst than no collaboration at all. Little articulates that most so called "teamwork" lacks the essential features of collaboration because most team talk floats high above the level of implementation: "distant from the real work in and of the classroom" (1987, p.507). Instead of closely and constructively examining practice, beliefs and actions, most teams serve to "confirm present practice without evaluating its worth, without using assessment results as the basis for improvement" (1990, p.517).

Over the last two decades of research, Little and her colleagues found that not much has changed, as teams continue to discuss wide ranging issues instead of looking closely and analytically at teaching and at how their teaching affects learning on an ongoing basis. Non-interference, privacy, and harmony still prevail at the expense of improved instruction. Unfortunately, many educators that are provided with the time and resources to collaborate end up playing it safe, by not questioning beliefs and practices and rarely do they ever get to the point of doing "joint work" resulting in authentic collaboration (Little et al., 2003).

The Power of Collaboration

Through extensive work on team learning and collaboration, Senge (1994) found that for learning organizations to flourish, the key ingredient to successful collaboration is practice. Senge articulates, "It cannot be stressed too much that team learning is a team skill. A group of talented individual learners will not necessarily produce a learning team, any more than a group of talented athletes will produce a great sports team. Learning teams learn how to learn together" (p. 240). Senge further emphasizes, "team skills are more challenging to develop than individual skills. This is why learning teams need "practice fields," ways to practice together so that they can develop their collective learning skills (p.240).

Little, (1994, 2003) agrees full heartedly with Senge that in order for collaboration to improve teachers must learn to practice together. In order for this practice to take place, schools have to be intentionally designed to provide the time and learning opportunities to take place. This challenge is explicitly addressed by Susan Moore Johnson (1990) who sums up this dilemma by stating, "Schools are in the business of

promoting students' learning and growth ….. Ironically, public schools are not in the business of promoting teachers' learning and growth" (p. 249). This dichotomy of solely focusing the learning on students misses the important point of getting teachers to learn from each other so that they can share the learning and thus improve student learning.

Little (1997, 2003) concludes that the organization of schools does not promote ideal conditions for teacher collaboration. "The most common organization of schools consists of independent classrooms linked by a common parking lot –leaves one with the impression that teaching is a relatively straightforward activity, bolstered as needed by outside coursework and other in-service activities" (p.256, 1997). Thus, the current structures of many schools results in structural challenges and inadequate human capital to build authentic collaboration. In order to provide authentic learning and collaboration that truly impacts the classroom, "schools must be sensibly organized with time and space , access to expertise of colleagues inside and outside the school that focuses on timely feedback on one's own work and an overall ethos in which teacher learning is valued" (p.233, 2003).

If schools are to be successful in addressing the challenges of closing the achievement gaps that exist and prepare students for the 21st century global economy, it is imperative for schools to not only redesign the organizational structures of schools, but more importantly to redesign the thinking and the way we implement strategies to get adults to work together. This challenge can be addressed through team learning; as Senge (1994) articulates, "there has never been a greater need for mastering team learning in organizations than there is today. People who need one another to act, are becoming the

key learning units in organizations. This is so because almost all important decisions are now made in teams" (p.219).

In the context of viewing schools as organizations, Little (2003) articulates that teaching is an extraordinarily demanding job that requires expertise, energy, enthusiasm and continuous growth. Because teaching is not stagnant and students continue to require new learning, it is imperative that teachers stay up to date through new learning to continue to support student learning (Elmore, 2002). For this reason it is imperative that teachers work together to produce "joint work" that helps address the multiple challenges that one person can not address. In order to produce this joint work, teachers can be supported by having the following:

- Emphasize teachers' individual and collective responsibility for student achievement and well-being, and make inquiry into student learning a cornerstone of professional development.

- Organize time, teaching responsibilities, and other aspects of teachers' work in ways that demonstrably enhance opportunities for teacher learning both inside and outside the school.

- Employ staff development resources in ways that increase teachers' ability to make well-informed use of ideas, materials, and colleagues.

- Conduct staff evaluation and program or school reviews in a manner consistent with teacher learning.

- Embrace an ethos genuinely conducive to teacher development (Little, 1997)

In addition to structuring the school with the time and space to practice collaboration, the importance of shared responsibility along with the mechanisms to support learning must be provided. Darling- Hammond (1997) articulates that shared responsibility requires a paradigm shift for schools and individuals that can come through by providing time, space and support for adults to build this responsibility. Traditional arrangements of "cellular" classrooms, individualized teaching assignments, and occupational norms of personal autonomy tend to obscure both the commonalities and differences among teachers and to place both structural and cultural constraints on teachers' communication. "For this reason structures that create genuine interdependence among teachers (small schools, houses, teams, and other school within school arrangements) make teacher contributions to student learning more visible" (p.239). Such structures also provide teachers with a common basis for discussions, planning, assistance, common assessments, opportunities to look at student work, analyze data, and thus focus on teacher learning.

The structural alternatives that schools choose to implement may play an important role in providing opportunities for more authentic collaboration. Yet, if the structures are not supported by explicit support systems for teacher learning, one may end up with contrived collaboration (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996). In many cases, there are schools that have been organized into houses, families, teams or small learning communities in an attempt to expand teacher interactions to achieve higher levels of shared responsibility, although research has shown that in many cases these structural changes have not lead to increased teacher collaboration. Such examples support the fact that structures alone do not impact student or teacher learning. The power in the restructuring lies in the

foundations of shared responsibility for students where the structure and culture reinforce one another (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Louse and Kruse, 1995). This further supports Little's (1997) point that:

"school structures can provide opportunities for learning of new teaching practices and new strategies for student learning, but structures, by themselves, do not cause the learning to occur…. Successful relations occur among school structure, teaching practice and student learning in schools where, because of recruitment and socialization, teachers share a common point of view about their purpose and principles of good practice. School structure follows from good practice not vice versa (p.148-149).

According to Blankstein (2004) the aim of collaboration is to enhance teaching and learning. To accomplish this "team members work interdependently toward a common goal which in turn supports the larger school vision and is aligned with the school's vision and values" (p.130). The explicitness of goals to support the goals and vision of the school are vital to authentic collaboration. Blankstein further articulates that in setting up collaborative teams, it is important to choose the appropriate members. He puts forth some areas that provide great opportunities fro authentic collaboration:

- Professional practice forums: Teachers who work with similar grade levels, or who teach related areas work together to share common concerns, describe challenges, research best practices and plan new strategies.

- Classroom observation: Teachers observe classroom of colleagues who are experimenting with new strategies or techniques. Through observations they can discuss learn about new practices, help evaluate the strategies and provide each other with constructive feedback.

- Curriculum planning: Teachers meet in groups or committees frequently and consistently to plan and monitor curriculum sequence, skills, products and assessments. Through this process they may help synchronize the key learning

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and skills that students must acquire to show authentic understanding of the learning.

- Professional study groups: Teachers and colleagues lead and report their learning on research from articles and books containing best practices, opportunities for professional growth or simply share information and new learning from workshops or trainings.

- Interdisciplinary teams: Teams of teachers use themes and key questions to seamlessly align the learning so that it extends beyond one classroom. This type of practice further strengthens opportunities for observations to reinforce different way to make the learning more meaningful for students. (Blankstein, 2004).

Blankstein (2004) contends that schools where collaboration is the norm share some very distinct characteristics. They include the following:

- The staff is committed to shared mission, vision, values, and goals, and recognizes its responsibility to work together to accomplish them.

- Strong leaders engage teachers in meaningful collaboration and support their activities and decisions.

- The school is characterized by a culture of trust and respect that permits open and willing sharing of ideas and respect for different approaches and teaching styles.

- The staff has real authority to make decisions about teaching and learning.

- Meetings are well managed and truly democratic, following established protocols for setting the agenda and making decisions.

- The functioning of teams is frequently discussed and reassessed.

- A plan is developed to provide meaningful time for teams to meet.

- Each team has clear purposes and goals.

- Educators acquire and share training in effective teamwork strategies (p.133)

These characteristics that Blankstein so clearly describes require time, space, support and leadership from the team members and administration. In addition to the characteristics that are evident in schools where authentic collaboration takes place, Little and Rosenholtz (1994) identify the observable behaviors that are evident in schools where authentic collaboration takes place. In these schools one would see :

- A high frequency of teachers talking with each other about teaching

- A high frequency of teachers observing each other

- A high frequency of teachers planning, making and evaluating curriculum materials together.

- A high frequency of teachers teaching each other about the practice of teaching

- A high frequency of teachers asking for and willing to provide one another with assistance.

These behaviors of high frequency of collaboration create powerful motivators for teachers to continue to engage in collaboration because they build trust, share learning and celebrate successes. These behaviors give teachers the confidence to teach each other to extend their knowledge and influence beyond their own classrooms (Little, 1994, 1997, 2003).

In addition to the behaviors of effective collaboration, Schmoker (2006) provides examples and processes that can support authentic collaboration within schools. One

powerful example that he puts froth to support collaboration is Lesson Study. Lesson Study is a model that has been adopted from Japan and Germany wherein school leaders or teams of teachers set time to meet regularly to create lessons and teaching units which are continuously reviewed, revised, and improved to provide maximum impact on student learning. Another practice to support collaboration is the concept of lesson fairs (Stiger and Hiebert, 1999). Lesson fairs provide each faculty member with the opportunity to showcase and share their expertise with the school community to share collective knowledge based on the work. These practices further support the idea of "looking within" to support internal learning because "teachers know a lot about good practice. But school systems, ever seduced by the next new thing, don't provide them with focused, collaborative opportunities that remind and reinforce the implementation of the most basic and powerful practices" (Schmoker, p.115). He further believes that "looking within" the school also provides opportunities for teachers to take a leadership role that challenges the "culture of dependency" that Hargreaves and Fullan (1996) view as "disempowering to teachers and a barrier to smart constructive effort" (p.24).

In addition to battling the "culture of dependency," Little (1994) provides many concrete strategies that help foster and create collaboration. She feels that it is essential to provide systems and strategies to help foster authentic collaboration. Many of these strategies are explicit in producing an outcome that results in "joint work." These strategies provide opportunities for schools to move beyond contrived collaboration to authentic collaboration. They include:

- Placing all new teachers in teams with other new and veteran teachers who are continuously engaged in working together to improve their teaching and who are willing to take responsibility for the enculturation of new teachers.

- Helping staff understand that they have something to offer the new teachers, have responsibility for the new teachers' success, and have a stake in their progress. Help staff understand that this is the kind of culture that the school seeks to develop.

- Use faculty meetings as times during which teachers share ideas and techniques with each other.

- Indicate that you expect team and department meetings to use and model collegial approaches for new and veteran teachers.

- Provide recognition and reinforcement for staff who engage in collegial approaches.

- Provide opportunities and time for all teachers who wish to co-teach classes, observe each other teaching, and engage in curriculum development together.

- Encourage teachers who are not mentors to encourage beginning teaches into their classrooms to observe specific techniques.

- Help find "natural times" in which teachers can work together or observe each other's teaching.

- Make creative use of resource people, volunteers, student teachers and others to provide "natural time for collaborative process (Little 1994)

Possible Steps to Create Collaborative Cultures

In addition to some concrete examples to implement collaboration, John Kotter (1997) urges schools to "generate short term wins" to help schools realize that they are making progress toward reaching their goals (p.32). This concept of short term wins is further supported by Hammel (2001) who exhorts organizations to "win small, win early, win often" to get teams to realize that they are making progress and as a result they are shifting the paradigm of viewing challenges as winnable opportunities to create more success (p.33). Collins (2001) further supports this concept by urging organizations to scrap the big plans in favor of producing a steady series of smaller victories which in turn will create "the magic of momentum that leads to enduring organizational successes" (Schmoker, 2004, p.427).

In addition to providing teams with small victories to build momentum and internal muscles to collaborate more effectively, Darling-Hammond (1995) puts forth certain systems that must be in place to provide for these victories to take place. She contends that the lack of time for collaboration is a product of the factory model upon which schools were and in many cases continue to be organized. The idea of using time in schools for teachers to reflect and discuss their craft has often been viewed as unproductive time that takes away from the actual teaching and learning time that teaches spend with students. Therefore teachers are given less time to collaborate because it would give them less time with their students. As a result, most educators continue to work in isolation, which results in the reduction of their effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

Darling-Hammond (1995) along with the Consortium of Productivity in Schools (1995) found that teachers in Europe and Asia spend less time in the classroom than American teachers. They found that teachers in Japan, China, France, Switzerland, England and Germany teach students for about 15-20 hours a week out of the 40 hour work week. The rest of the time is used to provide time and supports for teachers to share materials, co-construct lessons, and work more independently with students and parents. For this reason, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) calls for providing teachers with more regularly scheduled time for collegial work and planning that builds collaboration to support student and teacher learning. Schmoker's (2006) more recent research on the amount of time that teachers in the United States spend planning and collaborating found that explicit teacher collaboration time has not increased much in is the last decade. He too praises the fact that many other countries place high value on teacher collaboration by providing the time, structures and support to ensure that collaboration takes place.

Another important facet that Darling-Hammond(1995) puts forth to ensure that schools can have small victories is to ensure that the purpose of collaboration is made explicit to teachers. She articulates that forming teams is a means to an end, but that simply providing space and time for four or five teachers to meet does not result in collaboration. In order for teams to be effective, they must be clear about the results that they must achieve. This comes about when teams create or are provided with clear measureable performance goals. For this reason Schwartz (1994) indicates that protocols are essential to help build collaboration because collaboration is not a natural process in school settings. Thus it is important to provide teams of teachers with directions and

support to answer questions, address tasks which in turn will give team members the sense of direction and confidence to work together to reach goals.

In addition to directions and questions to guide teams, school personnel need training and support to be effective collaborators. Little (2003) believes that without the right training, much of what occurs in schools in the name of collaboration can be counterproductive, because in the wrong culture the time that has been set aside for educators to work together may simply reinforce the negative aspects of individualistic, balkanized and contrived collaboration that Fullan and Hargreaves describe that leads to unproductive collaboration. For this reason, DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that "the potential benefits of collaboration will never be realized unless educators work together in matters directly related to teaching and learning" (p.125). In order for this to take place, teachers have to focus on instruction, curriculum, assessment practices, and strategies for improving the school. Even with the best intentions, many schools fail to establish authentic collaborative cultures that impact teaching and learning in a positive way (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

The final element that must be in place for effective collaboration to take place according to Darling-Hammond (1995) is that educators must take responsibility to work together as true professional colleagues. Even if teachers have the time, structure and training to engage in collaboration, they must acknowledge their responsibility to work together. Educators that have systems and opportunities and training to collaborate must take the personal responsibility to ensure that authentic collaboration takes place. Barth (1991) writes: "God didn't create self-contained classrooms, fifty minute periods, and subjects taught in isolation. We did because we find working alone safer than and

preferable to working together" (p.128). Spillane, (2002) further articulates, that you can provide the conditions for collaboration and leadership to take place, but there needs to be a willingness from the adults in the schools to take on this challenge. This willingness along with support and practice provides the optimal conditions for teachers to assume personal responsibility through interdependence.

Potential Pitfalls to Collaboration

With the essential elements having been established to provide the ideal conditions for collaboration to become "the way we do things around here," DuFour and Eaker (1998) believe that creating a collaborative environment is the single most important factor in sustaining the effort to create a professional learning community. They caution school leaders to keep in mind that collaboration by invitation is ineffective. They go on to state: "schools have been characterized by some critics of public education as little more than independent kingdoms (classrooms) ruled by autonomous feudal lords (teachers) who are united only by a common parking lot" (p115). The reality that many schools have operated as separate entities for a long time makes collaboration by invitation very difficult to accomplish.

Other researchers concur. Donohue (1993) describes schools as "convenient places for a bunch of individual teachers, like independent contractors, to come to teach discrete groups of children" (p.229). Saranson (1996) concludes that teachers are more focused on their personal concerns because school cultures focus more on individuals rather than on groups. As a result, this isolation of teachers presents many roadblocks to authentic

collaboration. For this reason, school leaders cannot expect teachers to embrace collaboration by invitation.

Although schools present many blocks to authentic collaboration, Eastwood and Louis (1992) contend that creating a collaborative environment is the "the single most important factor for school improvement" (p.215). Unfortunately, the traditional teacher isolation is so entrenched in schools that fostering significant collaboration can not come about through a simple invitation. This having been established, school leaders must go beyond creating structures and providing opportunities for collaboration to take place; school leaders and school communities must organize a critical mass of educators within the school who are willing and able to act as change agents to move this new way of doing things forward to successfully move a school forward (Newmann, 1996; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Little (2003) found that one way to establish a critical mass of teachers to push forward authentic collaboration is by valuing the internal expertise that is available at the school site. She declares that instruction improves when teachers in teams, teach each other the practice of teaching. This internal expertise can be incredibly enhanced from looking at student work with protocols to help teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching through looking at student results. This concept of building expertise from within is further supported by Haycock (2005). Her research found that virtually all schools have some spectacularly wonderful teachers and if these teachers and teams are identified, their success and expertise can lead to expanding and inspiring those from within.

Alvarado's work with District 2 in New York City is another example that further supports building capacity from within as a powerful form of collaboration. Alvarado's work with Elmore and McLaughlin focused on looking within to build capacity on a systemic level to impact teaching and learning in classrooms across the district. Alvarado and his team identified the district's best teachers and provided organized opportunities for teachers to learn from them and from one another. During Alvarado's tenure, District 2 rose from 16th to 2nd among New York City's 32 school districts (New York City Leadership Academy, 2003). This form of collaboration of looking within further supports the premise that structures alone do not provide meaningful results; structures that focus on teaching and learning and are aligned with the values of the district provide powerful opportunities for growth.

Another strong proponent of the concept of looking within to create effective schools that use collaboration as the engine to drive school improvement is Schmoker. He concludes, "teachers learn best from one another, from people in their own organizations. We should therefore, share the compelling case for teamwork and engaging in dialogue as we make this transition" (p.120). He goes on to articulate that "Educators should obsessively celebrate, study and showcase every team success, and honor successful teams by creating as many opportunities as possible for internal experts to provide--and be compensated for--internal staff development" (p.120). This can not happen unless we seek, empower, and support that critical mass to lead the way to internal capacity building through collaboration.

In addition to looking within and building capacity from within to establish authentic collaboration, there are some implementation guidelines that can further

support the establishment of authentic collaboration. The usage of protocols is a purposeful way to institutionalize collaboration. The process of having teams put decisions in writing and to have teams sign their agreements and to hold teams responsible for implementing and staying true to protocols is essential in building authentic collaboration (Blankstein, 2004). Although this may seem impersonal and an "unnatural formality," deciding and agreeing to these issues in advance will help avoid future problems in getting teams to work together.

In addition to getting teams to agree to protocols and norms for working together, Blankstein (2004) provides a list of other issues that need to be addressed to ensure that teams are able to collaborate effectively. These include:

1. Team Organization

2. Decision Making

3. Managing Meetings

4. Sharing Workload

5. Commitment of Team Members

6. Communication Protocols

7. Monitoring Team Progress (p. 93).

According to Blankstein, addressing these technical issues early on and putting them in writing as a collective will allow the team to do the real work of :

1. Establishing goals

2. Prioritizing and assigning tasks

3. Deciding on sequence and timetable of tasks (p.137).

The fact that collaboration is not natural or common in many school settings and because teachers have been allowed and in some cases encouraged to close their doors and "teach," Blankstein (2004) provides some explicit behaviors that teachers have engaged in to derail collaboration and presents strategies that may be implemented to preserve effective teaching that leads to more collaboration. One roadblock that he identifies is that teachers will say "Sure, I'll collaborate…whatever." In many instances faculty members that are provided with the time and resources to collaborate pay a lot of lip service to collaboration yet do not do anything to make it happen. For this reason, he stresses that the "school culture must change, and making structural changes is not enough, the culture will need to shift to one in which collaboration is valued"(p.138).This value for collaboration is best represented in observable behaviors (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996, Little, 2003).

Another challenge that Blankstein puts forth that school leaders must be aware of in an attempt to create a collaborative culture is the "I'll go to the meeting, but I really can't take any responsibilities beyond that" syndrome. To address this challenge, he urges school leaders to "clarify expectations at the outset by making sure that team members understand what collaborative teaming really is all about--and what role they will be expected to play in it" (p.138). This explicitness about why the meetings are taking place and what the expectations are prior to beginning the meetings provide stakeholders with clear directives to guide the work.

Blankstein introduces another common factor that may arise in an attempt to establish a culture of collaboration. Another popular challenge that he puts forth is that teachers will often say;" Why are we always tinkering with the ways things work? I'm

happy with the way my classes are run, and my students are doing just fine" (p.139). His response to this challenge is for school leader to make sure that "people see the possible outcomes before launching a change process so that faculty members understand what the change is designed to accomplish" (p.139). These outcomes and desired results can be further supported by the school wide goals or the mission and vision of the school.

The final challenge that Blankstein puts forth as a deterrent to collaboration is the "There's no way I'm doing this; I'm completely opposed" stance which comes about despite all the training, time and resources that the administration has put forth. He suggests that you do not push harder, but instead to "confront dissenters in a respectful and positive way by confronting the individuals, listening to their reservations, or negative responses …. Then laying out a plan that combines support for the teacher that must change as well as oversight to make sure the changes occurs"(p.139). Ultimately, you cannot force a person to collaborate, but you can provide the person with all the supports to contribute and become a productive member of the team. The ultimate goal is for the collaborative culture to become institutionalized because the teachers embrace the benefits of the collaboration. As a result, members that do not contribute, operate in an individualistic manner which results in no authentic collaboration (Fullan &Hargreaves, 1996).

Closing Thoughts on Collaboration

Having provided an overview of the elements of collaboration, the possible steps to create an authentic collaborative culture in a school setting, and the challenges that may surface in the process of creating a collaborative culture, it is important to highlight Odden and Wallace's (2003) thoughts on the importance of collaboration. They believe

that through collaboration one is able to reach the ultimate goal of schooling, improved classroom instruction that produces consistent student achievement gains that helps students succeed in deep learning.

Authentic collaboration within schools provides us with the historic opportunity to fully understand and appreciate this opportunity by examining the institutional forces and traditions that prevent us from having an unimpeded view of our current reality and thus form a barrier to constructive improvement. Ingeniously, Elmore (2002) calls this barrier "the buffer. To deconstruct this buffer we can begin to address this challenge by becoming adamant supporters and practitioners of authentic collaboration.

Best Practices for ELL Students

The idea of best practices to inform and shape practice is necessary in all professions. This is especially important in the profession of teaching and learning. The fact that teachers work within a school setting where often times there is little time to "do joint work" is a reality and a challenge that schools across the nation face (Little, 1994). In order for the improvement of practice to take place and for the creation of best practices to come about there has to be research, establishment of trust, opportunities to practice, observation of teacher practice, constructive feedback, reflection and analysis of student performance and student data as a result of the practice (DuFour and Eaker, 2002; Schmoker, 2003; Fullan, 1997) . These elements are essential in order to produce, refine, and institutionalize best practices.

Best practices as it pertains to English Language Learners follow much of the same process that has been articulated above, but it is very important to keep in mind that

English Language Learners have a different set of challenges than many mainstream students. As a result, some of these practices are different from mainstream classroom best practices (Cummins, 1981, 2000). Cummins (2000) points out "that English speakers peers do not stand still in their learning and wait for ELL students to catch up on the language of instruction.(p.5) At the same time we cannot put ELL students' academic development on hold while they are learning the language of instruction. Ultimately if ELL are not to be disadvantaged in their long-term learning, and are to have time and opportunity to learn the subject specific registers of school, they need access to an ongoing language-focused program across the whole curriculum (Cummins, 2000). For this reason, Freire International High School served as an ideal setting to put in place best practices for ELL students that extended beyond a language class and attempted to seamlessly integrate content and language learning through interdisciplinary team-based instruction for the entire population of ELL students.

There is a plethora of research on best practices for English Language Learners. This review of the literature provided an overview of the research as it pertains to best practices for English Language Learners. In addition to this, this review made connections to the possible implications that the review of the literature may have had on this study.

Before an in depth review of the literature on best practices for English Language Learners was put forth, it was imperative that readers had a strong understanding of what and who is an English Language Learner. It was also imperative for the reader to have a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities that English Language Learners present to public education. This research based information may help support and

provide the appropriate backdrop to further review the literature of best practices for English Language Learners.

<u>Types of English Learners</u>

Olsen and Jaramillo, (1999) articulate that the range of backgrounds of English learners in upper elementary, middle, and secondary schools is phenomenal and seldom recognized. They go on to explain that there are many different types of English Language Learners. This includes:

- Long Term English Learners (LTEL) learners that have been in the schools for a longer period of time and have not had success in developing enough academic language to succeed without language support;

- Older English Learners (OEL) that have not had exposure to English language development in their native country;

- Newly Arrived English Language Learners (NELL) consists of various ELL from elementary, middle and high school students that are newly arrived to the US public schools. This group consists of a broad range of students from different origins with a vast array of academic and social needs;

- Lastly, there is a group of ELL that is identified as consisting of students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE). This group of students vary in ages and countries of origins. SIFE bring very little to no prior schooling experience in their native language to the new school settings

Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) assert that often programs designed to help English Language Learners are based on the assumption that all the students are alike. These

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assumptions often lead to inappropriate educational placement and ultimately

inappropriate practices to support teaching and learning. Gibbons (2002) further supports

this point by stating "English Language Learners are not a homogeneous group, but are

varied in terms of their background, experiences, language, expectations, values, culture,

and socio-economic status as any other group of students"(p.13).

