From coblabberation to collaboration: An interview study of professional learning communities

in elementary education

by

Heather Calvert

B.S., Kansas State University, 2006

M.S., Peru State College, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

The model for professional learning communities began in the business sector as professional learning organizations. While there have been many different structures referred to as professional learning communities, the model referenced in this study was created by Rick DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker. In their model, collaborative teams work together to answer four guiding questions: What do we want students to learn? How will we know when they have learned it? What will we do for students who already know it? What will we do for students who did not learn it? The DuFour model has been noted in research to be one of the most powerful and impactful educational reform efforts. This study examines the role of the implementation process on the overall effectiveness of the professional learning community.

The purpose of this interview study was to explore the experiences of five certified teachers. This qualitative study was informed by purposeful sampling intersected with criterion-based sampling. Participants selected needed to be a certified teacher who taught at the chosen site during the implementation process. Symbolic interpretivism grounded this study to elicit experiences during the professional learning community implementation that impacted the participant's professional responsibilities.

Findings of this study indicated that the implementation process was not the determining influence on how teachers and teacher leaders navigated their professional responsibilities and, in turn, the overall success of the professional learning community implementation. Instead, success was tied to the dispositions of each teacher and the anatomy of interactions based on those dispositions. Four specific personality dispositions were found in this study: Leading with Heart, Leading with Brain, Leading with Courage, and Leading with Leadership. The

combinations of these dispositions effected how each participant navigated their professional responsibilities as well as their reciprocal relationships with their colleagues.

This study raised implications about how combinations of different personality dispositions can be used to create teams of educators who will naturally accomplish the tasks of a professional learning community instead of being in conflict and tension with each other. Another implication was the notion that creating effective teams of teachers and teacher leaders could be based on personality dispositions and their consequent interactions versus the knowledge of one's pedagogy. Lastly, this study raised implications regarding the ways in which professional learning communities could be better implemented in schools nationwide by creating more awareness amongst educational leaders and policy makers about building harmonizing professional learning communities.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

For many years there has been a spotlight on educational reform, with schools facing continuous pressure to increase student achievement (Hord, 2004). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) found that "the most promising strategy for helping all students learn at high levels is to develop a staff's capacity to function as a professional learning community" (p. 2). Their research suggested that the focus of professional development should be on implementing professional learning communities with staff. Furthermore, while efforts to create educational change have been "widespread and varied in form…. the established professional learning community is a reform initiative that reflects [the most promise]" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. 4). However, even with research emphasizing the success of professional learning communities, the amount of pressure and responsibility that teachers and administrators are currently under makes creating and sustaining professional learning communities increasingly challenging (Fullan, 2001; Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Hord (2004) wrote that the challenge in education is how to transform a low-performing, low-achieving school into a high-performing, high-achieving school. The evidence suggests that one way to accomplish this is by transforming the school community into a professional learning community, which would be considered a second order change (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, 2008; Hord, 2004; Lambert, 2003; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). In order to create change in student achievement, educators should first consider increasing teacher capacity by "provid[ing] opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and to learn how to become more effective in their work with students" (Morrissey, 2000, p. 3). With an increased focus on the individual student learner, teachers are better able to make informed instructional decisions that should increase student achievement. Transforming staff into a professional learning community is a

research-based way to put the spotlight on collective learning and data analysis, which are the foundational components of a professional learning community.

Before detailing current applicable implementation research, it is important to understand the in-depth components that must be attained to be considered a sustainable professional learning community. A sustained professional learning community has the following six characteristics: a focus on student learning, a collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all, collective inquiry into best practice and current reality, action oriented, commitment to continuous improvement, and results oriented (DuFour et al., 2006, pp. 3-5). In order to be considered a professional learning community, all six of these characteristics must be fully embraced and adhered to by the school community. However, establishing and maintaining all six of these characteristics "requires dedicated and intentional effort on the part of the administrator and the professional staff" as there are often many other things happening in the school that require attention (Morrissey, 2000, p. 4). While there is no specific order or set procedure in which to implement the six characteristics, the school community must successfully implement all six before being considered a professional learning community. Even with all six components in place, the school still may not get the intended student achievement results.