According to Clearing House of Bil. Ed. (2000), 4.1 million students in the US are

classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Among those students, there is great

diversity in languages and countries of national origin. Although the vast majority of ELL

students are from Spanish speaking countries (72.9 percent) the diversity among the

Spanish speakers is extensive. These Spanish speaking students come from different

social and economic backgrounds. This diversity among this group of students requires

an equally diverse educational experience to support the multiplicity of challenges that

this diverse group presents to public education (Canedy, 2001).

Although many English Language Learners come with different educational

foundations and experiences, according to the New Generation of ELL (2002) the

majority of Ell's that come to the US often live in households and neighborhoods with

high and sustained poverty, their lives are extremely complex, and school is not always

the first property. As a result of the lack of social capital that many English learners

present, Fleischman and Hopstock (1993) estimate " 20% of ELL that are enrolled in

high schools and more than 15 % of the middle school ELL enrolled students have

missed more than two or more years of schooling" (p.13).

The educational gaps that many ELL have in their native language is further

complicated by the fact that the majority of ELL students that are new to this country

have had very little or no exposure to the English Language (Cummins, 1981, 2000). This makes it very hard for educators to provide high quality instruction when there are educational gaps and linguistic challenges that are not evident to classroom teachers who are meeting these students for the first time.

A further review of the literature provides an important distinction between conversational language and academic language. Cummins (1981, 2000) observed that "many teachers and administrators and school psychologists assumed that children had overcome all difficulties with their new language when they could converse easily in the [English] language" (p.32). Cummins disagreed with this and as a result his research led to the "development of distinction between BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) or conversational language and CALPS (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. His longitudinal research study on English Language Learners revealed that it takes ELL longer to learn academic language than conversational English. His research concluded that "conversational aspects of proficiency reached peer-appropriate levels usually within about two years of exposure to English, and a period of five to seven years on average for immigrant students to approach grade level in academic aspects of English" (2000, p.58). Cummins' research is further supported by Collier (1989, 1992) who found that ELL students need about two years to develop conversational language, but academic language takes at least twice as long to develop.

The importance of the research on academic language development and conversational language development plays an important role in classroom teaching and learning and the development of best practices for English Language Learners. Cummins articulates "oral classroom discussions do not require reading and writing directly, but

they do reflect the degree of students' access to and command of literature or academic registers of language. For this reason, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency can be defined as expertise in understanding and using literacy-related aspects of language" (2000, p.70).

The distinctions between conversational language and academic language also play a significant role in the assessment and placement of students. The assessment process for ELL is often done through oral language testing and the placement is usually done according to students' ages. Carasquilo and Rodriguez (1994) argue that oral language tests fail to measure students' ability to read and write, and they suggest the use of multi dimensional assessments that include:

1. information from the teachers or teacher referrals

2. information from parents

3. evaluation of records

4. appraisal of student's academic level

5. appraisal of students' language skills (p.15).

Mace, Matluc and colleagues (1998) point out that "early identification of immigrant adolescents with limited prior schooling is necessary so that students' needs may be served as effectively as possible" (p.108). They also suggest that "schools find out about parents' schooling and siblings' schooling to determine the kinds of support students can receive at home" (p.15).

Lastly, (Schifini, 1997; Short, 1997; Yankay, 1997) provide the most common characteristics of English Language Learners:

- Are overage for their grade-level placement due to their weak academic skills and limited or inadequate formal schooling

- Have needs that traditional ESL and bilingual programs, and regular programs for native speakers, cannot or do not meet.

- Have no or low literacy skills in their native language or in English, and have little academic language content-area knowledge

- Are socially and psychologically isolated from mainstream students

- Need approaches and materials that will help them catch up to and compete with mainstream students

- Are at risk of dropping out in traditional academic program

Best Practices to support Academic success for English Language Learners

Having established a stronger understanding of the diversity among English Language Learners and the challenges that ELL students present to public education we can begin to delve into best practices to support this diverse and rapidly growing population of students. Best practices may serve to meet the needs of ELL students and provide more opportunities to use this challenge as an opportunity to further strengthen and support teaching and learning.

The fact that "Traditional English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have often focused on helping students develop conversational English is not a bad thing, but in this 21st century economy, it is imperative that students have access to strong conversational and academic English" (Freeman & Freeman, 2002). The shift from

having students learn conversational language to developing authentic academic language that prepares them for academic and professional success has resulted in best practices with "new programs in which teachers teach language through academic content that are aimed at helping students develop academic language. This approach provides explicit opportunities for

 teachers of struggling older English learners to make the development of academic language a priority"(Freeman & Freeman , 2002, p. 47). This academic language development can be made explicit "by focusing on explicit theme based instruction to provide deeper and more connected ways to deepen the learning" (p.49).

A review of the literature from various sources revealed that there are many best practices to support English Language Learners that can be captured in major categories to help decrease and ultimately close the achievement gaps that exist between English Language Learners and mainstream students (Freeman & Freeman 2002).

The US Dept. of Education has issued a set of principles to guide state and local school districts in considering reform for the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students (George Washington University Center for Excellence, 1996). These include:

- having high expectations in both language and content
- building on the previous experiences of students;
- taking their language and their cultural backgrounds into consideration when assessing students;
- being cognizant of the fact that the success of ELL is a responsibility shared by all educators , the family and the community.

Freeman and Freeman's (2002) research on closing the achievement gaps with ELL provided the following best practices to support ELL students:

- Engaging students in a challenging curriculum

- Building on what students bring to the learning situation

- Scaffolding instruction

- Creating confident learners

Thomas and Collier's (1997) massive study on over 700,000 English language minority students found that "the three most important predictors in academic success for ELL students are:

1. Using cognitively complex academic instruction in students' first language for as long as possible as well as in the target language.

2. Using current approaches to teaching, including cooperative learning groups studying thematic units to teach the academic curriculum through two languages

3. Changing the social cultural context of schools to value students' cultures and languages and to create a warm, safe, supportive learning environment" (p. 61).

The following review of the literature provided a more in depth review of the literature of the best practices that have been identified to further support optimal learning for English Language Learners. These practices have been broken down into four major categories. They included:

1. Engaging Students in Challenging, Theme-Based Curriculum

2. Drawing on Students' Background- Their Experiences, Cultures and Languages

3. Scaffolding Instruction to Build Students' Academic English Proficiency

4. Creating Confident Students Who Value School and Themselves as Learners

Engaging Students in Challenging, Theme-Based Curriculum

The first key practice to support effective academic success for English language learners is to engage students in a challenging curriculum. Even though many students with limited formal schooling and many long-term ELL have not developed the academic concepts and language proficiency of other students their age, it essential to believe that they are capable of learning the material (Freeman & Freeman, 2000, 2002). They articulate, "ELL students need activities that will stretch them. They need effective teachers that have the capacity and the time to organize the curriculum around themes based on big questions designed to push students thinking" (p.50, 2002)).

In regards to high expectations, Garcia and Hughes (2000) note that "because students struggle , they are given basic skills and repetitive drills rather than activities that build on high level content knowledge, language and comprehension skills they need" (p.48). They further articulate,

"Seldom do these schools help them build on what they know and have experienced. Further, such students often attend schools that have limited access to technology, or where the technology that is available is used to drill and teach basic, rather than higher-order skills. Rarely do teachers engage these students in modeling and simulation exercises or in cooperative learning, approaches that have proven to be effective with English Learners". (p. 51).

In regards to high expectations that extend beyond individual classrooms and to entire schools, Berman's (1992) empirical research showed that "many schools have not implemented the kinds of programs that are effective for struggling older ELL (p.51). According to Berman, students were placed in passive roles, classes are organized as aged-based groups in which there is tracking, and the curriculum is abstract and driven by

college entrance requirements and standardized tests. Often times, the classroom climate is generally impersonal, with few connections between the curriculum and the students' lives (Berman, 1992).

In addition to Berman's research, Valdes' (2001) two year study on newcomer Latino middle school students and the teachers of those focal students supports Berman's and Hughes' research concerning the tracking and ineffective instruction many ELL experience in schools. The research revealed that in the three periods of daily English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, beginning ESL students were not provided with opportunities to interact with native speakers or opportunities to interact with other English Learners with much more English development.

Valdes' (2001) research found that students' interaction with language was limited to teacher direction:

"All interactions in English took place exclusively with teachers at a rate of 1 to30 or 35. They spent their time copying sentences and learning vocabulary. Little went on in the classrooms that could prepare them to develop the kinds of proficiencies they would need to succeed in other classes. The teachers' goals and objectives involved following the text book, teaching English language forms and sometimes merely keeping students quiet" (p. 147).
This lack of challenging curriculum does not support conditions that push students beyond their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Further research by Moll (1994) concludes, "Students need challenging, innovative and intellectually rigorous curriculum that is meaningful and draws on their personal experiences" (p. 467). Moll, who opposes ability groups, believes they degrade students and show a lack of respect for them. Moll further, articulates, "teachers who believe in their students often become advocates for them" (p. 9). Moll (1994) identifies three characteristics of effective teachers working with English Language Learners:

1. They were able to articulate theory and tell why they did what they did.

2. They were able to argue with administrators to allow them to select materials and implement curriculum according to their professional judgment.

3. They drew on the support from colleagues who shared their approach to teaching. (p. 53)

The research on engaging curriculum extends beyond all ELL groups. Hamayan's research (1994) on Southeast Asian refugee children who had not had formal schooling found that limited –formal –schooling children she worked with lacked a great deal: "Because of the complexity of the literacy development and the special characteristics of low-literacy children. Yet, there were various instructional approaches that provided for meaningful and functional literacy activities while teaching the specific forms and structures of written language need to be part of the classroom environment" (p. 298). Hamayan lists classroom characteristics that allow literacy to emerge naturally:

- Providing meaningful environmental print

- introducing activities centered on motivating literacy and constructing meaning

- creating a low anxiety environment

- embedding instruction about forms and structures in meaningful activities

- Integrating instruction with academic content (p. 300).

In addition to Hamayan's research, Gerten's and Jimenez's (1994) research concluded "that effective instruction for language minority students' challenges students , encourages their involvement, provides them with opportunities for success, and includes

scaffolding with a variety of graphic organizers to draw on their background knowledge and give them access to content"(p. 83). In addition, they found that effective teachers give students frequent feedback, make the content comprehensible, encourage collaborative interactions, and show respect for cultural diversity.

To build off the importance of effective teachers that Moll (1994) references, Garcia's (1999) research on attributes of effective teachers found that the most effective teachers and effective instruction come about when "teachers focus on meaningful instruction and organize curriculum around themes." (p. 132) He further comments "students became experts in the thematic domains while also acquiring the requisite academic skills" (p. 311).

Drawing on Students' Background- Their Experiences, Cultures and Languages

The other major component to school success for English Language Learners is to build on what students bring to the learning situation. It is important for educators to determine and accept the fact that there may be a gap between what the schools expect and what ELL students bring, but this does not mean that these students do not bring anything (Walqui, 2000). Students bring their language, culture, and background experiences. As a result of these important elements that students bring to their new school setting, it is essential that teachers draw on these resources to build new concepts and learning (Freeman and Freeman, 2002).

As stated earlier, Berman (1992) conducted extensive research which resulted in the findings that many schools have not implemented the kinds of programs that are effective for struggling older ELL. In his summary of research on the needs of language minority

students, Goldberg (1996) "critiques classrooms where students are given whole class instruction and seat work with limited opportunities to talk, ask and answer questions, read aloud and otherwise actively engage in learning language and content" (p. 354). He calls for programs that offer challenging content, and he encourages the use of students' first language to ensure that challenging content is made comprehensible.

Some effective practices that juxtapose Goldberg's findings is identified in Valdes, Hughes and Berman's (1998) research findings that conclude that "effective schools group students heterogeneously and engage them in meaningful activities. Students in those schools work within appropriate developmental groups on thematic and integrated curriculum"(p.147). In these effective schools standards are redefined, with a focus on authentic outcomes and indicators. Administrators, teachers and support personnel take an active interest in students and celebrate and embrace their strength and diversity (Hughes and Berman, 1998).

Another effective practice to support overage students is to organize and create environments where students are accepted, respected, made to feel that they belong, and given opportunities to be in charge of their own learning (Moran, 2001). This welcoming environment encourages students to feel safer and thus allows them to be more willing to share and display what they know from their previous learning and life experiences. Strategies such as using students' first languages to support the acquisition of the target language and as a base for what they are learning, are essential to get students to succeed in their new settings (Moran, 2001).

Another research study that supports the importance of creating a welcoming and safe environment for ELL students is Schifrin's (1997) research on older, struggling

students and older immigrants including (SIFE) students with formal gaps in education.

He concludes that:

"one of the most powerful ways to engage students in authentic learning is by making students feel part of the classroom community by drawing on students' background knowledge, and encouraging skill development through successful engagement with texts by building on what students bring to the classroom. –to help them develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed academically" (p. 56).

Scaffolding Instruction to Build Students' Academic English Proficiency

Gibbons (2002) views scaffolding instruction as essential for creating effective learning experiences for English Learners. Freeman and Freeman (2002) further support the importance of scaffolding instruction because they feel "it is essential to offer a challenging curriculum, it is not helpful to offer this challenging curriculum without also providing the support that students need to engage with lessons" (p. 68)

The practice of scaffolding instruction is further supported by Chang's (2001) research that focused on Asian-Pacific American students who were identified as struggling English Learners. Chang's research found that through explicit scaffolding, struggling students could reach academic success. As a result of the findings, she was able to put forth a list of scaffolding practices that help struggling English Language Learners achieve academic success. Chang 's (2000) checklist drew on standards from CREDE (Center for Reassert on Education, Diversity and Excellence) and Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. Chang suggests that teachers consider the following practices to support scaffolding of instruction in planning lessons:

1. Joint productive activities: Students are encouraged to work with each other, the teacher, and parents to reach their instructional goals and objectives.

2. Language Development: Teachers provide students with opportunities to use conversational and academic language appropriately in a variety of settings , adjusting the language to students' experience with English and providing first-language support.

3. Contextualization: Teacher's draw upon students' backgrounds and cultures and bring in guests who can foster respect for multicultural perspectives.

4. Challenging Activities: Teachers plan and implement activities that encourage academic concept development by drawing on cultural funds of knowledge and using culturally appropriate approaches to teaching.

5. Instructional Conversations: Teachers organize their classrooms to ensure that conversation between students and teachers develops academic concepts and language

6. Diverse Entry Points: In all content areas and in all interactive activities, the teacher is sensitive to the students' needs, interests, talents, and understandings and is able to use that information to extend students' learning (Chang, 2000).

In her research on scaffolding instruction, Gibbons (2002) makes a clear distinction between scaffolding and simplifying tasks, and as a result offers the following alternative: "rather than simplifying the task, we should instead reflect on the nature of the scaffolding that is being provided for learners to carry out the task(p.11). As far as possible, learners need to be engaged with authentic and cognitively challenging learning tasks. This support is critical for students that are learning new content through a new language (Gibbons, 2002).

Creating Confident Students Who Value School and Themselves as Learners

The essential practice of creating confident learners is imperative to provide high quality learning experiences for English Language Learners (Collier, 1989, 1992; Chang, 2001; Walqui, 2000). Freeman and Freeman explain, "older struggling English Language learners often lack confidence. Often times, many of these students do not see themselves as capable" (p. 62). It is often the case that these students may not understand how schools work, and as a result they may conclude that schooling does not offer them any benefits. This confusion along with outside pressures that many students bring to the learning environment makes it very difficult for English Language Learners to build confidence in themselves as learners (Cummins, 2000). For this reason, it is essential that teachers create explicit opportunities and organize activities to help all their students' value school and value themselves as learners.

Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) articulate that the true changes in students' perspectives comes from the conditions and behaviors that the adults in the school exhibit. They believe that changes to increase students' value of themselves comes through professional development, advocacy and action. Teachers must be involved in ongoing sustained professional development that encourages both collaboration and individual reflection that reinforces the importance of building students' confidence . Schools must have systems for analyzing data about student achievement and progress that goes beyond looking at standardized test scores. There must be strong advocates at school sites who can meet together and implement needed changes in assessment and curriculum that

focus on building student confidence by providing scaffold and real world learning that enhances student confidence.(Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999).

In addition to the programs and practices that Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) put forth, Garcia (1999) suggests alternative high school programs that would meet the needs of these students by providing programs that offer four essential features that they believe truly create confident and engaged learners. These included:

- Literacy development in Spanish or other native language and English to help students gain social and scientific knowledge

- Nontraditional organization of students so that students work in small groups with one teacher providing most of the instruction.

- Allowance for students to take longer than the traditional four years to earn high school credits needed for graduation.

- Flexible daily schedules so that students may work and attend school.

Garcia (1999) feels that these types of accommodations provide English Language Learners with the confidence and flexibility to succeed in school. These practices value the challenges that acclimating to a new culture and learning a new language presents to many English Language Learners. Ultimately these conditions help students' value school and themselves by giving them more confidence and support to succeed in school and beyond (Garcia, 1999).

As referenced earlier, in addition to the recommendations that have resulted from various research studies, Thomas and Collier's (1997) massive study on over 700,000 English language minority students found that one of the most important predictors in academic success for ELL students is "changing the social cultural context of schools to

value students' cultures and languages and to create a warm, safe, supportive learning environment" (p.61).This incredibly large study further supported the importance of building student confidence through purposeful relationships that value and respect students. This type of relationship building and learning is made more accessible through theme-based and interdisciplinary learning. This type of instruction provides more meaningful opportunities for teachers to get to know students better as learners. This practice helps students to build confidence by learning the content and the language through meaningful experiences that extend beyond traditional learning (Collier, 1995).

As a result of providing students with meaningful and engaging learning opportunities, Freeman and Freeman (2002) further support Collier's work that trough theme-based and interdisciplinary instruction teachers can build student confidence and engagement for ELL students because:

1. Students get language and content. Research supports that students can learn language and content at the same time. They can learn both simultaneously.

2. Language is kept in its natural context.

3. Students have reasons to learn language for real purposes (p. 62).

Marsh (1995) concludes that another important practice to continue to build confident and engaged learners is for teachers to move away from traditional approaches of teaching conversational language by keeping in mind that students that are English Learners are different and for this reason teachers must ensure the use the following practices to make the content understandable:

- Use visuals and real things to move from concrete to abstract

- Use gestures and body language

- Speak clearly and pause often

- Say the same things in different ways

- Write key word and ideas down

- Use overheads and charts when appropriate

- Make frequent comprehension checks

- Have students explain main concepts to one another working in pairs or small groups

- Above all, keep oral presentations or reading assignments short.

- Cooperative activities are more effective than lectures or assigned readings (Marsh, 1995).

In addition to Marsh's (1995) research, Freeman, Mercuri and Freeman (2001) conclude that the main reasons for using themes to develop academic language and content knowledge to support learning and to build student confidence and engagement are:

1. Students see the big picture so they can make sense of English Language instruction.

2. Content area classes are interrelated.

3. Vocabulary is repeated naturally as it appears in content area classes.

4. Through themes teachers can connect to students' lives.

To further support confidence and student engagement with English Language Learners, , Peregoy and Boyle (2001) conclude that "the meaningful context established by the

theme supports the comprehensibility of instruction, thereby increasing both content

learning and second language acquisition. (p.79)

More Day to Day Practices to Support ELL Learning

In addition to the essential best practices to support academic language

development for English Language Learners that builds confidence and engages students

to do more work, there are also many day to day practices that will help students build

confidence in ELL classrooms. Some of these practices focus on what

Wegerif and Mercer (1996) call authentic classroom talk. They place a strong emphasis

on the quality of the dialogues that children are engaged in by taking a close look at

"thinking aloud" and "exploratory talk." This kind of talk allows students "to explore

and clarify concepts or to try out a line of thought, through questioning, hypothesizing,

making logical deductions and responding to others ideas" (p. 14). In addition to this,

McGroatry (1993) places great value on group learning for second language learners. He

puts forth three major factors why group work is essential in helping to build student

confidence and ownership of their own learning:

- Learners hear more language, a greater variety of language, and have more
  language directed toward them; group work situations increase the input to
  learners.

- Learners interact more with other speakers, and therefore their output is also increased. They tend to take more turns, and in absence of the teacher, have more responsibility for clarifying their own meanings.

- What learners hear and what they learn is contextualized: language is used meaningfully for a particular purpose(McGraotry, 1993).

Other important day to day best practices that are put forth by Gibbons et al. (2002) to support the day to day learning for English Language Learners are:

- Making sure that clear and explicit directions are provided for daily and project based activities

- Providing clear outcomes for group work activities

- Ensure that the task is cognitively appropriate fro learners

- . Ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to be involved

- Ensure that students have enough time to complete the tasks (p. 37).

Closing Thoughts on Best Practices for ELL

The review of the literature further supports the fact that when English Language Learners are provided with high quality, engaging work that connects to their lives, they learn the material. They not only learn the material, they become confident learners that are engaged and motivated to apply the learning because it is relevant and purposeful to their lives. This type of engaged and meaningful learning further supports the acquisition of academic language. This acquisition of academic language is the type of language that will prepare English Language Learners to do well in college and participate in this 21st

century economy (Cummins, 2000). These practices are essential to inform and support effective teaching and learning for English Language Learners at Freire International High School.

Conclusion

It can be determined by examining a number of data sources that English Language Learners are the fastest growing number of students in the Unites States (New Gen. 2002). In addition to being the fastest growing group of students in the Unites States, English Language Learners are one of the most challenging groups of students to educate. The heterogeneity of ELL students , the lack of highly trained ELL teachers, as well as the linguistic, cultural and socio-economic factors that ELL present to public education, makes closing the achievement gaps that exist between ELL and mainstream students a multifaceted challenge (Freeman and Freeman, 2002).

As this challenge continues to become more of a reality throughout the United States, we are presented with an economic and a moral dilemma. The economic dilemma is centered on the fact that it is essential to educate students so that they can participate in the 21st century global economy. The moral and ethical dilemma is to provide all students with a quality education so that they can be productive and responsible citizens for their times and beyond (Starratt, 2004).

For these reasons, Starratt (2004) calls on school leaders and school districts to re-examine their values and to assume the responsibility of educating all students. Starratt (2004) challenges us to "Explore how to use the institutional resources to improve the good that schools are supposed to be providing--namely quality learning for all kids"

(p.39). Furthermore, he argues that if schools are going to be responsible for serving as the great equalizer, school communities must be responsible to students, teaching staff, support staff, and parents and the community at large by providing all students with the opportunities to learn so that they can be productive and informed citizens (Starratt, 2004).

If school districts across the county are going to take on the challenge of closing the achievement gaps and the disparities that exist between English Language Learners and mainstream students, they can do this through authentic and responsible learning. This type of learning requires the creation of schools as authentic learning communities that have a commitment to authentic collaboration and the commitment to the implementation of best practices to further support a professional learning community.

This environment and this type of learning can be best summed up as what Newmmann and Associates (1996) describe as authentic learning. This type of learning ensures that all students are able to:

1. Organize, synthesize, interpret, explain, or evaluate complex information

2. Consider alternative solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view as they address a concept, a problem or an issue

3. Use ideas theories or perspectives considered central to an academic or professional discipline

4. Use methods of inquiry, research or communication characteristic of an academic or professional discipline

5. Elaborate on their understanding, explanations, or conclusions through extended writing, using analysis, theory or argument

6. Address a concept, problem or issue they are like to encounter or have encountered in life beyond the classroom

7. Communicate their knowledge, present a product or performance, or take some action for an audience

This powerful description of authentic learning best synthesizes a professional learning community that can close the achievement gap for all students. Starratt (2004) believes that the type of learning that Newmann and Associates describe as "authentic learning" is the type of learning that will prepare all learners for academic and personal success that benefits the greater good.

Through the creation of a professional learning community that uses collaboration and best practices to support teaching and learning, schools can move beyond the follow the leader leadership mandate to a more communal leadership of following commitments, promises, obligations validated research, sound principles, agreed upon standards, and other ideas to redefine the way we approach learning as a society (Sergiovanni, 1994). It is for this reason that the previously presented research dictates that the current study is so important.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

Having provided a clear review of the research that framed this study of the emergence of a Professional Learning Community for a school that was specifically designed for English Language Learners, this chapter focused on the design of the study being conducted at Freire International High School. The chapter begins with a rationale for using a qualitative descriptive case study design to guide this study. The chapter then describes the research questions, research methodology, sample, rationale for the sample, pilot test, the data gathering procedures, methods for data analysis, formats for reporting the data, the limitations of the study and the frameworks for discussing the findings.

Design and Rationale

This study was an evaluative descriptive case study with participatory research. Thus, to obtain a better understanding of a natural situation, in which meaning is derived, qualitative research best supported this process (McMillan, 2000). Through qualitative research, the researcher was able to answer questions about process (how or why something happens) and understanding what happens and what does it mean to those involved (Merriam, 1998). Through observations, individual interviewing, and regular journal reflections, the researcher gained access to teacher perceptions of the effects that the emergence of Professional Learning Community had on a) teaching and learning for teachers, b) student learning and c) collaboration at Freire International High School.

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Because the emergence of Professional Learning Community that was aided by a house system was new to Freire International High School, a qualitative case study was used to gather, present and analyze the data.

Through qualitative practices, it was possible to get "rich" (Merriam, 1998) insight as to whether the emergence of a Professional Learning Community had provided professional growth, increased collaboration and perceptions of increased student learning. A qualitative case study provides opportunities for holistic, descriptive and evaluative processes (Merriam, 1998). The interpretive aspect of the case study was further complemented by the evaluative methodology, which involved description, explanations, and judgment on perceptions of changes in practice. For these reasons, a case study to present the reader with a better understanding of the implementation of a new initiative was a good process (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Through qualitative research, the intention was to get a more rich understanding of the study. Merriam (1998) states, "qualitative data consists of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge obtained through interviews" (p. 69). Patton (1985) expands on the description of qualitative methods by stating that a qualitative study provides " detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions' recorded in observations and excerpts quotations, or entire passages extracted from various types of documents"(p.10).

Research Questions

The major research questions for this study were:

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?

Research Methodology

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were the primary tools utilized to inform this study. The researcher was a participant observer. Gans (1982) explains that in reality, researchers are rarely total participants or total observers. Rather they are researcher participants, - one "who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved so that he can function as a researcher" (p.54). Although the ideal in qualitative research is to get inside the perspective of the participants, full participation is not always possible (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) further underscores the balance needed between being a participant and observer in qualitative research by explaining, "Experiencing the program as an insider is what necessitates the participant part of

participant observation. At the same time, however, there is clearly an observer side to this process. The challenge is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the program as an insider(participant) while describing the problem for outsiders" (p.207).

The researcher introduced the concept of a Professional Learning Community to the setting and the researcher was directly involved in many of the facets of its development. The research was evaluative in that it sought to assess the impact that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community had on perceptions of teachers' learning, teacher perceptions of students' learning and teacher perceptions of collaboration among the faculty at Freire International High School.

The primary researcher was a participant as he took an active role in creating structures and supporting collaboration to assist in the development of a Professional Learning Community. Merriam (1998) articulates, "the purpose of a case study is to gain in depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (p. 19). Merriam (1998) further explains, "case study is the best reporting form for evaluations. Case study is best because it provides thick description, is grounded, is holistic and life-like, it simplifies data to be considered by the reader and can communicate tacit knowledge" (p. 39).

A case study was also used in this specific situation because of the potential that this study had to "help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or objective"(Merriam, 1998, p. 33). In addition to this, "for teaching purposes, a case study need not contain a

complete or accurate rendition of actual events, rather its purpose is to establish a framework for discussion and debate" (Yin, 1994, p. 2).

The other aspect of this study that made it participatory was that the researcher brought research, ideas, best practices, and theoretical frameworks to the school and to participants to inform and move the initiative forward. The researcher put forth the idea of using a Professional Learning Community as a means to support teaching and learning in the School. The researcher introduced the idea of creating and helping staff co-construct a mission and vision for the school. The researcher helped staff co-construct a covenant to support behaviors and actions to support the work. The researcher provided Professional Development for teachers with assistance from district personnel and outside consultants on: team work, dialogue, looking at data to inform instruction, as well as on-going workshops on Accountable Talk, instructions for ELL students, reading and writing in the content areas and other workshops to support effective instruction for English Language Learners. In addition to the Professional Development, the researcher created a house system in which common teachers from different disciplines worked with the same team of teachers and students. Through this structure, teachers were provided with time and resources to share curricula, visit each others' classes, plan field trips and develop common theme based curricula to support interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

In addition to providing Professional Development and structured time and training to support the development of a Professional Learning Community, the researcher was involved in many observations of the implementation process (Yin, 1998). In addition to

this, participants helped co-construct and share research, best practices, insights and frameworks that shaped and moved the initiative forward.

In addition to being participatory, this case study was interpretive as it "gathered as much information about a problem with the intent to theorize and interpret" (Merriam, 1998, p. 37) changes that attempted to affect the outcome of the service delivery for teachers and students. The interpretive aspect of the case study was further complemented by the evaluative methodology, which involved description, explanations, and judgment on perceptions of changes in practice.

Data were compiled from six teachers in order to inform the perceptions of teacher growth, student learning and school-wide collaboration. The researcher used : pre and post interviews of each participant in the fall and the spring of the year of the study, announced and unannounced observations of house meetings as well as monthly observations of Professional Development sessions and monthly reflective writing journals for which participants were provided with time and space during the school day to complete . It was hoped that participants and the researcher reached "the level of abstraction and conceptualization that may range from suggesting relationships to constructing theory (Merriam, 1998, p. 39). This level of participatory research intended to allow us to gain in-depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved (Merriam 1998).

Magnet School Teacher Sample

The study was housed in a district magnet school that exclusively served English Language Learners. Almost 40% of the teaching staff was involved in the study. The school was chosen to house the study because of the uniqueness of the student population and the enrollment criteria for the school. Although the Charleston public schools have many English Language Learners throughout its district high schools, Freire International High School was the only school in the district that exclusively served English Language Learners. The other district schools addressed the needs of ELL students by providing sheltered instruction in English classes for students. They did not have a concentrated number of newly arrived English Language Learners or the adequate staffing to provide an entire program to support a sheltered instruction program in all the content and elective classes for ELL students. As a result, the sample was guided by the fact that the "investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Chein, 1981, p. 52).

A purposeful sample of teachers was selected. In order to maintain a manageable sample, six teachers were selected as participants for the study.

The criteria to determine a purposeful sample were**:**

- At least two teachers from each house

- Representation from different subject teachers

- Minimum experience of 4 years teaching experience

- Reflective of student population

The sample consisted of**:**

- Two teachers from House I, two teachers from House II and two teachers from House III

- Two mathematics teachers, two Humanities teachers, one science teacher and one academic language teacher.

- Teaching experience range of teachers: 4 years –33 years

- All of the teachers speak another language besides English

- Five out the six teachers are immigrants who are bilingual and bicultural (The sixth teacher is white, non-immigrant but well versed in languages and cultures of students)

According to Gay (2006) there are no hard and fast rules determining the 'correct' number of participants to inform a study. The researcher involved one third of the teaching staff at Freire International High School to participate in the study. Selecting teachers that worked in the school where the study was housed provided opportunities for the rich and descriptive data needed to evaluate the effectiveness that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community had on perceptions of teaching and learning for students and teachers and collaboration for the staff.

The researcher first obtained permission from staff before any data was gathered. The researcher sought permission from the researcher's sponsoring institution, and from the participants from whom information was solicited. After peer review of interview protocols and peer review of journal entry leads, all research instruments and protocols were submitted to the researcher's sponsoring institution for Human Subjects Review. Teacher participants were asked to sign consent waivers. All participants were provided

with the opportunity to decline participation in the study if so desired throughout any

point of the study with assurances of no consequences.

Pilot Testing

To ensure that the interview protocols and the journal prompts were clear and

strong enough to gain insight into teacher perceptions and attitudes on a) teacher growth

from each other, b) student learning, and c) school-wide collaboration, interview

questions and journal leads were subject to pilot testing. Merriam (1998) stresses, "Pilot

interviews are crucial for trying out your interview questions. Not only do you get some

practice on interviewing you also quickly learn which questions are confusing and need

rewording" (p. 75). In the process of creating these data gathering tools, doctoral students

and professors reviewed and helped shape the questions and journal entries. As a result of

these reviews, a number of changes were made to the interview questions. The interview

questions were shortened from 12 questions to 9 questions. As a result of the change in

the number of questions, the interview time was shortened from about fifty minutes to

about 35 minutes. The journal leads were improved by providing the researcher with

feedback to make the leads more open ended and reflective. The main goals of these

changes were to maintain the interviews below 45 minutes and to provide participants

with strong journal leads that allowed the researcher to gain more insight into

participants' thinking.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures in this qualitative study included interviews, journal reflections, observations of teachers during professional development and PLC house and content meetings. The researcher interviewed participants individually at the inception of the year of the study on the perceptions that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community had on perceptions of teacher learning, teacher perceptions of students' learning and teacher perceptions of school wide collaboration. Individual interviews were done of all participants at the end of the year of the study to measure teacher perception of teacher learning from each other, teacher perception of students' learning and teacher perception of school wide collaboration as a result of the emergence of a Professional Learning Community. The pre and post interview questions covered the same topics so that participants were able to make judgments on the perceived effect that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community, the professional development, the house meetings and other elements of the Professional Learning Community had on practice, student learning, and collaboration. The questions were open-ended, and interpretative to allow for various perspectives (Merriam, 1998). These types of questions were essential in providing for qualitative data that supported an evaluative case study approach.

Interviews

Pre and post individual interviews of all participants were conducted. The pre intervention interviews were conducted in the fall of the year of the study at the school, during school time in the researcher's office. Participants were provided with time during the school day to take part in the interviews. There was no compensation for the time and

contents of the interviews that the participants volunteered to take part in. Each interview took 35-45 minutes. The post interviews were conducted in the late spring of the year of the study. The post interviews took place in the school office, during school time. The interview questions were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher.

Participants who volunteered to take part in the study were provided with the interview questions in advance. All participants were asked in advance for permission to audiotape and transcribe the contents of the interviews. Once the interviews were completed and typed the transcripts were given to interviewees so that they checked the transcripts for accuracy. The tapes were stored in a safe and locked area in the researcher's office. Participants were provided with confidentiality. All tapes will be destroyed after the conclusion of the study.

Journals

Participants responded to journal entries once a month in a quiet space in the school building during school time. Participants were provided with journal leads on the topics of the study and time during the school day (forty-five minutes each month) to respond to journal entries such as: As a result of the emergence of a Professional Learning Community provide examples, if any of student learning …. Explain you perception of collaboration as a result of the house meetings ……... What practices, if any have you learned from colleagues as a result of the PLC? The journals were given to the participants and picked up after they recorded their reflections. Journals were be kept in the researcher's office and locked in a secure cabinet.

<u>Observations</u>

The researcher conducted announced and unannounced visits to meetings of different house and content PLC meetings throughout the year of the study. The observations were used to provide some knowledge of the context that related to the study and to provide specific incidents and/or behaviors, reactions and possible changes that related to the study. The researcher looked for: team dynamics, insightful breakthroughs, conflict negotiation, leadership, cultural change, acceptance of responsibility, development of rubrics, scaffolding strategies and common assessment practices during observations. Other behaviors that emerged from the observations were recorded as well. Observation notes were kept in an observation log. The time, date, names of participants and key findings that took place during the observations were recorded in the observation logs. These logs were kept in a secure location in the researcher's office. Key observations were coded and used to inform the findings.

Methods of Data Analysis

This researcher organized the collected data in a manner that best illuminated the common themes that represented the story of this study. As data were gathered it was organized under research questions and emerging themes. The researcher gathered data and organized it in chronological order. In addition to this, data were organized through observations of participants within the context of the PLC meetings in which specific observations and interactions of participants were recorded to support the study. The team observations helped inform the collection of data to further support interview

questions and journal prompts through triangulation of the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researcher utilized a system of cross case analysis so that it is represented the research that was critical to tell the reader the information that was gathered (Merriam, 1998).

Data from the following sources were coded and analyzed:

- Transcripts from interviews

- Field notes from observations

- Field notes from journal review Program documents

- Participant journal reflections

Through triangulation of data sources, it was hoped that a strong level of understanding and high degrees of clarity were attained to inform the study (Merriam, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Codes were developed to gather data from the interviews, observations and journals. The codes allowed themes to emerge which informed findings from the research questions. A coding system was developed as a result of the themes, patterns and trends that surfaced as the researcher examined the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p.56). As a result, data were used to make meaning of the study (Merriam, 1998). Categories that emerged from the data reflected the research as well as the possible answers to the research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

The researcher employed a coding system to record perceptions of teacher growth, perceptions of increased student learning and increased school wide collaboration while conducting observations. Codes were used to measure the same indicators when conducting interviews and analyzing data and perceptions from journal reflections. These codes were used to record interactions of observations of participants during PLC meetings.

For example, the code PG was used to record perceptions of growth, -PG was used to measure things that took away from perceptions of growth, the code PSL was used to record positive perceptions of student learning, -PSL was used to record perceptions of negative student learning. SWC was used to record positive school wide collaboration. The code –SCW recorded factors that were negative towards the growth of school wide collaboration. Other codes were used to identify perceptions of changes in teacher practice by looking for behaviors such as team dynamics, insightful breakthroughs, conflict negotiation, leadership, cultural change, acceptance of responsibility, development of rubrics, scaffolding strategies and common assessment practices.

Through coding of the data sources: interviews, journal reflections, and observations, the researcher was able to develop themes and patterns that emerged from the study. Themes, topics, concerns and issues that continued to surface through journal reflections, observations and interviews were highlighted to help support the findings.

Formats for reporting the Data

The data reporting for this case study included categorizing strategies, such as coding, thematic and pattern trend analysis, and contextual strategies, which included

narrative analysis and documents and memoranda (Merriam, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) stress the fact that text alone is not sufficient in providing a holistic perspective of the data. For this reason, Merriam (1998) advises the researcher to implement proper displays that help the reader to get a better grasp that reinforces the narrative. For these reasons, the use of graphic organizers, matrices, and text were employed to report the data.

Through these sources of data reporting the reader may get a more holistic understanding of the data. The graphs and networks intended to provide the reader with a clear and efficient data set that identified the variables, sources and themes in the study. Through the usage of text, the researcher delved into the rich and descriptive nature of the study (Merriam, 1998) which may allow the reader to get a better understanding of the rationale for the PLC, the challenges that arose and the potential impact that the PLC may have had on teacher practice as a result of learning from colleagues, school-wide collaboration and student learning.

The study was discussed in reference to the following research questions:

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?

The literature review from Chapter Two highlighted collaboration, learning organizations, and best practices for English Language Learners that helped support the frameworks for discussing the findings of the study in Chapter Five. These included: Judith Warren Little's work on collaboration, DuFour and Eaker's work on professional learning communities, Covey, Senge, and Fullan's work on learning organizations and Collins' and Collier's work on best practices for English Language Learners. Among other areas, Chapter Five discusses the implications for practice and policy.

Limitations of the Study:

One of the limitations of the study was the size of the sample. Six teachers at Freire International High School made up the sample in the study. As a result, not every teacher's voice and insights were used to inform the analysis. For this reason, the findings could not be considered generalizable. Nevertheless, a conscious effort was made to include a purposeful sample that included teachers from different houses, from different content areas, and teachers with various levels of teaching experience.

Another limitation to the study was the fact that the researcher and the participants were intent on making the implementation of the PLC a success. It was important that participants and the researcher tried to not see and/or feel what they wanted to have

happened as a result of this implementation. There was some potential for participants telling the principal researcher what they felt they should say or what they felt was the right answer as opposed to the actual feelings and/or observations that may have been contrary to the intentions of the endeavor. Bickman and Rog (1998) provide a cautionary note to participant researchers: "your relationship with the people in the study can be complex and changeable, and these relationships will necessarily affect you as the research instrument, as well as have implication for the other components of your research design" (p. 86). For this reason the researcher obtained signed consent forms indicating that participation in the study would not affect work relations. The researcher also implemented various data sources to provide for triangulation of the findings to further lessen the potential bias in the study.

Another limitation of the study was the time period within which the study took place. The study was completed in one academic year. The main focus was to capture the teacher's perceptions of how the emergence of a Professional Learning Community supported teacher growth from their colleagues, student learning and school-wide collaboration. Some of these changes may take more time to develop.

Another limitation to the study may have occurred when analyzing outcomes related to the emergence that a Professional Learning Community had on perceptions of teacher learning, student learning and collaboration. Teachers in the school had history that encompassed past collaborative practice and relationships that had been in existence prior to the implementation of the PLC. Thus, all findings related to the emergence of a Professional Learning Community could not be solely attributed to the PLC.

The final limitation to the study was that the findings of the study, due to its small sample and unique setting cannot be generalized to other schools.

Chapter Four
Findings of the Study

Introduction

Chapter four presents the findings of the study on the emergence of a professional learning community and teachers' perception on teaching and learning for a school that is specifically designed to serve English Language Learners. This case study examined how the emergence of a professional learning community impacted teacher perception of teacher learning from each other, student learning and collaboration. This chapter presents an account of data that was integrated through the following sources: interviews, journal responses, announced and unannounced observations of meetings, and group generated documents.

The divisions of this chapter are designed to allow the story to unfold in a meaningful way. Findings will be represented in a descriptive, narrative manner, along with charts and graphs in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

The major research questions for this study are:

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?

Chapter four will be divided into two major sections:

- **Introduction to the Case Study**: This section provides an overview of the context in which the study took place as well as the rationale for such an examination along with the sample of participants in the study and the demographics of the location of the study.

- **Representation of the significant data** collected from each instrument as it pertains to and answers each research question; which include:

a. **Interviews:** This section describes the composition of the participant interviews.

b. **Journal entries**: This section provides a narrative of the findings based on participant journals throughout different stages of the research project. Samples from journal entries in this section highlight recurring themes. This section concludes with a summary of the journal entries

c. **Observations:** This section provides a narrative of the findings based on the researcher's field notes from announced and unannounced visits to teacher meetings and professional development sessions. Samples from meetings are presented to highlight recurring themes. This section concludes with a summary of observations

d. **Co-constructed documents:** This section presents documents that were created throughout the year to highlight practices and systems that were put in place to

support teacher learning, student learning and collaboration. This section concludes with a summary.

These findings were reported after careful analysis of interviews, journals, field notes from observations and co-constructed documents that were created throughout the year of the study. The data were coded in order to present the themes that emerged from the analysis. The findings were presented after analysis of data contained in each instrument.

Description of the Case Study

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

The primary goals of this study were to analyze and evaluate the impact that the emergence of a professional learning community had on teacher perception of teacher learning from each other, teacher perception on student learning and teacher perception on collaboration at a school that was designed to exclusively serve English Language Learners. A secondary area of interest was that of studying the best practices that may impact the teaching and learning of English Language Learners.

The creation of a professional learning community was designed to facilitate the professional growth of teachers and students in order to provide more explicit opportunities for educators and students to take greater charge of their own learning. Most importantly, this study sought to ascertain the impact that the creation of a professional learning community had on perceptions of teacher learning, student learning and collaboration in a unique school that only services English Language Learners at the high school level. This study sought to identify potential challenges to creating a professional learning community with schools designed to meet the needs of English

Language Learners. Implications yielded from the study's findings may ultimately be utilized by other schools and districts that may attempt to create professional learning communities to service English Language Learners in the United States.

Sample of Participants in the Study

The participants selected for the study included six teachers, two female and four male, five of whom are teachers from other countries who identified themselves as former English Language Learners. The other participant was an Anglo, who had spent many years living in other countries and speaks three other languages besides English. All six teachers had at least eight years of teaching experience. The teachers were all between thirty and fifty-six years old. Four of the six teachers had earned Masters Degrees. Subjects taught by participants during the year of the study included: English, Spanish, Math, Science and Academic Enrichment. The teachers were chosen by this researcher, based on:

- their years of experience in education

- the variety of subjects taught

- The range of houses that they worked in within the house structure that the school instituted in an attempt to enhance the development of a professional learning community.

Table 4.1 Summary of Participant's Information

Name	Age Range	Race	Gender	Years in The District	Position	Education
Andres	50-59	Latino	Male	7	Mathematics Teacher	Masters
Antonio	40-49	West African	Male	15	Mathematics Teacher	Masters
Tom	30-39	Caucasian	Male	9	Spanish Teacher	Masters
Harrison	30-39	Latino	Male	9	Academic Enrichment Teacher	Bachelors
Christina	30-39	Eastern European	Female	6	Science Teacher	Masters
Sally	50-59	Latina	Female	22	English Teacher	Masters

Demographics of the Location of the Study

All of the participants in the study were teachers at Freire International High School. Freire International High School is a school within the Charleston Public Schools, a PreK-12 school system located in a metropolitan urban setting in Barrington County. Charleston is a historic city with a population of almost 600,000 people. According to the 2000 United States Census, Charleston is a minority-majority city.

Charleston Public Schools has a student body of approximately 56,000 students. Freire International High is the only public school in the Charleston district that is specifically designated to exclusively serve ELL students. As a result of the steady rise on ELL population, the Charleston School districted created Freire International High School to support the emerging student population. The school is located in an urban city in the Northeast Region of the United States.

Freire International High School is the only district magnet school that exclusively services English Language Learners. The school is located in the western part of the city. It is housed in an intimate and beautifully designed nineteenth century school house that was used as an elementary school prior to the establishment of Freire International. The school has twelve classrooms, no cafeteria, no gymnasium and no library. The school houses two hundred students from various parts of the city of Charleston.

Table 4.2 ELL students at the High School Level in Charleston Public Schools

Total number of countries represented in High Schools	Total number of ELL in High Schools	Percentage of all High School students in the district that are ELL
64	2750	12.5%

Table 4.2 indicates that there are a great number of students from different countries that make up the total number of English Language Learners for the district. The total number of high school enrolled English Language Learners in the district is 12.5%. Many of these students are assigned to various high schools throughout the district. Some schools have ELL programs to help meet the needs of English Language Learners and some have pull out programs to support language development through English as a Second Language classes.

Table 4.3 Student Information of Students at Freire International High School.

Country of Origin	**Number of Students**	**Percentage of ELL Population at Freire**
Dominican Republic	60	30%
China	4	2%
Colombia	8	4%
Haiti	12	6%
Cape Verdean Creole	16	8%
Guatemala	14	7%
Honduras	12	6%
El Salvador	13	6%
Albania	8	4%
Ethiopia	8	4%
Somalia	12	6%
*Other(Iraq, Kurdistan, Cameroon, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mexico, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Mexico, Egypt, etc)	34	17%

Table 4.3 represents the country of origin of students, the number of students from the country and the percentage that each country of origin represents of the total population of the student body.

The students at Freire are labeled as English Language Learners by the state and district. Although there is a great deal of diversity among the students at Freire International in regards to their country of origin, native language and educational experiences, some factors that were consistent among the student population during the year of the study were: ninety-five percent of the students received free and reduced lunch and one hundred percent of the student population met the enrollment criteria which specified that all students were newly arrived to the country and entered the school with a language code of beginner or Early Intermediated as measured by the state language test.

Reporting of Significant Data

Research Question One:

- *How do teachers' perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?*

Participant Interviews

Participants were interviewed twice during the research, once during the beginning of the academic year, prior to the emergence of the implementation of the PLC and again nine months later after the implementation of the PLC. The following are pre and post interview questions that were asked of all participants.

Describe your perception of teachers learning from other teachers?

During the second interview the question changed to:

> Describe your perception of teachers learning from other teachers as a result of the emergence of a Professional Learning Community?

<u>Participant Responses</u>
   (1) Indicates response from the first interview; (2) Indicates responses from the

second interview.

Sally

(1) Although our school is not so big, it feels like a big school because we don't spend much time learning from each other. If you are talking in those big meetings (school-wide meetings) you don't have a chance to get to the needs of the students and to the questions that you really want to address about students' needs that other teachers may know. I almost never get a chance to really talk to my colleagues so I don't really learn a lot from them. I don't have time in the day to meet with other teachers that teach the same students and share ideas and strategies to help me and the students. When we have professional development, we do not get a lot of chances to talk to each other about what we are doing that works with students. Sometimes we break up into small groups but we do not have enough time to bring up specific examples and we almost always talk about the professional development and not about how we can learn from each other.

(2) I have seen a big change as a result of our effort to create a professional learning community.   I can tell you that teachers feel more comfortable working together and learning from each other because we have regular house meetings that give us the opportunity to share ideas and help each other. The reason why we are working better together is because we have gotten to know each other much better. We have also gotten to know our students much better. We have chances to talk in small groups with teachers that have the same interest to help and guide and support the same group of students. That was difficult to do last year without the structures and times to meet and to share our ideas and things that are working and things that we need help with. It has also been very good to get to visit each other and to plan lessons together. When we visit each other we have chances to see things that we might try and we also have more to talk about.
   I feel that I have learned some important things from my colleagues that have helped with my teaching. Some of the things that have helped me the most have been the sharing of problems of practice. This has been helpful in giving me feedback and ideas to improve writing in my class. It has also helped me to check for understanding in different ways and to make different and better lessons.

Andres

(1) I don't think we work well together and learn much from each other. It's kind of difficult to find the time to get together with everybody, with all the teachers that are teaching the same students that I have with the exception of one or two teachers. I don't feel that I have time to talk to teachers from my grade level or to really talk to teachers

that teach the same subject that I teach. We get chances to come together for school meetings (PD) but we don't really get a chance to learn from our colleagues. The agenda does not allow time for us to learn from each other.

(2) Well, it seems to me that we have learned a lot from each other with our professional learning community because of the house system and the practices that we have put in place. Now we have the time to share and communicate with each other about what's going on in our classrooms. The teacher visitations have also really helped me learn a lot from my colleagues. When I visited other teachers, I focused my visits on the language of math. I got to see how other Math teachers present concepts build vocabulary and use writing in their Math classes. I also got to visit other content teachers and saw how they created group projects, emphasized writing and modeled lessons. This helped me change some of the things that I do in my classes. For this reason it was so important to visit each other and to have time to discuss and share our questions and ideas about what we saw and how we can use some idea to transfer to our own classes. To me, this was real learning because I could share ideas and use some of the same strategies and language that I saw to help teach my classes. The biggest thing I learned from other teachers is how to use more language and talk for students to learn the material better.

Antonio:
(1) From talking to other teachers and from my own personal experience, we do not spend time learning from each other talking about the students and our work. We have tried to have some afterschool meetings but we have not been consistent so it really hasn't really happened. This shows that people want to learn from each other but we have not been able to do this consistently. Even though we don't meet formally, when we do meet, we mostly talk about students. We don't spend a lot of time teaching each other and talking about what we do and how we do things. We need to better think about how we can share ideas to better help each other. I think that is one area that we can do much better if we have the time to meet and share our ideas.

(2) I think what the implementation of the plc and the house system does is actually contrary to what happens a lot with teachers. Teachers usually feel isolated in high schools. The plc and the house system helps teachers come together and to feel as part of a team. When you are going through difficulties with a particular student or you are having difficulties getting part of your curriculum across, you don't feel like you are by yourself because we can share our problem of practice and we can work on a lesson together to help us. The house system provides a place where you can share, brainstorm, talk and get feedback about your teaching. This is especially helpful when you are working with teachers that have the same students. It is much easier for teachers to learn from each other when we all know the students well. The plc really creates this space that otherwise is mostly missing in the way teachers work.
I have learned a lot from my colleagues this year. We have learned to work together in a different way. We have done this through sharing our problems of practice, looking at data and making units together. The most important thing is to meet on a consistent basis to share ideas and strategies to help each other so that we can help students learn. With

help from my colleagues I have learned how to create different tests, I have put more writing into my class and I have done more projects with other teachers.

Harrison:
(1) I don't think we make time to learn from each other. The school is small but it feels big because we really don't make the time to talk about our practice and the things that we can do to help each other. The only time I feel like I might learn from other teachers is when we talk a little during lunch but I never feel that we have enough time to share ideas and really sit down and ask each other questions about how other teachers handle things like grading, writing and discipline. Sometimes we try figuring out how students are doing in the school, but we don't take the time to figure out how we are doing and what things we are doing well that we can share with each other. We need to share more of our ideas and strategies because if we don't help each other, it's going to be hard to help the students.

(2) The plc and the addition of the house system have been great for us to learn from each other. I think it has been a great implementation for the school. Before having the house system, there was less sharing between teachers and less communication. A lot of teachers spent a lot of time more concerned about their class and were not open to sharing ideas and strategies. Since we have been able to build trust, now we can visit each other and share things that are going well throughout intervisitations. We have even shared things that are not going well through problems of practice and we have been able to give each other feedback and support to help each other.
This has been great for me because I have always had a hard time teaching students to write better. When I visited other teachers, I saw the sentence stems and the rubrics that they used to help students practice writing. I also saw the feedback form that teachers use to help students practice individually and in groups. I tried a lot of the things that I saw from visits in my classes. The other great thing that I learned from my colleagues was how to create better tests and assessments because we shared tests and assessments to help students learn the material better.

Tom:
(1) We do not really spend a lot of time learning from each other. When we do PD it is focused on practices that might help us but they do not come from our own experiences. We get to talk a little about what we do in meetings, but we do not make time to get into strategies and practices to learn from each other. There are teachers that I think are doing a good job and I would like to get a better sense of what they are doing in their classes to support student learning. We need to spend more time looking at what we do and not just talking about what we do.

(2)As a result of the emergence of a plc I feel that I have been able to meet and learn a lot from my colleagues. Some of the things that I have learned are good and bad. Some of the things that I have learned that have been tough have been how some of my colleagues struggle with things like getting students to do homework and to study for tests. We have

done lesson studies and problems of practice to support each other and I think that this has been really helpful.

Some of the things that I have learned that have been really helpful to me has been how some teacher's help students become more engaged with notebooks, projects and opportunities to lean and show their learning in different ways. I have tried some of the strategies and ideas that I have seen other teachers do in my classes.

The Plc has also helped us to learn how to share more ideas with each other. Some of the things that we have been able to get across are some common practices to support each other. I have learned more about getting everyone on the same page. We have looked at data together and we have learned to question each other about our mini-lessons and how we communicate expectations to our students. I have also learned that we are very different in how many of us grade students. This past year with the plc we have actually shared our syllabus, we have come up with a homework policy and we have used some of the same strategies like sentence stems and mini-lessons to support teaching and learning. It has been helpful to meet with other teachers and share ideas on teaching the same group of students. We did not have these systems in place before the emergence of the PLC.

Christina:

(1)We need more time to talk to each other about what we do so that we can really learn from each other. I spend time talking to my friends during lunch, but I don't have any conversations with some teachers about what is going on in their classes. When we get together we look at report grades and MCAS scores, but we do not spend time talking with each other about what we are doing in our classes to help students do better on MCAS and other tests. We need to spend more time as teachers talking and sharing what we do in our classes to help us get students to do better. In general, I can honestly say that I get some ideas from some teachers that I am friendly with but we need to do more stuff within our departments and grades to help each other learn more about our practices and our students.

(2) The implementation of a plc has truly helped us get on the same page about assessments, practices and grading. We have been working harder and building trust to work together to support the development of the students and our own development. The peer visits have been really helpful. It has been really helpful to see how other teachers begin their class. When we did visits on workshop instruction to help us build student talk I realized that the teachers that had the sentence stems and anchor charts were able to get students to talk more in class. This helped me to use more charts and sentence stems to help students with their writing.

The other idea that really helped me to understand what other teachers do and has helped me learn from my colleagues has been the lesson study. We have shared lessons and built lessons together. This has helped me with my lessons and my assessments. I look forward to having my colleagues give me feedback on how I can make something better to support our students.

<u>Summary of Interview Responses</u>

The six teachers responded to the pre and post interview questions pertaining to their perception of teacher learning as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. They addressed specific programmatic features that they believed assisted their learning and impacted their pedagogical practices. They addressed the impact that they believed the learning from other teachers had on their teaching practices as a result of the implementation of the PLC.

Two programmatic features stood above of all others in teachers' interview responses that supported teachers' learning from each other. These programmatic features were the implementation of the house system and the time and structures to meet on a consistent basis. All participants found that the structural implementation of the house system in which common teachers shared common students helped teachers learn from each other because they were able to discuss and focus on a specific group of students as a team. All participants felt that the consistent and intentional times to meet with colleagues within their house and within their content area were essential in enhancing teacher perception of learning from each other. As a result of the time that was provided teachers used the time effectively to look at student work, share practices, present problems of practice, share lesson plans, construct assessments and create interdisciplinary units. Participants also indicated that they learned how to look at data and interpret data differently from working with other teachers. As a result of the lesson studies and the looking at student data, participants felt that they learned how to create different lessons and assessments.

As a result of the time that teachers spent together participants felt that they learned how to: create interdisciplinary units, present lessons in different ways, give more explicit feedback to each other, implement new practices, run meetings more effectively, communicate with students in more effective ways and build stronger relationships with students. In addition to learning some of these new skills, teachers were able to create common systems to model lessons, give students feedback and to share consistency in practices. Additionally; participants learned how to reinforce and how to institutionalize operational matters from each other such as clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations of themselves and students.

Other practices and skills that participants learned from each other as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community were: protocol-based problem posing skills, giving each other feedback and how to hold each other accountable for the goals and systems that they had put in place. Participants were able to discuss the challenges and learning's that took place in classrooms that impacted student learning through authentic discussions of teacher practices. Participants felt that they became better at giving advice, sharing strategies, praising colleagues, motivating colleagues and at challenging colleagues in a respectful way. Five of the six participants stated that the problem of practice process was very helpful in helping them learn skills from colleagues such as questioning, pushing each other and giving advice. Participants learned how to build trust and share learning with each other through their colleagues.

The other facet of the implantation of a professional learning community that some participants found to be extremely helpful in their ability to teach and learn from each other was the professional development that took place throughout the year. Much of the

professional development was teacher-led. The teacher-led professional development gave teachers an opportunity to make their practice public because they had opportunities to model and present their work during these sessions to colleagues. The professional development also gave teachers an opportunity to visit each other based on areas that they identified that they wanted to improve in their own practice. All six participants found the intervisitation model to be helpful in learning from each other. The visits gave teachers opportunities to observe colleagues with time built in to meet prior and after the visitations to debrief the observations. Participants found the pre and post visitation structure and protocol helpful because it "gave the observer an opportunity to ask questions, probe and find out more about the thinking behind the strategies. It also provided the teacher that was observed an opportunity to reflect on their practice and to get feedback from a colleague".

Four of the six participants found the lessons studies to be very helpful in learning from each other. Teachers indicated that through the lesson study they were able to get feedback and strategies to help improve their practice. "The lesson study has helped me to make better lessons. It has helped me to differentiate instruction." Another participant found that the lesson study helped him to slow down his pacing. "When other teachers were able to help me realize that I was going too fast or that I was not clear about my goals, it helped me become clearer about what I wanted students to do. This helped me plan clearer lessons."

The other major theme that stood out among all participant interviews was the importance of having time to learn from each other. Many of the participants indicated that when they first started meeting they would focus more on the students. Through

professional development on goal setting, sharing practices and opportunities to look at student work, teachers became more comfortable in sharing and learning from each other. All participants indicated that they felt more comfortable and trusted participants in their teams more as a result of the team building and time spent doing professional development which resulted in setting and establishing norms and goals that teams constantly referred back to as a guiding principle to help improve their ability to learn from each other.

The following represents a summary list of the practices that participants believed that they learned from their colleagues.

- Pacing

- Giving each other feedback

- Giving students' feedback

- Creating lessons

- Building assessments

- Creating Interdisciplinary units

- Holding each other accountable

Journal Entries:

Participants were provided with opportunities throughout the academic year to respond in journal entries. Participants were provided with opportunities once a month to respond to journal entries during the year of the study to address their perception of learning that was taking place from their colleagues as a result of the implementation of the PLC.

The first journal entry, which was done very early in the year of the study,

indicated that most teachers were not sure if they were learning from their colleagues.

Four of the six participants indicated that they needed more time to meet to build trust

and learn more from each other. The following are a few samples of excerpts from

responses from the first journal entries that highlight this point.

Samples of 1st responses:

Christina:

"It is too early in the year to determine what I have learned from my colleagues as a
result of the emergence of a plc. We have gotten together and set norms and discussed
some of the challenges that we are facing. We give each other ideas but I am not sure that
I have really learned things that have really impacted my teaching."

Tom:

"It has been good to get on the same page with teachers and to talk about our common
students, but I am not sure that I have really gotten to the point that I feel comfortable
about sharing my challenges and learning from my colleagues. It has been good to do the
problems of practice, but I think we need to do this more often to build enough trust so
that we can really help each other".

Andres:

"I'm not sure if I have learned from my colleagues. It is too early to really see changes in
my teaching. I like talking to some teachers that I already trust. I am getting to know the
teachers in my house a little better. I feel like I can continue to work and learn with my
Math teachers because we have worked on the same curriculum for a long time, but I
have really liked the idea of visiting other teachers. This has helped me learn some things
from my colleagues that I am not sure if I have shared with them."

Two of the six teachers felt that the emergence of a plc was helpful to their learning

from their first response to the entry. The following are two excerpts that support this

perspective.

Harrison:

"The teacher sharing of problem of practice and looking at student work has really helped me to reach my students more effectively. I really liked sharing our assessments. By knowing what types of assessments my colleagues give, I can prepare them for more rigorous exploration of science as they get older - seeing other teacher's assessments and curriculum has been very helpful. After looking at other teachers assessments, it has helped me realize I should be focusing more on open responses - I tried that, and I need to do more work on teaching kids what I'm looking for."

Sally:

I think that the plc has really helped me to learn and share with my colleagues. One idea of skill-based stuff, that has worked has been Jessica and I doing something together. Something that has supported me is that the students learned to do lab reports using standard format. We both sat down and came up with a rubric and a lesson we could both use to teach them how to do a lab report properly. Then we looked at the products together and compare 10th, 11th, 12th grade lab reports.

As the year progressed participants began to provide more explicit examples about

how the implementation of the PLC helped them learn from each other. The following

are sample responses from a journal prompt half-way through the academic year.

Sally:

I have really enjoyed sharing and working with other teachers. I have learned so much from my colleagues. One of the biggest supports for me has been to establish norms for the way we use notebooks to teach students to take notes, make lab reports, reflect on their thinking and get on the same page with other teachers for common expectations. I was able to get this by looking at how other teachers set up their notebook. This then led to the implementation of the   rubric, which really helped me with getting students to write better and for me to give them more feedback. In quarter 3 and 4 I am planning on including the portfolio with reflections of students' best work. It has been really helpful to learn how to do this with help from my colleagues in the house and in the content teams. I have learned a lot and I know my students are learning a lot too.

Christina:

The sharing of practices has extended beyond my content area. Through the process of sharing assessments, I have gotten a great deal of suggestions and feedback from my colleagues. Some of the writing teachers have been very helpful in assisting me with developing my students writing in my classes. I have learned how to help students organize their writing better, I have been using more rubrics and I have done more modeling to help students understand what good writing looks like. I have learned these skills and practices from sharing assignments, looking at students work and through

getting feedback from my colleagues. If we had not shared my challenges, I would have had to reinvent the wheel and students would not have had a chance to practice and improve their writing. This sharing has also helped me too teach writing and content in a better way to support deeper learning.

Antonio:

"What has helped me learn the most this year from my colleagues has been the chance to see them teaching and for them to see me teaching. It has been really powerful to work with my colleagues and to build a lesson and to have them come back and give you their feedback on the lesson. This has helped me so much. I enjoy doing the lesson together, because when I teach it, it does not feel like it is just mine. The teachers can see some of the ideas that we came up with and they can tell me what they thought about what I did. Because I teach Math, it is always great to get support from language teachers to work on word problems. We discussed key vocabulary, using context clues and rewriting the problem in their own language. It feels great to learn new strategies from your colleagues and to try them and to get feedback right away".

Summary of Journal Entries:

The journal entries were a rich data source to gather information on what participants perceived they were learning from each other. Participants were provided with time once a month throughout the year of the study to reflect on how and what they felt that they were learning as a result of the emergence of a professional learning community. The programmatic feature, most frequently cited, as being helpful to participants' ability to learn from one another in their journal entries was time to meet so that they could learn from each other. Five of the six participants had powerful journal entries expressing their thoughts on how helpful they found the time that was provided for them to work together and how much they learned from each other as a result of the time that they had to share ideas and learning. All participants felt that having time to meet during professional development in smaller groups within content and house teams was helpful in getting them to share and learn from each other.

The journal entries highlighted that at the beginning of the year, some participants were uncertain or unaware if learning from their colleagues was taking place. In the initial journal entries four of the six participants indicated that time together and professional development helped participants to develop trust which helped them to learn from each other.

Participants referred to the problems of practice and peer visitations as important opportunities that helped them learn from each other. Through participation in problems of practice consultations, and the suggestions and ideas they received from colleagues all participants felt that they were better able to address the challenges that they faced in their classrooms. Teachers used a process called Problems of practice in which they presented their challenge to teachers and then received feedback and suggestions to help them address the problem. Problems of practice included writing assessments, differentiating instruction, writing in the content areas, getting students to do more homework, classroom management and getting students to produce accountable talk in the classroom.

The next most frequent topic represented in the journal entries that participants felt helped them learn from colleagues were the lesson studies. As mentioned earlier, lesson study is a process by which teachers work together to create lessons together. Four of the six participants' journal entries referred to lesson studies as a powerful way for teachers to learn from each other. Participants shared that they learned how to deliver lessons in different ways, provide different assignments and check for understanding in different ways as a result of the lesson studies.

Similar to the data collected from the interviews, the programmatic features of the house system and the intentional time and space that were provided for teachers to learn from each other were mentioned in all participants' journal entries. In addition to the time and sharing that took place, participants referred to the professional development to help set norms, look at student work and visitation protocols as helpful in helping them learn from their colleagues.

The following list shows the most common skills and practices that teachers perceived to have learned from each other through examination of the journal entries:

1. Creation of lessons

2. Providing student feedback

3. Creating assessments

4. Building relationships with students

5. Analyzing data

6. Providing feedback

7. Creating interdisciplinary units

Announced and unannounced visits of meetings:

The researcher conducted announced and unannounced visits of meetings with a specific focus on perceptions of teachers' learning from each other. During the meetings the researcher saw different levels of interactions from different houses and content teams that highlighted examples of teachers learning from each other. As the school year went on it became apparent that participants were more comfortable in sharing problems and

providing solutions to support knowledge sharing and learning. Throughout the visits, some teams and houses were better organized in maintaining norms, implementing protocols and following agendas. During observations, the researcher saw participants learning from colleagues by sharing insights about students, sharing lessons, presenting problems of practice, providing each other with feedback through co-constructing assessments, sharing best practices and by aligning curricula standards through looking at student work.

The following are two excerpts from field notes from announced visits:

House II (October)

Teachers were sitting together. One teacher described his problem of practice:

How can I teach the workshop model more effectively?

The teacher went on to describe the problem while other teachers listened intently. The teacher discussed his challenges in making sure that he provided enough modeling and a mini-lesson to help students get a better understanding of the material so that they could do the independent work and effectively demonstrate learning.

Teachers in the group asked clarifying questions such as: "Have you received training in the workshop model?" "Do you feel that you understand the components the workshop model well?"

They asked more probing questions such as: Do you feel that this is the best approach to support student learning? "Do you feel that you are modeling effectively?"

The teachers discussed the problem and offered suggestions and worked out ideas that they felt may help the teacher. When the teacher entered the conversation, he reported what he heard and gave an understanding of how he was seeing the problem.

At the end of the process, the teacher with the problem of practice was provided with ideas and recommendations to support the challenge. In addition to ideas and suggestions, the teacher with the problem of practice was invited to visit a teacher in the group who felt that she could offer him an opportunity to see her model and put the workshop model into practice to support his problem of practice with concrete observations that may have helped the teacher learn more how to implement the workshop model more effectively.

House I (October)

Teacher was getting feedback on a Science assessment that he had created from other teachers. Teachers were helpful in asking clarifying questions such as: "How long do students have to take the test?" "Will you give students the chance to answer the questions in their native language?" They also asked more probing questions, such as: "How ado you think students will do on the test?" "How are you preparing them for the test?" "Are you providing differentiated assessments?"

When the teachers reviewed the test, the presenter took notes. Teachers provided many suggestions such as: "There needs to be less multiple choices questions." "Students should be provided with opportunities to represent their learning with drawings in their native language." "There needs to be more open ended questions such as: What did you

learn from the unit? How does this apply to your life? How would you teach this material to someone else?" Teachers also provided suggestions about the phrasing of the questions.

When the teacher reentered the conversation he reported what ideas he felt were helpful and he engaged in conversations about how to make the test better with assistance from other teachers.

Summary of announced and unannounced visits:

The announced and announced visits provided great insight into how teams worked together and learned from each other. The dynamics in the groups were all different. Some teams were more agenda driven while others were more informal. The perceptions of learning were evident through the sharing of practices, through protocols for problems of practice, lesson studies and looking at student and teacher work.

As the year went on, the researcher saw a great deal of progress in teacher trust building and sharing of knowledge. Content and house teams were more open about their challenges and more willing to offer suggestions and offer assistance in creating lessons and assessments with their colleagues. In addition to the sharing of knowledge during the announced and unannounced visits, the researcher saw many instances of teachers learning from each other in informal manners. This was evident when participants voluntarily visited each other during their planning and development periods, when teachers from different content areas shared lessons, when teachers from different houses shared rubrics and when teachers supported each other with assessments by working on vertical alignment of curricula.

The other example of knowledge sharing and learning that the researcher observed taking place was during school-wide meetings at the end of each term when teachers from the entire school got together to share best practices. During these meetings, teachers from each house presented the practices and systems that were working within their houses. This gave teachers from other houses opportunities to learn more about best practices by engaging in conversations with colleagues that they did not get a chance to meet with on a regular basis.

As a result of these meetings, teachers shared ideas such as the creation of monthly assessments calendars, house-led, after-school programs, as well as best instructional practices such as providing feedback and examples of differentiating instruction. In addition to learning from each other through sharing best practices, teachers learned from each other through teacher led professional development. Teachers' learned from their colleagues through teacher led workshops on: teaching reading in the content areas, teaching writing in the content and creating more student centered classrooms.

Through announced and unannounced visits, and through observations of professional development, content meetings, and house meetings, certain themes emerged.

- As the year went on, participants were more comfortable and more trusting with each other.
- Teams that practiced norms more consistently and followed the protocols seemed to learn more from their colleagues.
- Participants learned from each other when they shared successes and challenges.

- Participants learned from each other by creating lessons and assessments together.

- Participants learned from each other when they visited their colleagues.

<u>Co-constructed documents to support teacher learning:</u>

Throughout the year of the study, participants made and kept documents that each team produced and put in place to support teacher learning. The following documents were constructed by teaches during plc meetings, content meetings and professional development sessions to support teachers' learning from each other:

Teacher Observation protocol

Rubrics to support writing across the curricula

Student feedback form

Norms

Problems of practice protocol

Lesson Study Protocol

Interdisciplinary units

<u>Summary of documents</u>

These documents were produced by teachers during plc meetings, content meetings and professional development sessions during the year of the study as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. The documents were created to enhance teacher learning, student learning and organizational learning. Practices and documents were shared and instituted by teachers throughout the school. Some documents were exclusively used by one house or by one content team. These artifacts

and documents served to support and highlight products that had been created by teachers to support learning from each other.

Question One Summary:

    This section presented data from interviews, journals, observations, and actual artifacts that illustrated the practices and skills that participants perceived to have learned from their colleagues as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. Program features such as the house system structures, professional development, time to meet, peer observations and the creation of goals were perceived by participants as being extremely supportive for their growth.

    The analysis of the data from all the sources revealed that participants perceived to have learned the following practices and skills from each other as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community:

- to create better lesson plans,
- to provide more effective feedback to students ,
- to create more effective assessments,
- to create interdisciplinary units,
- to build more meaningful relationships with students,
- to analyze student work
- to backward map and align curricula for a discipline (History, Math 9-12)
- to provide colleagues with advice and support about teaching and learning

The social science literature reviewed in Chapter 2 revealed that effective professional learning communities require time, trust, goals, norms and consistent follow through that is supported through internal responsibility by the adults that take part in the work. The social science literature in Chapter 2 revealed that structures need to be in place in order for teachers to build an authentic professional learning community where adults trust, support and learn from each other.

The social science literature in Chapter 2 also revealed that the structures and time must be in place in order for a professional learning community to emerge. Little (1996) goes on to emphasize that the time and structures are the holding containers that provide the opportunities for teachers to learn from each, but the true learning comes through actual "joint work" that goes beyond the casual congenial meeting. Through the "joint work" teachers are able to learn from each other in ways that enhances responsibility and strengthens a culture of learning.

Research Question Two: *How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?*

<u>Participant Interviews:</u>

Participants were interviewed twice during the research, once during the beginning of the academic year, prior to the emergence of the implementation of a professional learning community and again nine months later after the implementation of a professional learning community. The following questions are the pre and post interview question that were asked of all participants.

(1)   Describe your perception of students' learning at Freire International?

During the second interview the question changed to:

(2) Describe your perception of students' learning at Freire International as a result

of the emergence of a professional learning community?

The responses to the questions are excerpts from the interviews of each participant.

After all the participant responses, there is a summary of the pre and post interview

questions.

Andres:

(1)We have a lot of students that are learning a lot and we have students that are not doing so well. In my class, I have students that stay after school and are doing well. I also have students that are not doing their homework and not advancing so much. I try different things to get in touch with parents and I also stay after school to help students. Some students take advantage of the support and do better but some students do not do well. In terms of how the students do in their other classes, I don't really know. I find out how they are doing when I pass out report cards or when I talk to other teachers and when I talk to students. In general, I know how the students are doing in my class.

(2) I think that the professional learning community has brought many benefits to support student learning because the students see everybody working as a team. They also see more consistency from one class to the next and because we are taking it to the next level, you can see more consistency in terms of curriculum, more integration and sharing of practices. Even the fact that all the students see that there are groups of adults that are responsible for them and working together to help them, I think the students appreciate that and it impacts their learning.
   I know that the plc has affected student learning because students do more homework and their attention in classes has increased. Within the house system we created norms for homework, notebooks and class work routines in all the classes. It is something that we created, that we tried, and we have continuously worked on to support student learning. So they (the students) can see more consistency in how we do things. This may not be so much in the way you explain things, but in classroom procedures and things like that. The fact that we have been more consistent in sharing common practices helps their learning. The fact that we have quarterly meetings to discuss how all students are doing in our classes lets me know how all the students are doing in my house and when we come together at the end of the term to discuss and share how all students are doing this helps us all know how our students are doing.

Sally:

(1)We are a small school and I think that we do a good job of helping students learn. The students in my class, the first year students come with a lot of energy and desire to learn. They work hard and they make a lot of progress. I can see them increase language and reading and writing. Outside of my classroom and my students, I am not really sure how students are learning.

(2)The fact that as a result of the plc we share the same students, it has helped students to learn more because we have really gotten to know them really well. I'm sure it is helpful for all of the houses, but especially for House 1. We get all the kids who are newly arrived. It's a lot more than academics. The more we can talk and get to know our kids, the better we can focus on academics. The other aspect of it that I think is very helpful to students learning is when we work together with different teachers who teach different subjects. We have teachers who share different native languages with students and they are very helpful in getting us to form relationships with students whom we have a language barrier with. I think it is very helpful, for example, when I talk to Ms. Romero and she helps me re-write my tests to give students an opportunity to understand the question. I realize that students know the material but they have difficulties with the language. Now that I meet with my teacher team, we spend time looking at the assessments. This helps me with the teaching and it helps the students because they are able to understand the material better.

    The other thing that has helped students is that we are pushing each other a little bit more. Now that I know that my colleagues are looking at my work, and looking more closely at how students are doing, this pushes us to work harder to help students more. Everyone now does warning notices and report card grades together because we all come together to look at the data together. We really have a better sense of how students are doing because we use the student data to help us help our students.

Christina:
(1)This is a tough question because we are all over the place. Some students come here with different educational experiences and skills. Some students know what to do and some don't know who the teachers are and some don't have the connections and support that they need in order to move on. Some of our students don't have a responsible adult or an adult that really has the time to talk and be with the kids and give them the directions they need in life. Some students are able to make good relationships with teachers and they make progress. Some students get lost in the shuffle. Some of us are successful in working with parents and some of us have no results in reaching out to parents. This is a hard question, because I know that we can do better to help students learn more.

(2)The plc and the house system have made a big difference in helping students learn. Now with the house system, the students have a bond with the teachers. They know who the teachers are. The students know where to go for help. The teacher-student bond is really good. We have helped students learn more by providing different activities such as field trips, such as community service, such as working together after school. I find that by sharing student data, and sharing lessons, with the assessment calendar and the

template we made to support language, the students are better able to do the work that we are asking of them.

The other thing that has really helped us support students has been the stewardship agreement. Teachers follow the stewardship agreement, they go according to that and plan the field trips and plan the activities that support student learning. Students know what's going to happen every term. I see a big change in students' attitudes and interest. The students work much better within the house system than without that. That's why we have it and that's why we are going to keep it.

Harry

(1)I can focus on my students to answer this question. I can't really speak for the entire school because I don't really visit other teachers. Sometimes people talk to me about how a student is doing, but we don't really talk about how they are learning and what they are learning. We sometimes talk about students that are not doing homework and not passing the classes, but we don't spend a lot of time talking about their learning. In my classes, the majority of students are doing well, but I also have some students that are not doing so well. I am not really sure how those students are doing in other classes. The students that do well in my class, for the most part seem to do well in other classes too, but I am not sure of this.

(2) Once we reorganized the school with the plc and the house system, we became more focused on our group of students. With the new structure and the times to meet to look at student work and grades and our tests, we were better able to keep track of our students' progress. We spent a lot of time sharing ways to help kids who were not doing well in our classes. We were able to take ownership of the fact that these were our students and that what we did in one class had an affect on another class. We came up with strategies to best support those students. Before the house system, it was too open. We did not have time to meet as the same group of teachers and really share ideas and tests and results to support students. Even meeting with parents is possible now with our new set up because we are all off at the same time.

   The other great benefit of the plc is that now our PD is run by us. You have to come up to the meeting with data, information and student work. You have to share your ideas. You have to show what the students are doing. We all know the students so well that we can really tell, if we are doing what we say we are doing or not. Without the house system, the PD sessions were not connected to our classes, it was too broad, now we are concentrating on our students and our teaching practices. Even the fact that we look at the grade distribution for all the students in our house and the grade distribution for all the students in our content team now lets us know how the students are doing in every house and in every subject. This is good because it helps us see the students that are doing well and the students that we have to support more.

Tom:

(1)I think that like many schools, we have a good number of students that learning a lot and we have some that are in the middle and then some that are just not making it. Part of the reasons why I think that some of our students are not doing well is because we are not all on the same page. Some students do really well in one class and really poorly in

another class. I think that if we can be more consistent with how we do things our students can do better in school. As a school we need to do a better job of helping students that are not doing well. We have after school programs, but the change needs to take place in the classroom. As teachers we need to do a better job of differentiating instruction to help students succeed in the classrooms.

(2)I feel that the emergence of the plc has helped many of our students do better and learn more. Once it became a house system, we had more of a sense of ownership of our students. It was more like, these are our students, and this is our house. Even some teachers felt comfortable that now I can go to their class because they knew that we were working together. The way I see it, I belong to House 2. I need to fight for my students. I need to give it all. That sense of ownership has been something fun to see, that teachers are taking part of being a team. Sometimes when House 3 students come up with a nice project or a good strategy, the teachers in our team want to make sure that we do things well for our students too. The house system brings out some competition among the teachers and this helps us work together which helps us to help students learn more.

    The other thing that helped students learn more was the fact that we had data from every student available at all times. When we had to look at every student's grades, this helped us realize that we needed to concentrate our support on all students. This is how we came up with the progress notice for house II and this is how we decided to do the after school support program for all of house II. Now all the teachers stay after school together to work with our students. The data really helped us realize that we needed to work together to support all students to do better.

Summary of Interviews for question #2

The six participants responded twice to interview questions; pertaining to their

perception of student learning as a result of the implementation of a professional learning

community. Participants described their perceptions of student learning at the school

prior to the implementation of the plc and their perception of student learning nine

months after the implementation of the professional learning community.

The first questions at the beginning of the study regarding student learning yielded a

consistent response from all participants. All participants felt that the question was too

broad. Participants felt that students in their classes were performing at different levels.

Some were doing well, others were in the middle and some were not doing well. None of

the participants were able to clearly respond to student learning throughout the school. As

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a result, they responded to the question of student learning with information regarding their own students.

Four of the six participants referred to after school programs and Saturday programs that were available to students that were not doing well, but there was no specific mention of the effect that these programs had on students' learning. None of the six participants shared their grades with other teachers prior to the implementation of the PLC. Some participants indicated that they knew if students were doing well outside of their classes because they passed out report cards during homeroom or because of the honor roll lists. Three of the six participants talked informally to other teachers about students that were doing well in their classes and students that were not doing well in their classes, but there was little to no discussion from all participants of levels of student learning prior to the implementation of the professional learning community.

The interview questions about teacher's perception of student learning as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community produced many themes. Responses can be categorized as programmatic and pedagogical. The first programmatic feature that all participants felt supported student learning was the implementation of the house system. All participants found that "sharing the same students with the same teachers gave us a sense of ownership, because we realized that these are our students and that we are responsible for helping them do well and for learning." They found that it was "very manageable for four teachers to have time to meet to share ideas and student learning for sixty students." Another participant indicated: "We got a chance to meet every day at the same time while students took their Opportunity to Learn block. This

gave us time to work together and to figure out how to help students that were not learning."

The sense of ownership and responsibility for student learning extended beyond teachers' individual classes. All three houses created their own homework and after school programs to support student learning. In addition to the homework support centers, each house instituted monthly assessment calendars that they shared with students before the upcoming month to give them a better sense of the learning goals and assessments dates that teachers expected students to do and learn for the month. "This assessment calendar system gave students an opportunity to know what assessments and projects they would be responsible for the upcoming month. It also helped us get more organized."

The theme of accountability and responsibility for student learning surfaced in all participant responses. Participants found that the programmatic aspect of meeting with administration at the beginning of each academic quarter helpful to student learning. Teachers met with administration at the beginning of each marking period to discuss what they were going to teach and what supports they felt were necessary to support student learning from other teachers and administration. During the middle part of the academic quarter, administration met with each team to discuss progress, challenges and possible supports that needed to be put in place to support student learning and teacher practices. Administration met with all teachers at the end of the quarter to provide the school with opportunities to share what was accomplished throughout the school by having each house share successes and challenges with student data and grade distributions for each house and each content team. This sharing gave teachers an

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opportunity to share the good ideas and practices that they were putting in place to

support student learning as well as to learn how to address some of the challenges that the

student data revealed.

Participants indicated that "meetings with administration and with colleagues gave

teams opportunities to share and implement successful practices such as the monthly

assessment calendars, progress reports, after school programs and peer mentoring

programs with other houses." A few participant quotes that best represent teachers'

perception on the impact that these meetings had on student learning are:

"These meetings are really helpful because we create lesson plans, we go over the data
and we discuss different challenges and strategies from teachers that are teaching our
same kids. This gives us a chance to see that some teachers are really successful with
certain students, and through sharing this helps us to work more effectively with students
that we are having challenges in our classes. It makes you change things around, and
analyze things. At the same time, it gives you a chance to see the strategies that the other
teacher uses can be put in place in your own classes. Sometimes you can get the best
ideas from your colleagues. These meetings help you improve as a teacher which in turn
helps support the ultimate goal to improve students' learning at the very end."

"At first, I though that three meetings a quarter with administration were going to be too
much but that was not the case. When we had school wide meetings in those big groups,
I felt like I never got to talk about the real issues that impacted my classes and my
students. In small groups, you talk about the issues and you solve them. We set goals and
we discuss the progress and challenges that we are facing in meeting those goals. Now
when we come together at the end of every quarter, when we come together in bigger
groups, we can really talk about what we did that works. We also get a chance to hear
ideas from other colleagues and houses about things that they are doing that we may want
to try within our houses to help our students."

The other theme that surfaced during the year of the study was the improvement in

relationship building that took place with teachers and students. All of the six participants

found that as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community

students felt more connected to their classmates, teachers and the school. A programmatic

feature that participants felt supported the relationship building in the school was the

stewardship delegation, which served as the document that was created to guide the

development of the professional learning community. One of the goals within the

document provided teachers with systems to support student and teacher learning by

extending the learning outside of the classroom. The stewardship document explicitly

stated that teachers would conduct field trips and build in activities throughout the

academic year to support student learning by extending the learning outside of the

classroom. A few excerpts from participant interviews that highlight the impact that the

field trips and the team building activities had on student learning:

"The trip to the Lowell mills really helped solidify the unit that we did on the Industrial
Revolution. The students did an excellent job of making connections with the readings
and the material by actually putting their learning into practice. They did an excellent job
on their reflection papers on the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on the
economy. Many students referred to the field trip as the most powerful example of their
learning on the Industrial Revolution."

"The House sharing of the Math projects was excellent. The students realized that other
people were coming to see their presentations. This gave them the opportunity to be the
experts on their projects. They took the assignment very seriously. Every single student
took part in the presentations. It was nice for all the other students to see their classmates
doing presentations. This was really good because the students did not only do the
projects; they taught other students what they learned."

The following chart represents the features of the implementation of the PLC that

teachers perceived to have a positive impact on student learning from the interview

questions:

Time/ House System	Ownership/ Responsibility	Relationship building	Sharing practices	Looking at Data	Co-constructing work
6/6	6/6	6/6	5/6	5/6	4/6

<u>Journal Entries:</u>

Participants maintained journals through the year of the study. Participants were

provided with time and space once a month to respond to journal leads regarding their

perceptions of student learning as a result of the implementation of a professional

learning community. The following is a journal entry taken from each participant's

responses that highlights their perceptions of the impact that the implementation of a

professional leaning community had on student learning.

Journal entry
Tom:
"I know that students are learning because when we discuss student work and look at
student data we get the information that is helpful to help students do better in our
classes. It's really powerful when you can tell a student that you know that they can do
well in your class because you saw their work from another class. This helps you create a
stronger relationship with students and it helps you find out what is going on. I don't
think that happens naturally in schools. It's more like, I've done my class and you're
done. You go to the next thing and you lose the chance to really help the student do the
work. I am glad that we are working together to help our students do better."

Antonio:
"The students realize that we are on the same page. They recognize practices that we use
in the same classes as a benefit. They'll require these things of all teachers. Students
understand that if teachers do something like give progress reports in class, they expect it
from their other teachers in their house too. For example, when all of the teachers give a
progress report in the middle of the semester to let students know where they are right
now in the class, they expect this from all the other classes. If you don't do it, they come
to you and let you know. This helps us be clearer about how students are doing and it
helps us come up with academic supports to help them succeed."

 Christina:
"I know that students are learning more because we take the time to look at their work. When we
discuss student work, we bring work from other classes and we get to see the work that students
are doing in other classes not just our class. This also helps us to see that students are making
connections with the things that are happening in my classes with other teachers.
The other way that I can tell that students are learning more is because we have created
exams together to help students learn better. This has helped me to give students more
practice and to get a better sense of what they know because when we create the tests
together we come back as a team and discuss what the students learned and what they did
not learn. This has been really helpful because we are working together to help the
students do better in all our classes."

Harry:

"Because of the house system, it is my belief that we have concentrated so much on how we can help our students that it has become our unified purpose. All the teachers feel even more responsible with the plc that it has helped us to give it one hundred percent to move them forward to the next house. I like it when we come together at the end of the quarter and share how our students are doing as a house. Everyone knows that students are making progress. It has also helped me to think more about the whole school. Even though I am in house II, when I hear the teachers from house I talk about their students and about the successes and challenge that they are having, I realize that I can go to them to get more information about how I can help my students for next year.

Sally:

"One of the main reasons why I know that students are learning more is because I have been more successful in doing differentiated teaching - we've started to give two different assessments because the range is so great in reading capacity and understanding. Students are working hard. They are learning they are striving and motivated to do well. Even students that do not do well on the tests sometimes can really explain what the challenges were with the material and for this reason some students do better when they have to show their learning through projects and essays.

Andres:

I know that students are learning more because I have changed the way I teach my classes. I give my students more choices and options to show their learning. I have seen students being more engaged in class. They are more interested in participating a=in class and they are more aware of how they are doing. The main reasons for this change are because we meet to look at the data, to give each other ideas about how to help each other and also because we have incorporated more filed trips and projects into our teaching. With the academic support class, my lessons now have more choices. The more we share with each other, the more we can prepare the students, the better we can address students' problems.

The following table represents indicators from journal entries that teachers felt helped students learn as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community:

Teacher trust	PERSONAL CONCERN for students THEME	Differentiated Teaching THEME
• trustworthiness • sharing • honesty • team building	• ownership • responsibility • encouraging • empathetic • understanding of the life circumstances	• portfolios • Differentiated tests • Presentations • Cultural competence • Consistent Feedback
Student motivation	RELATIONSHIP THEME	Accountability Theme
• ability to improve academics • after school attendance • student choices • student engagement	• More student teacher talk • Conferences with students • Filed trips • Award ceremonies • Celebrations	• looking at data • goal setting • goal revisions • Professional Development • Sharing school wide practices

Summary of Journal Entries:

Participant kept journals throughout the year of the study. Participants were provided with time during the school day once a month throughout the year of the study to respond to journal leads regarding perceptions of student learning. The journal entries revealed many themes that were directly associated with perceptions of student learning. The themes have been broken down into six major categories.

Teacher Trust:

Participants felt that they were able to support student learning because they were able to build trust among the teaching staff. All six participants responded that student

learning throughout the school increased because teachers had the time to work together to support student learning in a systematic way.

Four of the six participants referred to the stewardship as a helpful tool that guided the trust building that took place to support student learning. All six participants found that the sharing of lessons and peer visitations were helpful in building trust and thus supporting student learning. All participants found that sharing their work and their problems of practice helped them to support student learning and build trust.

All six participants found that the quarterly retreats that each house and content teams had to share successes, challenges and to revisit, revise and measure goals were helpful to support student learning because they used data to inform authentic dialogue about student learning. Five of the six participants found that they were able to be more honest when they met in small content and house teams as opposed to as a whole school. All six participants felt that the trust that they built throughout the academic year helped support student learning.

<u>Personal Concern for Students Theme</u>

The data from the journal entries revealed that all six participants took more of a sense of ownership and responsibility for student learning as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. Participants felt a sense of urgency to support students to do better in their classes. Five of the six participants referred directly to the after school program that teacher teams instituted as a way of taking more ownership for student learning. All participants felt that they were more aware of the challenges and issues that students in their house were dealing with as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community at the school. "As a result of the

PLC meetings, looking at student data and sharing assessments, we have a better understanding of the challenges that our students are facing. We can put in interventions and supports throughout the academic year, because we are constantly looking at their work and our practice to support learning."

All six participants found it to be extremely helpful to do students check-ins. The check-ins provided teachers with opportunities to see how students were doing and to give them a heads up about certain challenges that particular students may have. One participant viewed this check in as "the most important part of the day because I get to find out how my students are doing before we begin teaching them. Before we did this, I never knew why students were acting out. Now when we check in, we have an idea or a heads up as to why a student may be out of sorts. This helps me to support the student that is having a tough day and it helps me to keep the rest of my class focused."

All participants indicated that they got to know their students better as learners and got to know more about their students as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. Participants discussed the looking at student work as a powerful vehicle to get to know students better. The looking at student work sessions provided teachers with opportunities to see how students work in other classes. "These sessions (looking at student work) provided teachers with more insight into how our students approached assignments and learning in other classes which could be used to inform our practice."

All participants felt a stronger personal connection to their students as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. This personal concern and sense of responsibility extended into the teaching and learning and relationship building. As a

result of the personal concern theme, teachers were more willing to support and give students more chances to learn because they were more determined to not give up on students. One participant commented: "because we have a better understanding of who our students are and what they were capable of I have a better sense of many of the challenges that my students face and it has helped me make changes to support their learning."

Differentiated Teaching Theme:

Another theme that arose throughout the journal entries that supported the perception of student learning was the theme of differentiated teaching. All participants indicated in the journal entries that as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community they had changed their teaching practices to support students. Participants described changes in practices such as: mini-lessons, vocabulary development, creating assessments, and interdisciplinary projects which they perceived to have increased student learning.

All participants felt that they had a better understanding of what other teachers in their house teams and content teams were trying to get students to learn and as a result they felt that this supported student learning. One participant explained: "Because I know that we are working on writing and building academic language, I have focused my teaching to support more writing and language development. Although I teach Math, this year, I have worked a lot harder to focus on writing in my classes." Another participant discussed the looking at student work as the most powerful way to differentiate instruction. "When we look at student work, we can really see that some times we are not clear on what we are asking students and for this reason we sometimes get so many

different responses. This has helped me to be clearer and give students more choices to show their understanding of the material." These insights about providing students with more opportunities to show their learning in different ways as well as changes in teacher practices informed teachers' perception of students learning in a positive manner.

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Student motivation theme:

Another theme that surfaced from the journal entries that supported participant's perception of student learning as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community was student motivation. All six participants indicated that as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community students were more engaged in their learning and more engaged in improving their academic standing. All participants indicated that having students in a house system, in which the same teachers were responsible for the same students made it possible to communicate and work together to support student learning. Below are a few excerpts that highlight student motivation from journal entries that support the perception of student learning:

"Because we have the time and support to work together we are able to be on the same page with our students about our expectations. When we get together we know that these are our students and we know that we have to work together to support their learning. Now that we have the same system to provide students with feedback about how they are doing, they know that we want to help them and for this reason they come after school and work with us to improve their grades and to learn more."

"It's really powerful to see us all stay after school with students as a team of teachers to support student learning. The students know where to find us, they know that we are working together and they appreciate the support. When they see us working together with them they also work together better."

As a result of the implementation of a professional learning community participants indicated that student attendance in after school programs, homework completion and

class work increased. Participants believed that the extra time on task that students took part in after school helped students learn more.

The following are a few excerpts that highlight teacher's perception that the implementation of the professional learning community supported student learning through increased student motivation:

"I know that students are willing to stay after school now because they know that we are organized and are there to help them. Our organization of programs has resulted from our plc work. Now when we give students the progress reports, they want to stay after school to work on the material so that they can make up the work, do extra credit or just to do their homework so that they can do better."

"The kids love coming to the after school program for house II. They work together to make up work, study for tests and work on their projects. It's nice for the teachers because we can see the students working at their own pace. Some times students just work without our help. Some times they need our help and we can help them. It's nice because if I am busy working with another student or with another group, the students will ask any of their teachers for help. Since most teachers know what we are doing in our classes, they can help the students."

All participants indicated that students were more engaged in classes, more willing to stay after school to do work and more interested in their learning. Participants indicated that they used the time that they spent together to build systems to communicate effectively with students about expectations. Participants believed that these intentional systems and structures led to more student engagement which resulted in deeper student learning.

Relationship Theme

The other theme that surfaced from the journal entries to support the perception of student learning was the relationship theme. While this theme was very similar to the personal responsibility theme it differed in the fact that participants made the distinction between personal responsibility and relationship building as an important theme that they

believed increased student learning. Participants described that relationship building took place through more student teacher talk, conferences with students, field trips, award celebrations and academic celebrations and presentations that took place throughout the year.

Some excerpts that highlight participants' perception that the implementation of the professional learning community increased student learning through relationship building are:

"This year I have gotten to know my students better than any other year. The fact that we have the same students in the house system and that we have house meetings with students on a regular basis has helped me form stronger relationships with the students. Because we have set up house goals and we have field trips and after school programs with our house, the students have taken advantage of this by forming more relationships with us. The relationship building has helped teachers communicate and get to know students better. This relationship has really helped students learn."

"The house system has made it possible for us to really work more closely with our students. Last year, I really only knew how students did in my class, now I really feel that I have a strong understanding of what my students are learning in other classes and how they are doing in school. It's really nice to celebrate student successes at the end of the quarter with the entire house. When we recognize students who have improved the most and when we give the citizenship awards, it let's students know that we value the hard work and not just the honor roll students."

"The best part of building relationships this year has come through the field trips and the celebrations that we have had throughout the year. When we go on the field trips we get to know our students a lot better. The community service trips and the trips to Washington and St. Croix really helped me to get to know the students so much better. I have learned a lot about my students in ways that is hard to do in a classroom setting. I have used this learning to help students learn more by giving them opportunities to write about their experiences in assessments and papers."

Participants felt that they got to know their students in a more encompassing way as learners from sharing data, through looking at student work and through meetings with students and parents. They also felt that they got to know students as people through field trips, fund raising events and community service trips. Participants felt that the

experiences and relationship that took place throughout the year really helped them to

teach students more effectively because they were able to get to know them better.

<u>Accountability Theme:</u>

The final theme that stood out in the journal entries among most participants was

the accountability theme. Four of the six participants referred to accountability systems as

important factors that supported student learning. Participants referred to looking at data,

goal setting, goal revisions, professional development and school wide sharing of best

practices as key elements that supported their perception of student learning. The

following excerpts from journal entries support participant perception of accountability to

support student learning.

"The idea of keeping what you called "a running scoreboard" on how we are doing as a
school was good because it gave us an opportunity to always come together as a whole
school and to share how we are doing in reaching our goals. When we came together we
also had a lot of opportunities to share good ideas. I remember that one of the houses
started meeting together as a team to do after school support so that students could get all
the help they needed and didn't have to feel like they had to see one teacher and may be
miss another teacher. We used this idea with house I and it helped us to help our students
learn more."

"The fact that we always looked at data about our students and we looked at student work
and we brought our own problems of practice to get help helped us to help each other and
our students because we realized that although we teach different subjects we are still
having problems. This helped us to work together to put in systems to support the
students. I really liked the system that we put together for homework and for starting
class. This gave us an opportunity to put some common practices together that helped
students do better. Not only did we put the systems in place, but we had chances to visit
each other and to see how it was working when we did visits."

The importance of putting in accountability systems and providing space and

opportunities for teachers to share their successes and challenges helped teachers

perceive that this accountability system supported student learning. Participants

responded that the professional development that took place throughout the academic year was very much connected to the challenges and successes that were taking place through out the school. Participants indicated that when they worked in content teams and in house teams they continued to discuss successes and challenges. Participants indicated that they followed up on successes and challenges by reviewing and revising content and house goals. They felt that they were further able to hold each other accountable and support each other through visitations and consultations which they felt supported student learning.

Field notes from announced and unannounced visits

The researcher conducted announced and unannounced visits to the plc meetings and professional development meetings throughout the year of the study to observe practices that addressed the research question. During the visits, the researcher observed teachers discussing student data, looking at student work, sharing assessments, sharing practices to support student learning, conducting problems of practice, organizing visitations and debrief visitations to support student learning teams were responsible for keeping notes and rotating assignments. The PLC teams maintained a binder of their meetings to record meeting notes and maintain artifacts. Teams provided the researcher notes at the end of each week.

The professional development sessions took place once a month for three and a half hour blocks. The professional development sessions provided content teams with opportunities to extend practices that took place in the plc meetings in content teams. The researcher kept field notes in order to draw conclusions regarding the research question.

The researcher observed content teams working on aligning practices as a discipline through looking at data, visitations, co-constructing curricula and sharing best practices to support student learning. Much of the professional development was teacher led. After staff had received training and practice in looking a student work, sharing problems of practice and critical friends groups, the teams met with administration to co-construct agendas that helped guide professional development.

The following is an excerpt of notes from an announced meeting, in which one of the participants in the study worked with their plc team on aligning practices that attempted to align practices throughout an entire department to support student learning.

History content meeting:
Teacher: our last meeting, we talked about what specific methods of addressing history we could make the norm, so they could do basic things in House I, House II, so when they got to House III they would not need to learn how to do it but could focus more on higher order thinking because they have had an understanding of our practices from the onset of their educational experience with us. Teacher #1: I agree with you but in order to do this we must make sure that we are clear about what skills we are teaching in each House so we can build on each other, and what content so it flows, so we know what students know

Teacher #2: I'm thinking about how I hand off students to you. This will entail the student's portfolio, notes on their strengths, needs and areas for development so that we continue to support students as they go off to their next teacher.

Teacher #2 : We must continue to build off on how we are giving feedback this year and let students know that we will continue this through the three or four years that they will be with us. This will help students to know where they're going from the beginning and how we can work more closely with them to support their learning.

Teacher#3: We can also include students in this process. We can have older students present to younger, so when they get there they remember.

Teacher #2: This can continue to build off the projects that we are creating together. We can take projects and extend them beyond for each house so that students can see the connection more clearly. This will build off what we have already put in place to help students learn such as: note taking, forms for notes, objectives, student self-assessment of

objectives, types of assessments. We can also continue to work on creating tests and grading at beginning of our units to lead the creation of these projects by coming up with similar tasks for our different houses.

The following is an announced visit in which the researcher served as an active participant to help shape the next steps for professional development to support student learning for the Math Team:

Andres: as a department, we need to align the curriculum and need unified math curriculum which means that we make this like a line from House I, II, and III - no turns, no surprises - we all talk the same language - make sure House I students are getting what they need for House II, etc.

Teacher: All of us have to have the same grading system, since we started sharing our grading system I can see that we are on the same page . Having this common system has made it clearer to help students because we are grading in the same way

Andres: I want to take our common systems to the next level by creating more student independence- I want student to be able to do something and not just call the teacher after ten seconds. If we can work together to align our teaching so that we can create more student independence that would be really good.

Teacher: can I suggest something for that. Let's set up a schedule to visit each other to see how we are creating or not creating student independence. If we can give each other feedback, then we can get better and have a better sense of what we need to do to create more student independence.

Antonio: I really like this type of meetings - we are in different Houses, we have different students, but there is something that is common that goes through all the Houses - we need meetings like this to understand big picture

The following excerpt is taken from an announced visit to a problem of practice session:

House I problem of practice session:

Problem of practice: How do I differentiate instruction and assessments to support student learning

Christina: Description of the problem: I have students with different language development skills and as a result, I realize that this impacts the class work, homework completion and level of understanding that students produce. I want some help in coming up with teaching strategies to support all their learning by differentiating instruction so

that they can all learn the material from the unit and be able to show their understanding and learning a the end of the unit assessments.

Suggestions:
- Team members recommend that the teacher provide students with all the things that they will need to know at the beginning of the unit
- Teachers recommend a pre-assessment of the knowledge to guide and support instruction for the unit in language and content development
- Team members recommend that the teacher provide students with the least language development the material in his or her native language (to the extend that it is possible)
- Teachers recommend that the teacher use direction sheets to support learning to build independence
- Teachers recommend that the teacher use conferring notes with all students to check for understanding throughout the unit
- Teachers recommend that the teacher use cooperative groupings activities for students to work together(assigning buddies with specific language groups)
- Teachers recommend that the teacher stay after school with students who need more support with language development

Actions taken by the team:
- The creation of a pre-assessment to get an understanding of language and content understanding of the material
- The creation of what students must k now at the end of the unit
- The creation of student teams to support language development with input from all team members
- Set time for follow up with looking at pre-assessments to support creation of materials for the unit

Summary of the announced and unannounced observations to PLC meetings and

professional development sessions:

   The researcher attended announced and unannounced meetings throughout the year of

the study. Teams worked on supporting student learning by sharing lessons, strategies,

looking at data, aligning practices and conducting problem of practice to support student

learning. Throughout the year of the study the researcher took notes, observed and in

some occasions was an active participant in the meetings. The researcher's notes

provided some recurring themes that surfaced during the visits that supported perceptions of student learning. These themes were:

- looking at student data and student work

- sharing knowledge about students

- co-construction of assessments and lessons

- participation in problems of practice sessions

- sharing ideas and best practices

Looking at data to support student learning:

During announced and unannounced visits, throughout the year of the study, the researcher observed all six participants looking at student data to support instruction. All participants took part in these sessions by presenting student work, analyzing and discussing student data on report cards, projects and assessments. They used this data to create assessments, to inform lesson planning and to modify their teaching practices in an attempt to support student learning.

Sharing knowledge about students:

Notes from visits and observations revealed that all participants shared knowledge about their students' strengths and challenges in their own classes. The sharing was done through check-ins, lesson planning , looking at data and through visitations. Four of the six participants went beyond sharing students' strengths and challenges to help co-

construct lessons that intended to reinforce student learning through cross disciplinary

projects.

Co-construction of assessments and lessons to support student learning:

All participants presented their assessments to team members to receive feedback

and support in creating more authentic assessments to support student learning. During

observations throughout the year of the study, the researcher observed three participants

taking part in co-constructing assessments. The researcher worked directly with two

participants in co-constructing assessments to support student learning. During the

professional development sessions, the researcher observed all participants taking part in

creating assessments.

Participation in problems of practice sessions to support student learning **:**

During observations of meetings, review of PLC minutes, and professional

development sessions, the researcher saw all participants take part in problems of practice

sessions. All participants took part in presenting problems of practice as well as serving

as supporters of problems of practice for colleagues to support student learning.

Participants believed that this practice supported student learning.

Sharing ideas and best practices:

During observations of meetings and professional development sessions, the

researcher observed participants sharing best practices within content teams, house teams

and during school wide sharing at the end of every quarter. Participants believed that this

sharing supported student learning and teacher learning. All participants took part in sharing best practices and ideas to support student learning through lesson studies, problems of practice and through informal sharing.

Documents to support student learning:

Throughout the year of the study, participants kept documents that each team produced and put in place to support student learning. The following documents were produced and instituted by each house in an attempt to support student learning:

- Progress Reports

- Student Feedback forms

- Student Reflection Forms

- Looking at student work protocol follow up sheets

- Homework routine and policy

- Feedback form for students after taking an exam

- Feedback forms for students at the end of the quarter

Summary of documents

These documents were produced by teachers during plc meetings, content meetings and professional development sessions during the year of the study as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. The documents were created to enhance student learning. Practices and documents were shared and instituted by teachers throughout the school. Some documents were exclusively used by one house or by one content team. These artifacts and documents served to support and highlight products that were created by teachers to support student learning.

Question Two Summary

This section presented significant data collected from interviews, journals, announced and unannounced visits and teacher made program documents that helped to answer *Research Question Two:*

How do teachers perceive the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

A review of the data presented showed that there were a number of themes that emerged as a result of the implementation of professional learning community that participants' felt affected student learning. The researcher organized the themes into six major categories and provided evidence as to the importance of each.

The relationship building theme was very important in shaping participants' perceptions of student learning as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. The importance of relationship building was present in all data sources. The teacher to teacher relationship building allowed honesty and trustworthiness to support teachers to try new practices that were observed or suggested by colleagues to support student learning. The teacher to teacher relationship building extended to the teacher to student relationships. This perception of relationship building improved student learning because it helped teachers get to know students better and thus were able to help them learn more.

The journal entries revealed that the relationship building proved to be critically important in helping create a positive classroom culture that helped students learn more. These positive relationships created a sense of students feeling safe, valued and respected in the classroom which led to more learning opportunities for students.

The personal concern theme surfaced as another major theme that supported teacher's perceptions of student learning in all the data sources. Teachers worked together and got to know each other and the students in a deeper way. As a result, they became more responsible and more concerned about the students learning. Teachers took responsibility and a sense of ownership for students in their house. This sense of ownership brought forth examples of motivation, encouragement, patience, and willingness from participants and students to try new approaches to support student learning such as: collective after school programs, progress reports and interdisciplinary units to reinforce student learning. As a result of the personal concern theme there was more empathy and understanding of students as learners and as persons from teachers. Teachers were able to discuss, understand and address challenges that students had by providing more consistent feedback, staying after school to support student learning and by differentiating instruction through genuine care by providing students more opportunities to learn.

Almost equally important to perceptions of student learning was the structural theme of creating the house system. This structure provided the time and space for teachers to discuss student learning, share practices, look at student work and to share challenges and successes that were taking place with common students. The structural element and support systems gave participants the needed space and time to feel comfortable communicating with their colleagues through protocols and norms that encouraged honest sharing and support which in turn led to change in practices which ultimately led to perceptions of student learning.

The other major theme that supported participants' perception of student learning was student motivation. Participants indicated that students were more engaged in class activities and more concerned about their learning as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. The data sources indicated that the after school programs were much more successful and meaningful for students because students became more motivated and more engaged in their own learning. Participants indicated that students completed more homework, worked together more effectively and learned more in their classes. The interviews and journal entries revealed that students also became more motivated because the learning extended beyond the classroom. Field trips, presentations and interdisciplinary projects increased student motivation to learn.

The other major theme that was present in all data sources as a strong indicator that supported teacher's perceptions of student learning was the accountability theme. Participants felt compelled to support student learning because there were opportunities and systems for them to create goals, review data, measure and monitor goals and time to check and assess challenges and successes. Participants indicated that there was a "compelling scoreboard" of data that was always available to help teachers and students get a sense of where they were in accomplishing goals that were put forth to measure and support student learning.

The final major theme that was present in all the data sources were participants' perception of changes that had taken place in their actual practice which they felt helped students learn. Participant interviews and journal entries revealed that teachers felt that they had changed their practices in giving feedback, presenting lessons, writing assessments, extending learning in more meaningful ways through fieldtrips and personal

connections and differentiating instruction and other best practices to support English Language Learners . Participants felt that sharing problems of practice, observing and discussing each other's practice and co-constructing assessments and lessons changed their practice, which they felt supported student learning.

In conclusion, the perception of students' learning as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community in a positive manner required time, space, and relationship building to build trust and ownership. Students learn best when adults know them, care about them, believe in them, provide them with quality instruction, provide timely feedback and give them opportunities to learn. Teachers that want to support student learning need to recognize and put into practice the themes covered in this section.

Research Question Three: *How do teachers perceive the emergence of a Professional Learning Community affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?*

Participant Interviews

Participants were interviewed twice during the research, once during the beginning of the academic year, prior to the emergence of the implementation of a professional community and again nine months later after the implementation of a professional learning community. The following pre and post interview questions were asked of all participants.

(1) Describe your perception of teacher collaboration at Freire International?

During the second interview the question changed to:

(2) Describe your perception of teacher collaboration at Freire International as a

result of the emergence of a professional learning community?

The responses to the questions are excerpts from the interviews of each participant.

After all the participant responses, there is a summary of the pre and post interview

questions.

Christina:
(1) I don't think we collaborate on projects a lot. Some of this has to do with the fact that we do not have the time to work on things together. When we have our off periods, I don't meet with people in my content area and I don't meet with too many people that have my students. I would say that the most collaboration takes place when we do school wide professional development, but even this may not be collaboration because we do not work together on something. We are all together, but we are not all working on the same things. We usually get some PD that everyone can try it in their classes, but this is not something that comes from us. We don't do this together.

(2)I would say that the second half of the school year, some teachers really took advantage of creating a lot of good projects that we worked on together. For example, Ms. Gonzalez and I, we sat together and we created a few projects that kids did our classes together. The projects were a great success. We were able to create these projects through the amount of time that we actually had to meet, to see each other and through help from other teachers in our PD sessions. Again, once we were more comfortable working together we were able to create projects together. This is what I really believe that the house can bring. It takes time, but it is more rewarding once we let our guard down and really feel comfortable around the teachers. We respect and trust each other; we know that this is about the work. It's about the work, and how can I help you and how can you help me. This is when we took off this year, a lot more than at the beginning of the year; the second half of the year has been really powerful.

Sally:

(1) I'm not really concerned about what is happening in other classrooms. I try to focus as much as possible on my teaching and my students. I don't know much about other classes. I don't have the time to work with other teachers. Right now I am really concerned about teaching the kids in my class to read and write better and to learn more English. The one thing that I have done is invite other teachers to visit our classes with their students when we do presentations but we don't work on these projects together. We don't really have the time and space to do these projects together.

(2) There has been a big difference in collaboration from the beginning of the year to now. Now that we have the time to meet with the same teachers and we have the

structures in place we are doing a lot of things together. For example, the Math teachers are talking to the Humanities and English teachers a lot more and other subject teachers too because we created the Academic language template to support academic language development. We all have the common vocabulary for the week to support writing in all the classes. We created the writing rubric for House I and we have also created our own feedback form that all teachers in our house to help students complete the work. Ms. Romero and I created a direction sheet for students that all teacher use. We also created our own feedback form. We have increased our collaboration as a result of the plc and the house system.

Andres:

(1) It's hard to collaborate in schools. I think most teachers want to work together but maybe we just don't know how to do this or how to begin to do this well. I think that most teachers are willing to try but we sometimes have a lot of teachers at different levels and teachers that have had different experiences. Some teachers have been working in the district for seven years. Some teachers have been teaching for thirty-five years. We have a different range of practices and ways of looking at collaboration. We may not be willing to admit that we don't know how to work together. We need to focus on sharing practices and doing things together to really help students learn. This takes time and practice.

(2) I really feel good about the way we have collaborated this year. Through the content and house meetings we have been able to create some real projects and assignments together. I really enjoyed doing the Algebra I exit assessment with my colleagues. We used the district final exam and rewrote the exam to align better with our student population. This required collaboration from the Math office, all the Math teachers at the school and collaboration with administration. We didn't just translate the final exam; we redid the exam to include the things that we felt were most important for students to know such as linear functions and linear equations. It was also good to rewrite open response questions to help us get a better sense of how students are writing in our classes. The other collaborative project that I am proud of is the work that we did with the writing coach and with you on building a framework for addressing word problems in all the Math classes. We visited each other, shared responses and continued to fine tune our word problem framework to support writing and expressing mathematical thinking.

Antonio:
(1)It seems to me that we are left with our own ideas and misconceptions about our teaching and our students because we do not collaborate very much. We need to work together in what we do, and in the way we teach now more than ever. I feel like we teach in a vacuum. We need some time together to talk about collaboration so that we can really understand what it is and what it looks like because I don' think we really work together to build things in schools. I used to be an engineer and I think that in my previous job we really collaborated because you could not do anything without affecting another person. This does not happen a lot in schools.

(2) There has been a huge shift in how closely we collaborate since the beginning of the year. The things that stand out the most have been how closely we have worked as a Science team to build common systems that extends beyond our own classes. We created a common system for doing notebooks; we have created a system and process for writing our lab reports for all three Science teachers. We have even focused on doing writing exercises to support writing in Science by practicing open responses. We have collaborated on assessments and units together to support students. We have also worked on creating routines within our houses. We created our own system for beginning classes with routines, checking homework and giving students feedback. I do feel that we have really collaborated on many things even in creating lesson plans and assessments through lesson studies ands doing problems of practice.

The best example of collaboration for me was when met before we did our separate labs and built the rubric and steps for all the expectations before your next lab and we met meet a couple of days or a week before the lab and we observed and gave each other feedback about the lab we created together to make our process better.

Tom:

(1)We do not collaborate very much in the school. We work very hard on helping students do well in our own classes but we do not spend a lot of time working together on projects and doing units together. We have not had the time and the training to do this well. In the years that I have been here the only collaboration I have done has been with the History teachers when I am reading novels in my class. Sometimes the novels that we are reading connect with the historical period that the teacher is covering and we have done some small projects together but this is not something that we always plan. Sometimes it happens by accident.

(2) We have come along way in collaborating as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. We began the year by creating the Stewardship delegation of houses together. This helped us to come together and create a document to help us work together. We have worked together this year in building assessments together, organizing field trips to support our classes, creating feedback forms to help us with observations and to give each other feedback and we have also worked on creating the progress reports and feedback forms for our students.

The other way that we have collaborated has been by creating the academic language template for the week. We share our lessons and discuss the key vocabulary that students will focus on in their language classes. We use the template to help Math, Science and History teachers reinforce writing and language development when we teach our classes. This has helped us use common practices such as sentence stems and mini-lessons to help students build vocabulary and language development. The final way that we have collaborated has been by really helping each other become better teachers by giving each other suggestions and helping each other make better assessments and lessons.

Summary of Interview questions:

The interview responses regarding perceptions of teacher collaboration at Freire International High School prior to the implementation of a professional learning community revealed consistent themes from all participants. All participants felt that there was very little collaboration taking place at the school prior to the PLC. Some of the reasons why participants felt that there was very little to no collaboration at the school was because of time constraints, lack of structures to support collaboration and lack of understanding about how to collaborate.

All participants indicated in their pre-interview responses that they did not have enough time to collaborate with colleagues. Four of the six participants alluded to the fact that as a school we did not have a clear understanding of collaboration. All participants felt that there were no clear structures or mechanisms to support collaboration prior to the implementation of the PLC. Three of the six participants indicated a desire to have more collaboration to support teaching and learning in the pre- interviews.

The post interview questions regarding teacher collaboration at Freire International High School brought forth consistent themes from participants. As a result of the implementation of a professional learning community, all participants felt that there had been an increase in teacher collaboration. Teachers responded that they had increased collaboration by visiting each other, creating and co-constructing work, by talking about teaching and learning through problems of practice and through lesson studies. They also felt that through collaboration they were able to build trust that supported teaching learning and student learning. The themes that consistently emerged from the participant interviews were:

- Collaboration increased trust and support

- Collaboration increased as the academic year went on

- Participants felt that the time and space to collaborate was essential to increase collaboration

- Participants initially found collaboration to be easier with content area teachers than with house teachers

- Participants found that visiting their colleagues provided the highest leverage of collaboration

- Participants felt that the best way to build collaboration was through practice

Trust

All participants felt that through taking part in collaborative practices they had created stronger relationships with their colleagues. Participants felt that they got to know each other by sharing ideas, practices, creating work together, giving each other feedback and by observing each others' practice. As a result of these collaborative practices, they were able to build trust and count on each other to co-construct and create practices and put systems in place to support teaching and learning.

Perception of increased collaboration:

All the participants in the study felt that the level of collaboration among teachers at the school had increased a great deal. Participants indicated that they had taken part in co-constructing assessments, created interdisciplinary units, created progress reports and aligned practices with their content area classes with colleagues. These were practices that had not been accomplished prior to the implementation of the professional learning

community. All participants felt that the increased collaboration supported teacher learning and student learning.

Time and Space:

All participants indicated in the post interview questions that the time and space that was allotted to teams through PLC meetings, professional development and content team meetings were essential in increasing collaboration. Participants felt that they had enough time, space and support built into the work day to build collaboration. All Participants found it very helpful to have consistent time in their schedules to meet with teachers who taught the same students through the house structure. They also found it to be just as important to have the time and space to meet with teachers who taught the same content areas that they taught on a consistent basis.

Content Collaboration:

Five of the six participants indicated that they initially found it to be easier to collaborate with teachers who taught the same subject matter than it was to collaborate with teachers that taught a different subject matter. Participants indicated that as the year went on, it became more natural and easier to collaborate with teachers in their houses. Participants indicated that once they began to work more closely with teachers who shared the same students through the house structure, they found a great deal of value in collaborating. As a result, teaches began to plan interdisciplinary units, they visited each other, gave each other feedback and they co-construct assessments and lessons with colleagues from different content areas. Five of the six participants indicated that by the end of the year, they found it to be just as helpful to collaborate with house teachers as they did with teachers who taught their content areas.

Clarity regarding collaboration:

The pre-interviews revealed that participants had a different understanding of collaboration at the beginning of the study. After professional development and opportunities to collaborate, participants felt that they were able to be more intentional about collaboration. In the post interviews, participants shared that they had a better understanding of what collaboration was and what collaborative practices were as a result of professional development that they received throughout the year of the study. Four of the six participants referred to professional development from Judith Warren's Little's work on norm setting, creating goals, giving each other feedback and on collegiality to be very helpful in increasing teacher collaboration.

Journal Entries:

Participants responded to journal entries throughout the year of the study. Participants were provided with time and space once a month to respond to journal entries regarding their perceptions of teacher collaboration as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. The journal entries attempted to get a better sense of teachers' perception of collaboration was at different points of the study. The entries attempted to capture what teachers collaborated on throughout the year of the study.

The initial entries indicated that it took teachers time to have a clear and collective understanding of what collaboration was and what it looked like. The journals also revealed that it took teachers time to build trust and to get to know each other well enough so that they could take part in authentic collaboration. The initial journal entries highlighted that participants had a different understanding of collaboration. Some

participants initially thought that the purpose of collaboration was to talk about students. After professional development and opportunities to practice collaborative practices such as creating the stewardship delegation, norms, sharing problems of practice and lesson studies, participants indicated that they began to focus on teacher work.

Participant responses shifted from talking about students to a more targeted focus on teachers' work. Participants began to talk more about their teaching, teachers evaluated and gave each other feedback on assessments, teachers' co-constructed assessments and teachers visited each other. In the journal entries participants indicated, that once they had a better understanding of what teacher collaboration consisted of, they were able to put practices and systems in place to support collaboration. Some of these systems included consistent feedback forms, progress reports, homework routines, academic language templates and schedules to visit each other.

Journal entries from the initial responses revealed that participants found it to be more "natural and easier" to collaborate with teachers in their own subject areas at the inception of the study. Four of the six participants responded in their journals that they felt more comfortable visiting and working with teachers within their content area in the earlier entries. As the year went on, the level of collaboration among teachers from different subject areas continued to increase. Journal entries from the latter part of the year revealed that five of the six participants found it to be just as important and natural to collaborate with teachers in their houses as it was to collaborate with teachers in their content areas. Participants built relationships with colleagues that did not teach their same subject area through "joint work".

The other theme that surfaced throughout the year of the study from the analysis of the journal entries was that teachers felt that they needed the time and space to collaborate. The meetings gave teachers opportunities to share work, build trust and co-construct work. The meetings also gave teachers time to create schedules so that they could go visit each other. All teachers in House I and House II created a protocol to give each other feedback when they visited each other. The teachers in each house, visited the Opportunity to Learn teachers together to help them build common language and systems to communicate and support each other. In addition to the visitations, teachers created routines and systems to support expectations in all their classes. They spent time visiting each other and helping each other get on the same page in terms of practices and expectations. These expectations extended beyond routines and into interdisciplinary projects and common systems to support learning in all classes.

The following are examples of journal entries taken from participant's responses from different times throughout the year of the study that highlight teacher perceptions of the impact that the implementation of a professional leaning community has had on teacher collaboration.

"The best example of collaboration for me was when met before we did our separate labs and built the rubric and steps for all the expectations that we had for students prior to the actual lab. We put together the expectations and did the directions and the outcomes for the lab together and then we observed each other and had time to talk about what we saw and what we learned from our observations"

"For me one of the best examples of collaboration was when we worked on creating a problem solving process to answer word problems in Math. We came together and created the steps, visited each other, looked at how the students used the process and came back together and refined it after we all tried it and visited each other to get a better sense of how it was working in all the Math classes"

"A real powerful example of collaboration that we have been doing since the second quarter has been building the academic language template together for the week and using it in all of our classes to help students build language. This has really helped our students because they see that although we are teaching different classes, we are all focused on key vocabulary to support their learning. When we come up with the key vocabulary together we also share ways that we can pt into practice with all of our classes.

A good example of collaboration that we have done as an entire house was to share all the MCAS for each of our content classes with each other. After we did this, we came up with the key strategies that we would teach all the students in all our classes. We also came up with the key vocabulary that students would need to know for the different tests and reinforced it in our classes with the academic language templates. This then helped us institute the same process for doing Open responses. Although the open responses are for different subjects, we saw the commonalities in a good answer and we all practiced by using the same rubric when we did our own assessments. This helped students practice on our class assessments and at the same time prepare for MCAS open responses.

Summary of the Journal entries:

The journal entries provided a running account of teachers' perception of collaboration throughout the year of the study. The initial entries indicated that it took teachers time to have a clear and collective understanding of what collaboration was and what it looked like. Once teachers had a better understanding of collaboration, practice and time became the most important elements to support collaboration. Participants indicated that they learned how to collaborate by doing the work together. Teachers set norms, created goals, visited each other, created common practices, aligned curricula, gave each other feedback through lesson studies, problems of practice and through peer visitations.

The data from the journal entries revealed some similar themes that were highlighted in the analysis from the pre and post interview data. These similar themes included:

- Trust building came about through collaboration

- Teacher collaboration increased as the school year went on

- Time and space were essential to support collaboration among teachers

Other themes that emerged from the journal entries were:

- Teachers used collaboration as on going professional development

- Doing the work was the most effective way to build collaboration

- Teachers valued collaborating with colleagues

Trust building came about through collaboration:

All participants perceived that collaboration increased their level of trust among each other. Five of the six participants explicitly stated in the journal entries that they trusted their colleagues more as a result of taking part in collaborative practices. All participants perceived that as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community there was a stronger culture of collaboration in the entire school. One participant stated:

"I know that I can trust my colleagues because we have seen each other's classes, we have created lessons together and we have shared our strong point and our areas of weaknesses. We have worked together to make each other better teachers and that to me is the power of collaboration. We could not have done this kind of work, if we did not trust each other."

Teacher collaboration increased as the year on:

All participants responded in their journals that as the year went on the level of collaboration increased. Part of the reasons for the increased levels of collaboration according to participants' were trusts building, understanding of collaboration and the fact that teachers felt that they were reaping benefits in supporting students and themselves as a result of the collaboration that was taking place. One participant stated:

At the beginning of the year, I really did not think that I would get so much support from teachers that don't teach my subject matter. I really got a lot insights about my teaching, about my students from other teachers' perspectives and I really learned a lot by visiting and working directly with my colleagues on my practice because I trusted them and knew that they wanted to see me succeed.

The importance of time and space to support collaboration:

Throughout the year of the study, the theme that surfaced most in teachers' journals that supported their perception of increased collaboration was time and space to do the work. The earlier journal entries highlighted teachers' need to have the time to get a better understanding of what collaboration was and just as important they wrote about the importance of having the time in the school day to build relationships and trust in order to produce authentic collaboration. The journal entries indicated that the true collaboration was much stronger during the second half of the year. All participants felt that collaboration increased because the time and space were made available through the entire year of the study.

Collaboration as on going professional development:

All participants referred to professional development as a major theme that helped them increase collaboration in their journal entries. Participants expressed a deeper understanding of collaboration through the Professional Development that was offered throughout the year. Participants indicated that the leaning that took place during their Professional development on collaboration helped them to enhance the actual practice of professional development during their teacher led Professional Development sessions. Teachers used their learning from the PD sessions to organize their own PD sessions by setting norms, creating goals, looking at problems of practice, setting up visitation schedules, creating feedback forms for students and creating feedback form for teachers.

They felt that as a result of their Professional Development of collaboration they were able to take responsibility and hold each other accountable during their teacher led PD.

<u>Doing the work</u>

All participants indicated through the journal entries that the best way to learn how to collaborate with colleagues more effectively was through practice, i.e. by doing it. Participants wrote extensively about the projects, products, assessments and forms that they created throughout the year of the study as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. Participants indicated that their understanding of collaboration became real when they did the work together. As a result, teachers did "the work" through projects such as : doing publications of students work with samples from all disciplines, creating cross disciplinary assessments and projects, creating an academic language template for each house on a weekly basis to support academic language development, creating progress reports to provide students with feedback, sharing strategies, instituting a homework policy, visiting each other on a regular basis and creating lessons together through the process of lesson study.

<u>Teachers valued collaborating with colleagues:</u>

Another theme that surfaced through an analysis of the journal entries was participants' enjoyment of collaboration. Participants indicated that they looked forward to visiting each other's classes. When they created assessments together, they were excited about looking at how their students did on the assessments. They enjoyed planning filed trips to enhance collaboration and they enjoyed sharing things that were working as well as ideas that helped them with their challenges. One participant

indicated: "I really look forward to working with my colleagues because it helps me become a better teacher and it helps students learn."

Field Notes from announced and unannounced visits

The researcher conducted announced and unannounced visits to the PLC meetings and professional development meetings throughout the year of the study to observe practices that addressed the research question. The announced and unannounced visits provided some concrete opportunities to observe teachers collaborating. The researcher's notes provided multiple examples of teacher collaboration. These visits included observing teaches creating lessons, teachers sharing insights about teaching and learning, teachers teaching each other how to model lessons, teachers making and evaluating materials together, teachers creating feedback forms to help give each other feedback for classroom visitations and teachers teaching each other through problems of practice sessions.

The announced and unannounced visits highlighted many collaborative interactions. The researcher attempted to break these practices into three segments of collaboration:

- Planning and co-constructing curriculum materials and systems

- Teaching each other

- Observing and assisting each other

Planning and co-constructing materials and systems to support teaching and learning:

During observations the researcher saw teachers planning units of studies within interdisciplinary teams as well as with content teams. The researcher observed every

house and every content team taking part in planning and co-constructing work. Through

these visits, the researcher observed teachers:

- Creating tests

- Sharing house wide strategies for MCAS preparation

- Creating rubrics and common practices to support Writing across the curriculum

- Creating and providing feedback on Progress Reports

- Organizing and selecting field trips to enhance learning

The following are summaries from field notes that the researcher kept from

announced and announced visits that support collaborative behaviors and actions:

House II PLC meeting:

Teachers in house II worked together to construct a unit test on English Language Arts

with assistance from all house teachers

Math PLC content meeting:

 Math teachers came together to design common practices to support students to better

express their mathematical thinking in writing through Open Response questions. In

addition to collectively coming up with a process to address Open Responses, they

evaluated work, visited each other and continuously monitored student progress by

looking at student work

House III interdisciplinary planning and co-constructing:

All the teachers from house three co-constructed a writing across the curriculum

publication to highlight writing in all the classes. All teachers selected writing pieces

from their classes and put them together to highlight the key writing that they had

focused on as a house. They evaluated and selected student work to use these examples as

a teaching tool and to celebrate writing in all content classes.

Science content team:

Teachers created a common system to do notebooks, take notes and do lab reports.

Opportunity to Learn:

Teachers evaluated and selected materials for the entire year by selecting signature novels

and signature projects to support the vision of the school.

Teachers created a common system for grading and providing feedback on projects.

House I PLC meeting:

All teachers took part in an interdisciplinary unit that included the entire school. The

Science teacher taught students how to gather data on sleeping habits for all students in

the school. The Math teacher helped students analyze and present data, the language

teachers helped students write surveys and present their data.

Teaching each other:
        During observations the researcher saw many examples of teachers teaching each

other different skills and practices that supported teaching and learning through explicit

collaborative practices. The researcher observed teachers collaborating by: leading workshops on building vocabulary, effective questioning and writing in the content areas, creating multiple assessments to support English Language Development, using visuals to support language development, using role play to build language. The researcher observed teachers sharing ideas and strategies through lesson studies, problem of practice sessions and by sharing best practices within content teams, house meeting and during professional development sessions.

Teachers observing each other:

When the researcher instituted the professional learning community, one of the goals was to encourage teachers to visit each other. Teachers were provided with time in their schedule to visit each other. They were also provided with opportunities to request a visitation from colleagues or administration if they wanted feedback on their practice. In the first month of the implementation of the professional learning community there were very little requests for visitations. A few months into the year of the study all of the participants had participated in peer visitations . All participants had requested to have colleagues visit them and they had all been asked to visit their colleagues to support collaboration.

As the year went on, there were more requests to support peer visitations. The visitations became so common that teachers created schedules in advance to help organize their collaborative practices to support teaching and learning. The researcher became an active participant in helping each house schedule visitations and debriefing sessions to support collaboration. Participants indicated that in order to collaborate more

effectively it was vital to visit each other so that they could provide each other with feedback and get a better sense of what was happening in classes to enhance collaboration.

Co-constructed documents to support collaboration:

Throughout the year of the study, participants kept documents that each team produced and put in place to support collaboration. The following documents were produced and instituted by each house in an attempt to support collaboration:

- Progress Reports with student feedback

- Looking at student work protocol follow up sheets

- Homework practices to support understanding

- Routines(Workshop Instruction)

- Feedback form for students after taking an exam

- Feedback forms for students at the end of the quarter

- Writing rubrics across houses

- ALD templates

- Teacher to Teacher feedback forms

- Problem of Practice protocol

Summary of documents

These documents were produced by teachers during plc meetings, content meetings and professional development sessions during the year of the study as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. The documents were created to

enhance teacher learning, student learning and organizational learning. Practices and documents were shared and instituted by teachers throughout the school. Some documents were exclusively used by one house or by one content tea. Some documents such as the progress report feedback form, the Academic language Template, teacher observation feedback form, workshop instruction routines and homework policy were instituted throughout the entire school. These artifacts and documents served to support and highlight products that had been created by teachers through collaboration.

Question Three Summary

This section presented significant data collected from interviews, journals, announced and unannounced visits and teacher made program documents that helped to answer Research Question Three: *How do teachers perceive the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected a culture of collaboration at Freire International High School?*

A review of the data from all the sources brought forth a number of themes that emerged as a result of the implementation of professional learning community that supported a culture of collaboration. The researcher organized the themes into major categories and provided evidence as to the importance of each:

1. Time, space and resources were essential to build collaboration

2. Planning and co-constructing curriculum materials and systems

3. Collaboration supported teachers' perception of increased teaching and learning

4. Participants valued and enjoyed collaboration

All the data sources supported the fact that participants felt that time, space and resources needed to be made available during the school day to support collaboration. The support that was most mentioned throughout the data sources was most helpful in creating and enhancing collaboration was time to collaborate. In addition to the time to collaborate, participants indicated that they needed the space, both physical and mental space to build trust get to know each other and to work together.

In addition to the time and space that were made available to support collaboration, participants highlighted the importance of professional development in all the data sources as essential in helping to create a culture of collaboration. Participants felt that the professional development that took place early on in the year of the study to help teachers get a better understanding of collaboration helped them to get a stronger sense of what authentic collaboration was and what it looked like because they practiced and worked on it during the professional development sessions.

All participants took part in planning and co-constructing materials to support teaching and learning. Participants highlighted practices such as lesson studies, problems of practice, creating interdisciplinary units and co-constructing systems to give feedback and to observe each other as the most important way to build collaboration. Participants set goals with support from the researcher and they consistently came together to assess and reassess goals. Participants also felt that they were able to build a level of trust that helped them to hold each other accountable by taking active roles in collaborative practices.

All participants perceived that teaching had improved and that learning for students had improved as a result of their collaborative practices. Participants felt that teachers shared more ides, created more interdisciplinary units to support language and content learning, created systems such as feedback forms, homework policies, implemented differentiated instruction, extended learning beyond the classroom through filed trips and provided more meaningful and culturally competent material through collaborative practices. They believed that were able to put many of these practices in place and strengthen teaching and learning because they routinely visited each other, co-constructed material and gave each other feedback on their work.

Lastly, all participants expressed how much they valued and enjoyed collaboration in all the data sources. Participants looked forward to visiting each other, co-constructing materials, looking at data and planning learning activities that extended beyond the regular school day. As a result of the value that they found in collaboration, teachers instituted their own teacher run after school programs, feedback forms to support their visitations and field trips to enhance student learning.

Summary of the Findings:

The findings from the major research questions:

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?

Participants learned both practical and adaptive skills throughout the year of the study as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. Some of the practical skills that teachers learned from each other were things such as providing students with directions sheets, providing students more time to complete tasks, giving students less materials to cover a topic more in depth. They also learned skills that were both practical and adaptive throughout the year of the study. These included pacing their class instruction, differentiating instruction, and giving students more explicit feedback about their wok. Participants also learned a great deal of adaptive skills as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. These skills included: providing each other with constructive feedback, building trust, holding each other accountable and how to be more reflective about their practice.

The new learning that teachers were able to get from each other connected very much to the second research question. As a result of the skills that teachers learned from each other during their content, house and professional development meetings, they were better able to help students. The findings revealed that teachers believed that students learned a great deal as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community. This learning occurred because teachers believed they changed their practices. Teachers were more intentional about modeling, providing students with more explicit vocabulary development, giving students more choices to show their learning and providing students with more support through conferences and after school help.

Teachers created stronger relationships with students through filed trips, project based activities and interdisciplinary units. As a result of the implementation of the PLC, teachers' personal concern for their students increased. This personal concern resulted in stronger relationships which impacted student learning in a very positive manner.

The findings revealed that teachers spent a great deal of time talking and sharing ideas about teaching and learning. They also spent a great deal of time planning, evaluating and creating work. Teachers reached the highest level of collaborations by conducting routine peer observations to enhance their collaborative practices. Teachers visited each other on a regular basis, co-constructed lessons and did interdisciplinary projects throughout the year of the study. As a result of the implementation of the professional learning community, a culture of collaboration grew which enhanced teachers' ability to learn from each other, which in turn they believed enhanced student learning.

Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter was used to address the research questions of the study. The following chapter will present a more thorough summary of the data, with discussion of the research literature from Chapter Two. In addition, limitations of the study, implications on the researcher's leadership practice and suggestions and recommendations for practice and possible policy implications and for future study will be discussed.

Chapter Five
Summary, Discussion and Implications

Introduction

This chapter is divided into major sections that analyze and extend the findings presented in Chapter Four. It summarizes and interprets how the findings presented in the previous chapter relate to the literature presented in Chapter Two. The summary of the findings provides a rationale for suggestions about practice and policy and is discussed in the context of how such findings may support future research. This chapter concludes with a reflection of the researcher's leadership journey and a brief conclusion of the study.

This chapter is organized as follows:

1. **Summary of Findings**: In this section, the major findings are summarized in relation to the research questions.

2. **Discussion of the Findings:** In this section, the findings are discussed in relation to the relevant literature discussed in Chapter Two.

3. **Limitations of the Study:** In this section, the limitations of the study are reviewed in order to provide objectivity.

4. **Implications for practice:** In this section, the findings are interpreted as they relate to their possible impact on practice. Suggestions in this section are designed to initiate reflection and ultimately, to provoke thought about change in practice.

5. **Implications for policy:** In this section, the findings are interpreted as they relate to their possible impact on policy. Suggestions in this section are designed to initiate reflection and ultimately, to provoke thought about change in policy.

6. **Possible further research:** In this section, ideas for further research are discussed.

7. **Reflections on the Researcher's Leadership Role:** This section discusses the researcher's reflections and lessons learned on his leadership in designing and conducting this research. It also discusses important insights gained by the researcher.

8. **Conclusion:** This section completes the case study and presents the researcher's thoughts and ideas on the value gained from conducting the study. It invites the reader to consider the potential benefits that can result in implementing professional learning communities in schools to support English Language Learners' personal and academic success.

Summary of Findings:

This case study focused on the impact that the implementation of a professional learning community had on teachers' perception of learning from each other, student learning and on teacher collaboration in a school that is exclusively designed for English Language Learners. The findings that emerged from the data sources suggest that the implementation of a professional learning community improved teachers' ability to learn

from each other, improved student learning and improved a culture of collaboration at the school.

The major research questions for this study were:

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected the creation of a culture of collaboration at Freire International High School?

The findings from the prior chapter are broken down into one section of major findings. There is one sub-section that further summarizes question #1.

- Participants felt that the trust, relationship building and practice that they built through working together within the house structure were essential in helping them learn from each other, helping students to learn and in building collaboration because it provided the time, space and resources to support each other and a common group of students.

- Participants indicated that the most important factor that helped them learn from each other, helped students learn and increased collaboration was time to meet on a consistent basis. Teachers met twice a week for hour long blocks within houses,

three hours a week within content teams and three hours a month for professional development.

- Another important programmatic feature that participants felt was instrumental in enhancing teachers' ability to learn from each other, students' to learn more and enhance collaboration was the professional development that was offered throughout the year of the study. This finding further supports the idea that structures and time alone do not impact change in practice and behaviors; consistent focus is also an essential component.

- The professional development that participants felt enhanced teacher learning, student learning and collaboration the most focused on: best practices for English Language Learners, lessons studies, problems of practice and critical friends group. Teachers felt that the professional development had two very important components: building the knowledge base and their ability to share the knowledge.

- Participants believed that students learned more as a result of the implementation of the professional learning community because of the relationship building that took place among teachers and between teachers and students. This personal concern and relationship building helped teachers work more closely and take more responsibility for students learning.

- Participants felt that student motivation increased because teachers provided more consistent feedback on student work through conferences and progress reports, stayed after school to support student learning and supported student successes through celebrations and exhibitions.

- Participants felt that student learning was enhanced because teachers provided more meaningful learning that connected to students' lives. These experiences included field trips and more personal assignments that valued their prior knowledge and highlighted their interests and concerns.

- Participants felt that students learned more as a result of the implantation of the professional learning community because teachers worked together for a common purpose. Teachers felt that they could count on each other to help each other learn and to help students learn.

- Participants felt that another major reason why they believed student learning increased was because they implemented new strategies into their classroom. These were practices that they learned from the professional development and which they shared during team and house meetings and through observing colleagues.

- Participants worked together more consistently and with greater results as the year progressed. During the second half of the year of the study, teachers routinely visited each other on a consistent basis which helped enhance trust and create more opportunities for collaborative practices.

Pedagogical Learning: This section includes a summary of the findings that addresses participants' perception of the practices that they learned from each other to further answer question #1.

- Relationship building skills

- Pacing the work in a more reasonable manner

- Cutting down on material presented per lesson, (Chunking the learning)

- Giving students more explicit feedback,

- Increasing teacher patience,

- Connecting the lessons to real world experiences,

- More explicit vocabulary development,

- Providing students with more opportunities to learn during and after school

- Encouraging students to do better

- Providing students with more choices to show their learning

Discussions of the Findings:

This case study specifically concentrated on the perceptions of the impact that the emergence of a professional learning community had on teachers' ability to learn from each other, on student learning and on collaboration. The theoretical rationale reasoned that schools that implement professional learning communities by highlighting and embracing best practices such as co-constructing materials, looking at student work, looking at teachers' work, visiting each others' classes and evaluating work increases collaboration that ultimately improves teaching and learning. Improved teacher practice has been strongly associated with high levels of collaboration (Little, 1990; Newmann et al., 1996). With this logic as a point of reference, the researcher rationalized that the emergence of a professional learning community in a setting that exclusively serves English Language Learners could enhance learning for teachers and students through increased collaboration.

Professional Learning Communities:

It was very evident in the findings that the emergence of a professional learning community was perceived to provide a focused and safe environment for teachers that helped them become engaged in creating a mission, building trust and knowledge sharing. Participants felt strongly that the emergence of a professional learning community enhanced their own learning and student learning. DuFour and Eaker (1998, 2004), based on their extensive work with schools, describe the elements that constitute a professional learning community as: shared vision, mission and values, collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation and experimentation, continuous improvement and results orientation. DuFour and Eaker (1998, 2004) go on to state that the most important element to institute an authentic professional learning community is to create a compelling mission and vision that guides the work. The findings from the case study highlight and support the importance of this critical element. As a school community, the study site engaged in a collective process of co-constructing a mission and vision through the development of a covenant and a stewardship delegation of the PLC which encompassed many of the elements of a PLC. These documents served to guide and support the work that was done throughout the year of the study.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) describe schools as a factory model which is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of the 21st century. For this reason, they argue that schools must engage in the hard work of creating a compelling vision and mission to meet the demands of this complex world. They further articulate that it takes time and consistent focus for adults to buy into this new mission and vision. The findings from the case study support this developmental progress. In the beginning of the year, content teams and house teams worked with genuine compliance in an attempt to enhance their own

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learning and student learning. It became very obvious at the outset of the study that participants needed time and training to build trust and engage in the work in a more meaningful manner. As suggested by Little (1996) and DuFour and Eaker (1998, 2004), structures, training and time provide meaningful opportunities for teachers to build trust, get a better understanding of the mission and vision and to better understand and learn the roles and responsibilities that they need to assume in this initiative to institutionalize the mission. As the year went on, participants recognized and appreciated the importance of having a clear focus, time and professional development to guide collective goals.

Newmann & Wehlage (1995) add to the understanding of professional learning community by expressing, "If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional learning community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff (p.37). Darling-Hammond (1996) makes explicit references to the fact that in order for schools to be successful they must be restructured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching and teach for understanding. For this reason, the school in which the study was conducted was restructured to provide explicit time for teachers to meet in house and content teams to share practices, look at student work and to visit each other. The school was also restructured so that students within their houses could share common experiences through field trips and learning exhibitions.

DuFour and Eaker, (1998) caution that collaboration and participation by invitation do not become a reality without structures and a clear focus. For this reason it was imperative to put forth structures that strengthened identification of roles and

responsibilities which in turn provided opportunities for participants to take ownership of their learning. Bolman and Deal (2002) state: "Structures serve to hold us together, not to hold us back" (p. 56). As the findings demonstrated, besides having the time and space to work together, teachers received professional development which helped to build responsibility, to increase knowledge and to hold each other accountable because teachers themselves had taken part in creating the goals and norms to guide the work.

Once teams and houses had created norms and goals and had a strong understanding behind the essential elements of a professional learning community, they began to work more closely. Senge (1994) states "When there is a genuine vision, (as opposed to a vision statement) people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to" (p.9). As illustrated in the case study, teams shared lessons, gave each other feedback and they used protocol-based approaches to support each other. These sessions provided structured opportunities for knowledge sharing and trust building which helped participants realize that they were not alone in addressing the daily challenges that teacher's encounter. As a result, participants engaged in critical conversations that went beyond "storytelling" and more into authentic conversation that led to new learning and new ways of doing things (Little, 2004).

Senge (1994) states that in order for an organization to move beyond resistance and compliance and ultimately toward commitment there has to be genuine buy in and investment in the mission and the vision of the organization. The findings from the case study supported this observation. Participants in the case study constantly referred to the importance of co-constructing a covenant and the stewardship delegation of the PLC as a guide for the work that was embarked on to create an authentic professional learning

community. Participants looked forward to working together, to visiting each other's classrooms, learning from each, and pushing each other and students to do better.

Fullan (2003) states that a true community takes time to build because trust is earned through consistent follow through and responsible behaviors such as honesty and authenticity. Unfortunately, schools have not been designed and/or socialized to operate in this manner. The findings from the study strongly support Fullan's research. As the year went on, teachers became more trusting and open with each other. At the inception of the study, it was difficult for participants to discuss their challenges and concerns with colleagues. Participants also had a hard time asking for advice and support at the outset of the study. Trust increased as time went on because participants were given the structure needed to become more honest, respectful, and present to their colleagues.

ELL Best Practices:

Throughout the year of the study there was extensive professional development that focused on enhancing best practices for English Language Learners. These sessions included professional development on creating engaging classrooms for English Language Learners by focusing on accountable talk, by providing leveled questions and by providing more opportunities for students to take ownership of the learning through connections to students' cultures and their first language. This professional development helped guide teacher's ability to learn from each other which in turn made them more competent teachers.

Educational research emphasizes the importance of teacher competence as the most important determinant in ensuring that English Language Learners reach academic

success (Garcia, 1999, Walqui, 2002). Well trained ELL teachers must be current in a wide range of instructional strategies, have a strong understanding of language acquisition and must be culturally competent to address the social, emotional and linguistic challenges that many ELL present (Cummins 1981, 2000). Freeman and Freeman (2002) recommend that teachers of high school aged English Language Learners provide students with engaging and challenging curriculum that builds on students' background knowledge, that they provides theme-based instruction that fosters deeper learning and language development, to organize more collaborative learning opportunities, to scaffold learning and to ensure that they build student confidence through empathy and patience.

Thomas and Collier's (1997) massive study on over 700,000 English language minority students found that the three most important predictors in academic success for ELL students were: using cognitively complex academic instruction in students' first language for as long as possible as well as in the target language; using current approaches to teaching, including cooperative learning groups studying thematic units to teach the academic curriculum through two languages; and, changing the social cultural context of schools to value students' cultures and languages and to create a warm, safe, supportive learning environment. The findings from the study confirmed some of these aspects. Throughout the year of the study participants used more current approaches such as studying thematic approaches to enhance language and content thinking. Participants incorporated and provided more opportunities for students to use their first language to activate knowledge. Participants also created a safe and welcoming environment through

fostering relationships with students and by providing after school activities and field trips that fostered a safe and supportive learning environment.

Further research by Gerten's and Jimenez' (1994) concluded that effective instruction for language minority students' challenges students to use critical thinking skills, encourages their involvement, provides them with opportunities for success, and includes scaffolding with a variety of graphic organizers to draw on their background knowledge and to give them access to content. Participants were able to incorporate some of these practices as a result of the lesson studies and problems of practice sessions in which they received assistance from colleagues.

The findings from the case study revealed that participants learned and implemented a great deal of the best practices mentioned to support student learning. Participants indicated that the two most powerful avenues that they felt enhanced student learning came from the relationship building that took place with their students and through observations of their colleagues. Participants indicated that they got to know their students really well through field trips, after school activities and other meaningful learning experiences such as service learning trips and school functions. They also indicated that they learned many new strategies such as questioning techniques, the usage of direction sheets, providing more explicit feedback and conferring techniques with students through teacher observations.

Participants spent a great deal of time building interdisciplinary units that connected to students' lives. The "joint work" provided participants opportunities to seamlessly integrate learning from one class to another. This was evident in the many projects that were conducted by Math, Language and Science teachers throughout the

year of the study. The other common practice that was instituted by all house teams was the weekly academic language template which consisted of the key vocabulary terms that all teachers in each interdisciplinary team embedded into their teaching to enhance academic vocabulary development.

<u>Collaboration:</u>

Cambron-McCabe (2003) sums up collaboration by stating: "the emphasis should be on restructuring how people work together because that's what ultimately has an effect on the classroom" (p. 8). Judith Warren Little (1986), in her seminal work on collegiality describes different levels of collaboration. These include: storytelling, aiding, sharing and joint work. In her later work, Little and Rosenholtz (1994) conclude that the highest levels of collaboration encompasses: a high frequency of teachers talking with each other about teaching, a high frequency of teachers observing each other and a high frequency of teachers planning, constructing, and evaluating curriculum materials together.

The findings of this study supported and validated Little's research. Participants in the study began collaboration by initially talking about their students and sharing stories about the things that they did in their classrooms. As the year went on and participants received more professional development and practice on collaboration there was a shift from storytelling to sharing lessons, and strategies that ultimately led to "joint work." Initially, participants found it easier to collaborate within their content teams. As the year went on, they found value in working within their interdisciplinary/ house teams. As the year went on, participants took part in giving each other more feedback about their teaching, creating lessons, and visiting each other on a regular basis. Participants were

very proud of the co-constructed products that were done to improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment. Participants felt that they were able to gather a great deal of traction in helping their students learn more because of the "joint work" that they created and because of the peer observations.

At the beginning of the study, participants did not visit each other's classrooms much. It took a while for peer observation to materialize because trust and new learning needed to be developed in order for this to take place. It was only with passing time that participants in the study reached the highest degree of collaborative practice described by Little and Rosenholtz (1994).

One of the main reasons why participants in the study were able to reach this height of collaboration may have been because they made peer observation an explicit goal in their stewardship and because they were provided with the resources to support its implementation. The researcher suggests that any school that is focused on building collaboration must provide time, resources and professional development to support this practice for content teams and house teams. These resources were available because the school was organized to ensure that teachers had the time and space to visit and debrief with colleagues.

Collaboration increased and resembled "joint work" because teachers spent time building assessments together, giving each other feedback about lessons and co-constructing interdisciplinary projects. In addition to the planned time that was made available for collaborative practices to take place, teachers worked together after school by instituting homework clubs for their houses and by organizing field trips and extracurricular learning experiences to enhance learning.

Senge (1994) further contends that "team skills are more challenging to develop than individual skills. This is why learning teams need practice fields, to practice together so that they can develop their collective learning skills" (p.240). The findings from the research strongly support this. Collaboration did not come naturally to participants. It required time, patience, training and practice in "doing the work" for participants to get better and feel more comfortable in taking part in collaborative practices. These practices became more natural through training and with assistance from protocols.

According to Blankstein (2004) the aim of collaboration is to enhance teaching and learning. To accomplish this "team members work interdependently toward a common goal which in turn supports the larger school vision and is aligned with the school's vision and values" (p.130). The findings from the study supports the fact that participants worked closely together with a common vision which they perceived to have had a positive impact on their practice, on student learning and in building collaboration throughout the school.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that this study had limitations that may affect the generalization of this study. Because not every teacher at the school participated in the study, the findings can not be generalized into this setting or any other setting. Six teachers at Freire International High School served as the participants in the study. As a result, not every teacher's voice and insights were used to inform the analysis. For this reason, the findings cannot be considered generalizable to a similar setting. Nevertheless,

a conscious effort was made to include a purposeful sample. The sample consisted of 40% of the teaching staff. The sample included teachers from different houses, from different content areas, and teachers with various levels of teaching experience.

Another concern in the study may have been the researcher's role which sometimes was as participant and at other times as observer, but at all times the headmaster. With the researcher in this role, these roles may have affected opinions, biases or expectations. Another limitation to the study was the fact that the researcher and the participants were intent on making the implementation of the professional learning community a success. The researcher was cognizant of the idea that there was some potential for participants telling the principal researcher what they felt they should have said or what they felt they was the right answer as opposed to the actual feelings and/or observations that may have been contrary to the intentions of the endeavor. For this reason the researcher obtained signed consent forms indicating that participation in the study would not affect work relations. The researcher also implemented various data sources to provide for triangulation of the findings to further support the validity of the study.

Another limitation of the study was the time period within which the study took place. The study was completed in one academic year. The main focus of the study was to capture the participants' perceptions of how the implementation of the professional learning community enhanced teachers' ability to learn from each other, enhanced student learning and its affects on school-wide collaboration. The researcher recognizes that some of these changes may take more time to develop.

Another limitation to the study surfaced when analyzing perceived outcomes related to the implementation of the professional learning community. Interviews and

observations and journal responses, while based on each participant's perspective, were reflective of that person's current interpretation of reality. In addition to this, participants in the school had a history that encompassed past collaborative practice and relationships that were in existence prior to the implementation of the professional learning community. Thus, all findings related to the implementation of the professional learning community could not be solely attributed to the implementation of the professional learning community.

Implications for Practice

There are multiple implications for practice derived from this study that may be considered by districts and schools and educational leaders at the high school level. With the drastic increase of English Language Learners into high school across the nation it is important for school districts, researchers and school leaders to use the plethora of literature on the power of professional learning communities as well as research on best practices for working with English Language Learners and combine them to implement programs that support English Language Learners. For the purpose and focus of this study, recommendations and implications are specifically designed for schools that have a high number of English Language Learners. School leaders and districts may consider the following:

1. The development of a clear mission and vision

2. Restructure and reorganization of schools

3. Allocation of time, space and resources for teachers

4. Put forth systems of goal setting, feedback and accountability

5. Providing students with a safe and welcoming environment

6. 5T's: Trust, Time, Training, Teaching, Togetherness

1. The development of a clear mission and vision

Schools that are committed to taking on the challenges of educating English Language Learners for learning independence and leadership must be willing to grapple and learn more about what their beliefs and values are about education. In addition to this, they must engage in learning more about who their students are, where their students are academically and emotionally, and where their students want to be after completing their high school experience. Through these dialogues educators can begin to shape an authentic vision and mission that can guide the implementation of a professional learning community.

In this study, the major stakeholders were active participants in co-constructing a clear mission and values that explicitly articulated our beliefs and expectations for English Language Learners. Teachers and administrators were active participants in identifying the roles and responsibilities that they would assume in supporting the mission and vision of the professional learning community. These values, principles and expectations served as a guide for how decisions of curricula and professional development were made to support the mission and vision.

2. Re-structure and reorganize schools to spend time and resources on what is valued:

Schools or districts that have a high concentration of English Language Learners can not simply expect students that are learning a new language, a new culture and a new way of life to simply do the same things that mainstream students do without supports such as professional development, training and time to learn and practice different approaches. For this reason it is extremely important that schools that serve ELL students reorganize so that teachers and students have time built into the school day to learn more about students' cultures, languages and values to support teaching and learning. ELL students need to have more explicit opportunities to synthesize learning through more interdisciplinary and applied learning that incorporates these elements.

In this study, the school was reorganized so that teachers from each house had time to work directly with their house students and house teachers. The school was reorganized so that teachers could meet every day for an hour within their house teams to collaborate. The school was also reorganized so that content teams met on a monthly basis to align curricula, look at student work and align practices. The school was reorganized so that teachers met once a month to take part in school wide professional development. The school was also reorganized so that teachers observed each other and had time to debrief their visits on a consistent basis. Lastly, an Opportunity to Learn block was implemented into the daily schedule for the entire school. This block provided students with more time and instruction to enhance student learning.

3. Provide time, space, resources and a relentless focus to enhance best practices

In order for teachers to effectively teach and prepare English Language Learners for the 21st century economy, it is vital that they have a relentless focus on best practices to support learning. Teachers need to be provided with time, space and professional

learning to enhance their practice. Teachers need poignant and current research based professional development to guide and enhance their own learning. The reorganization of schools to place teachers in content teams and in interdisciplinary teams such as houses is very important, but it is important to keep in mind that structures alone do not create powerful changes in practice.

For this reason, throughout the year of the study, all teachers received explicit training on best practices to support authentic language development for English Language Learners. All teachers received professional training in collaboration and trust building. The professional development was done in an on-going consistent basis within the context of the school so that teachers were able to put the new learning into their practice. Participants revealed that the Professional Development gave them opportunities to learn new best practices which they put into practice throughout the year of the study.

4. Put forth systems of goal setting, accountability, feedback and reflection:

Schools are institutions of learning and for this reason it is very important that schools put forth systems for setting goals, monitoring progress and creating systems to provide feedback about the systems and practices that have been put in place. In addition to using the state tests and district assessments, schools that serve a high number of ELL students may consider more ongoing assessments such as portfolios and language proficiency benchmarks, to measure appropriate academic language development.

The findings from the study revealed that the ongoing systems that were put in place to monitor progress by maintaining "a compelling scoreboard" with data sources such as attendance, grades, looking at assessments and constantly coming together to celebrate successes and problem solve challenges together were vital to support the PLC.

Setting the time and putting systems in place to come back to these data sources were vital in providing information that helped celebrate successes as well as address practices that impeded student learning.

5. **Provide students with a safe and welcoming learning environment that foster relationships**

Newly arrived students are already dealing with a great deal of uncertainty in their lives. For this reason it is essential that schools provide a safe and welcoming learning environment for English Language Learners. In order for students to succeed, they must feel welcomed and safe. Schools have to work very hard to ensure that each student has a dependable and available advocate. Schools that want to see a major difference in student learning need to focus on the relationship building. The findings from this study revealed that the element that participants perceived to have had the highest impact on their perception of student learning was the relationship building that took place during the year of the study between participants and students. Participants indicated that these relationships grew through more informal interactions such as field trips, service trips and learning exhibitions which then extended into the classroom relationship.

6. 5T's: Trust, Time, Training, Teaching, Togetherness:

A final suggestion that may help schools and districts enhance teaching and learning for students and teachers are the 5T's that surfaced throughout this study. The 5T's are:

Trust: Build trust with all stakeholders. This will help everyone create an honest vision that everyone can believe in.

Time: Provide time and space for teachers and students to learn and try new experiences.

Training: Provide teachers with the most current and engaging training to support and enhance their practice.

Teaching: Provide time and organize the school so that teachers observe each other on a consistent basis.

Togetherness: Ensure that time is made during the school year for teachers and students to come together to share common experiences. This helps foster community.

Implications for Policy

There is one major implication for policy derived from this study that may be considered by districts and schools and educational leaders:

Ensuring and demanding higher teacher quality

While strides have been made through NCLB and other measures to increase teacher quality, there is still a need to demand a higher level of teacher preparation to serve English Language Learners. States, districts and schools may consider increasing teacher training programs with more explicit classes and development on collaboration, linguistics and best practices for working with English Language Learners. As mentioned earlier, the most important determinant in ELL students' success is teacher quality (Walqui, 2000). English Language Learners need the best teachers in front of them everyday in every classroom.

Schools and districts need to push for higher teacher quality. Teachers benefit greatly from ongoing professional development every year to enhance learning of new

strategies and practices in linguistics, language development and collaboration. The findings from this case study support this. Participants revealed that the professional development that they received throughout the year of the study on best practices for English Language Learners and collaboration helped them become more effective teachers.

Implications for Future Research

An analysis of the data this study presented in combination with the study's limitations allows the recognition of what could be suggested for further research. This study focused on perceptions of teachers' learning from each other, perceptions of student learning and perceptions of collaboration as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. A deeper continuation of this study could be the actual effect that the implementation of the professional learning community has on student learning by closely examining academic gains over time. This study could be pursued by doing a comparative study in which a cohort of students from each house could be selected to participate in the program while other cohorts are not part of the PLC. The students' progress could be measured and compared with students who were not within the house structure of the PLC.

Another interesting area of analysis that could come about from this study could be that of participant's age and their perception of increased collaboration and learning from their colleagues. Research could be conducted on whether a participant's age or experience in teaching had an impact on perceptions of collaboration and student learning. This information could be useful in helping organize professional learning communities according to teachers' years of classroom experience.

The other study that may provide more insight into the impact that the emergence of a professional learning community has on a school and teaching and learning would be a follow up study to this particular study that focuses on students perspectives of the research questions. This would add a deeper level of learning and validity to the current study as well as a comparative perspective on how teachers and students perceive the impact that the implementation of a professional learning community has on a school.

Reflections on the Researcher's Leadership Role

As the researcher embarked on this journey, Thomas Aquinas' thoughts helped me to continuously reflect and redefine what it means to lead. Aquinas stated: "If the captain's job were to guard his ship, then he would never set sail." My participation in this study has enabled me to learn a great deal about my leadership and about who I am and what I stand for as an educator. Setting the sails in pursuit of creating a professional learning community that aimed to enhance teaching and learning for adults, students, families and myself has been a great experience of self discovery, reflection and reinvention that can best be captured through three powerful themes: creating and modeling core values, authentic presence, and continuous learning through reflection.

The study helped me to define and redefine who I am by putting forth and helping shape the core values of the PLC. I realized that it was very easy to come up with core values to guide the creation of our professional learning community. The true challenge came in modeling and exhibiting these values. At times it was difficult to model these values on a daily basis, but as leader, I realized that authenticity and trust are the core pillars of leadership and that if we were going to move forward in becoming an authentic

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community it was essential that I modeled and led with my actions and not my words. Embodying my core values was greatly enhanced with the support of mentors such as Dr. Irwin Blumer who challenged me to grapple with the essential questions of: What do you stand for as an educator? How do you know this? How do others know this? These essential questions helped me to: say, model, organize, and institutionalize these values.

At the outset of the implementation of the professional learning community the mantra was: "We do not say students can't, we simply say, this student is not able to do this right now and this is what we are doing about it." This mantra did not become a reality until I realized that I needed to model this mantra with my teachers. My job as a leader shifted from simply saying to modeling this mantra by not giving up on the teachers. My shift in leadership was greatly influenced by the thinking and writing of Dr. Starratt who describes authentic and ethical leaders as those who lead with the ethic of presence, critique and care. This powerful learning was groundbreaking for me because it taught me to move beyond pushing teachers to give all students the Opportunity to Learn by modeling Opportunity to Learn for teachers.

The shift of extending the concept of Opportunity to Learn to teachers provided incredible opportunities for me to engage in authentic presence. As a result of this presence, I spent valuable time with teachers co-constructing, supporting, and celebrating their work rather than checking to see if they were doing the work. This was a huge shift from managing the work to leading the work. As a result of this, I was able to form more authentic relationships that enhanced collaboration, built trust and demonstrated genuine care. Through these experiences I learned how to be a more patient and empathetic leader.

The other powerful insight that I learned about my leadership throughout the study was the importance of providing people the space and safety nets to take more risks. As leaders, we are often seduced with the idea that taking risks and making mistakes are bad and that our job is to minimize risks and to fix the mistakes. If I had led this project with this mindset, I am certain that there would have been very little progress in our attempt to create a community of learners.

Another powerful leadership component that I learned is the importance of managing the highs and lows of leadership. A leader's job is to set the emotional tone of the organization. There were times during the study where I caught myself reflecting more about my mood, tone, and reactions to successes and challenges. I learned how to manage my emotions more effectively by occasionally "getting on the balcony" to get a better sense of the emotional energy that I was emitting .

My participation in this study has increased my ability as a leader and helped me to develop a greater understanding of what is required to be a more effective leader. I have arrived at the point where I am convinced of how important it is to walk the walk with authentic presence. An effective leader has to live and model his values in every action and decision he undertakes. The process of personal reflection has been a powerful way to learn more about my leadership. Reflection has become an effective component of my leadership style. Utilizing reflection has allowed me to learn that leadership is not stagnant; it has also taught me that the best way to continue to grow as a leader is to seek guidance and new learning from mentors and confidants through dialogue and more reflection. Reflection has helped me to not only set sails to reach new horizons, it has also

taught me how important it is to change and realign the sails to weather the storms along the journeys of leadership.

Conclusion:

The infusion of English Language Learners in public high schools across the country continues to rise at an incredibly high rate. English Language Learners are the fastest growing number of students in the United States public schools. According to Fix and Passel (2003), 10.5 million children of immigrants comprise 19% of all school children in k-12 education. Projections from the Pew Hispanic institute suggest that the number of English Language Learners in US public schools will make up 30% of the total school age population by 2015.

The staggering increase of ELL students into the public schools presents great challenges and opportunities to our nation. This steady increase of newly arrived members to an already expansive and diverse nation suggests that our nation continues to grow and redefine itself linguistically and culturally into the 21st century. Schools will play the most prominent role in determining how we address the demographic and cultural changes that the nation is undergoing. As the nation continues to grow and what it means to be an American continues to expand, the public schools will serve as the prominent vehicle in leading and reinventing the identity and the values that determine what we stand for and who we are as a nation.

English Language Learners will play a huge role in defining and redefining our nation. Unfortunately, the harsh reality is that English Language Learners across the nation are not experiencing academic success. English Language Learners perform

considerably lower on state and national standardized assessments and experience higher drop out rates than any other major demographic group (New Gen, 2004).

The pronounced lack of academic success of English Language Learners has social, economical and moral implications that affect the fiber of the nation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2001) adults who are not fluent and literate in Academic English are by far "less likely to be employed and when they are employed they earn lower wages than individuals who are fluent and literate in English" (p120). In addition to this, adults who are not fluent and proficient in English are less likely to be involved in active and informed citizenship.

If education serves as the great equalizer, it is imperative that we put forth public policies that address the inequities that prevent English Language Learners from flourishing into active and informed citizens that partake in and enhance the global knowledge "flat economy." We can do this by training, hiring and supporting school leaders and teachers that have the cultural, linguistic, and emotional fortitude to provide English Language Learners with effective instructional strategies that improve students' content knowledge, their academic language development and their confidence as learners.

These public policy steps can be greatly enhanced if federal and state policy makers across the country put forth the resources to give districts the time, resources and professional development to train school leaders and teachers on creating and sustaining professional learning communities that enhance sheltered instruction, language development, authentic thinking and cultural competence. Steps such as these may: minimize the achievement gaps that exist amongst English Language Learners as well as

provide our nation an incredible opportunity to shape a more pluralistic and socially responsible nation.

This case study assessed teacher's perceptions of their ability to learn from each other, perceptions of their students' learning, and perceptions of collaboration in the entire school as a result of the implementation of a professional learning community. The conclusions that can be drawn from this case study are that teachers learned a great deal from each other, that students' learning was greatly enhanced and that teacher collaboration increased as a result of the implementation of the PLC. Teachers felt that they became better teachers and that they were better able to serve their students because they built caring relationships with their students and trusting collegial relationships with their colleagues.

For these reasons, it is important for school districts, researchers and school leaders to use the plethora of literature on the power of professional learning communities as well as research on best practices for working with English Language Learners and combine them to implement programs that prepare English Language Learners for active and informed citizenship.

BOSTON COLLEGE
LYNCH SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study that is aligned with my dissertation at Boston College. This project seeks to gain an understanding of how moving from independence towards interdependence through the implementation of a Professional Learning Community supports teaching and learning for teachers and students. In order to get a better understanding of how the implementation of a PLC impacts the teaching and learning for students and teachers at Freire International teachers from each house and from different content areas will be invited to participate. The purpose of this study is to inform our understanding of how the PLC impacts teaching and learning for English Language Learners.

To conduct this research, each participant will be asked to take part in a series of two thirty-minute interviews that will be taped. These interviews will be done as a series of conversations with key questions that will be provided to the participant in advance. Questions will focus on participant perceptions of the effects of the PLC on teaching and learning; and participant experience in working in teams in school settings. After individual interviews, tapes will be transcribed in order to diagnose similarities and differences that have surfaced from participants. In addition teachers will be asked to respond to journal prompts through out the study to keep notes and reflections on the process of moving towards the PLC and the implications it has had for teaching and learning for participants and students.

The benefits of participating in this study are the possible improvements of teaching and learning for teachers and students. The other benefit of participating in this study is that participants will be able to co-construct and learn about the benefits and challenges of moving towards a PLC to improve teaching and learning through the formation of professional learning communities. It is hoped that we learn how to provide participants with more information, tools and skills to work more interdependently as well as how to create support systems that extend beyond the PLC and benefit the entire school and the district.

The participation in this study is completely voluntary. Because time is a valuable resource, I will respect the time commitment that you will put towards this effort by not asking too much of you. Because participation in this endeavor is voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked. Names and information provided throughout the study are withheld and confidentiality of responses is ensured.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this invitation, please feel free to contact me through e-mail at osants@boston.k12.ma.us, through phone: 617-590-4553 or by setting a time to meet with me.

I understand the conditions of this study and agree to participate. I understand that I will be audio taped and that I have the right to review the transcriptions for accuracy. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Signature of Participant: _____   Date: _____

Appendix B

Project Interview Protocol

Dissertation Title:

The Perceived Effect on Teaching and Learning through the development of a Professional Learning Community for staff teaching English Language Learners

Research Questions

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected learning for students at Freire International High School?

- How do teachers perceive that the emergence of a Professional Learning Community has affected teacher collaboration at Freire International High School?

Interview Protocol:

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this process. Do you have any questions before we begin?
2. The purpose of this interview is to document responses to questions regarding your participation in the research study on the implementation of a Professional Learning Community and responses to your perceptions of school wide collaboration, student learning and teachers' learning from each other.
3. Do you understand the intent of this interview? Do you have any questions of the interviewer?

4.   The following are the interview questions that will be asked at the inception of the program and after eight months. We will now proceed with the interview questions.

Pre-Interview questions:

1. Describe your perception of teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School.

2. Describe your perception of student learning at Freire International High School.

3. Describe your perception of teacher collaboration at Freire International High School.

4. Describe your collegial interactions with other teachers that do not teach your subject area at Freire International High School.

5. Describe your collegial interactions with other teachers that teach your subject area at Freire International High School.

6. Describe your process for sharing lessons, data and strategies to support student learning that extends outside of your classes at Freire International High School.

7. Describe your experiences in creating cross-disciplinary projects with colleagues at Freire International High School.

8. Describe your expertise on best practices to support acquisition of academic language for ELL at Freire International High School.

9. Describe your experience in sharing practices, strategies and challenges with colleagues at Freire International High School.

Post Intervention questions

1. Describe your perception of teachers' learning from each other as a result of the implementation of the PLC at Freire International High School.

2. Describe your perception of student learning after the implementation of the PLC at Freire International High School.

3. Describe your perception of teacher collaboration at Freire International High School as a result of the implementation of the PLC?

4. As a result of the implementation of the PLC describe your collegial interactions with other teachers that do not teach your subject area at Freire International High School.

5. As a result of the implementation of the PLC, describe your collegial interactions with teachers that teach the same subject area at Freire International High School.

6. As a result of the implementation of the PLC at Freire International High School, describe your process for sharing lessons, data and strategies to support student learning that extends outside of your classes.

7. Describe your experience in creating cross-disciplinary projects with colleagues at Freire International High School as a result of the implementation of the PLC.

8. As a result of the implementation of the PLC at Freire International High School, describe your expertise on best practices to support acquisition of academic language for ELL students.

9. Describe your experience in sharing practices, strategies and challenges with colleagues at Freire International High School as a result of the implementation of the PLC.

10. What are your impressions of the impact that the PLC has had on teaching and learning at Freire International High School?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview process.

Appendix C

Project Journal Protocol

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this process. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- The purpose of the journal entries is to document responses and reflections regarding your participation in the research study on the implementation of a Professional Learning Community. The responses will be based on your perceptions of school wide collaboration, student learning and teachers' learning from each other as a result of the implementation of the PLC throughout the year of the study.

- Do you understand the intent of the journal entries? Do you have any questions?

- You will be provided with an hour a month during the school day throughout the year of the study to respond to the following journal prompts.

1. Describe your perception of teachers' learning from each other at Freire International High School since the implementation of the PLC. If you have specific examples of practices and or ideas that you have learned, seen or discussed with other teachers please specify.

2. Describe your perception of student learning at Freire International High School since the inception of the PLC. If you have specific examples that support your perception of student learning, please specify with examples.

3. Describe your perception of teacher collaboration at Freire International High School since the inception of the PLC. . If you have specific examples that support your perception of school-wide collaborative [practices, please specify with examples.

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