Research suggests that there are many reasons why implementation of a professional learning community may not result in a sustainable change that positively affects student achievement (Bond, 2013; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Sims & Penny, 2015). For example, the difficulty of creating a professional learning community could be "due to the many demands on teachers and administrators; the growing accountability issues; the increasingly diverse needs of students; teacher isolation and burnout; and many other unmanageable stressors" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. 5). Implementing a professional learning community

cannot be done within a single school year, but instead occurs over multiple years. As such, the implementation may cease due to staff turnover, changes in the school district structure, or a need for immediate change. With countless factors hindering the successful implementation of a professional learning community, leaders in education must learn "how to cultivate and sustain learning under conditions of complex, rapid change" (Fullan, 2001, p. xi). While things all around the school might change rapidly, the school must hold tight to the professional learning community implementation if it is to be successful. Beyond this factor, Sims and Penny (2015) found that some professional learning communities have a narrow focus, and therefore the collaborative work does not have a school-wide effect. The narrow focus described in their study was on data analysis instead of collaboration, collaborative planning, and problem solving. Similarly, Bond (2013) found that teachers struggled to maintain focus on student learning and manage their collaborative time together. The studies done by Sims and Penny and Bond illustrate possible obstacles that are the result of teachers not following a research-based professional learning community implementation model. Based on research listed above, failure to implement a sustainable professional learning community can occur for a variety of reasons, all of which leaders in education need to be aware of.

Rationale

There is substantial research depicting the characteristics and benefits of professional learning communities and the barriers that sometimes hinder their development. However, there appears to be scarce research outlining how leaders can successfully implement a professional learning community initiative. For example, Morrissey (2000) found that "little has been written to guide schools toward professional learning community development" (p. 11). With no clear path or process to guide implementation, schools are left on their own to attempt to overcome the

specific barriers that impact professional learning communities. There is, however, research that supports implementing change initiatives in an educational setting. Lambert's (2003) work suggests that implementing a professional learning community would be considered a second order change, as it completely alters the way the school and all stakeholders think and pushes staff members outside of their current comfort zones. While implementing a professional learning community is acknowledged as a change initiative, Stoll, et al. (2006) note that "it is unclear…. whether [change initiative findings] would apply to the development and sustainability of learning communities where a key goal is continuous learning rather than implementing a specific change initiative" (p. 228). This currently creates a problem for administrators who want to use change research to guide the implementation of professional learning communities in their building, as there appears to be no research on which to lean on to guide the process (Huffman & Hipp, 2003).

Not only is there a gap in research regarding how to successfully implement professional learning communities, there is also a gap in current research on how teachers perceive professional learning community implementation. After studying professional learning community implementation from an administrators' perspective, Stevens (2007) suggested that "more studies need to be done studying professional learning communities from the teachers' point of view" (p. 115). Even though administrators are responsible for the implementation process that is used, transforming to a professional learning community requires teachers to think and act differently. As such, Stevens states that there is a need to research the professional learning community implementation process specifically from the perspective of teachers.

In conclusion, there is an abundant amount of research that shows the current need in education for the implementation of professional learning communities to increase student

achievement. There is also a great deal of research that describes possible barriers to the professional learning community implementation process. However, there seems to be a gap in the research when it comes to how teachers describe the effective implementation of a professional learning community.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative semi-structured interview study was to explore how five elementary school teachers accomplish their professional responsibilities while their school implements a professional learning community. In order to achieve this, I sought answers to two research questions, both of which provided insight into the importance of the professional learning community implementation method from a teachers' perspective. There exists a gap in the literature about what teachers report experiencing during the implementation of a professional learning community, as well as how teachers report the implementation process impacts their learning experiences.

Research Questions

1. How did the participants describe their experiences when a professional learning community was being implemented in their school?

2. In what ways did participants attribute the ways in which the professional learning community implementation influenced their professional learning experiences?

Methodological Framework

The epistemology that informs this study is social constructionism, or the idea that "knowledge is not disinterested and apolitical" (Lee, 2012, p. 405). In other words, constructivists believe that meaning is made based on relativism (Lee, 2011). Even when individuals experience the same event, many constructions (or meanings) are made as everything

is relative to the individuals' perspective and prior experiences. Social constructionism is appropriate for this study, as it examines the experiences (or constructs) of five different individuals who have experienced the same event in different settings.

Underneath the umbrella of social constructionism is the methodological framework. For this study, symbolic interpretivism was used to inform the methodology. George Herbert Mead, known as the founding father of symbolic interpretivism, "redefined human behavior as a response to individual interpretations of the world rather than to the world itself" (Oliver, 2011, p. 410). This belief about human behavior allows researchers to understand that individuals can experience the same event but have different lived experiences of what occurred. This is applicable to this study, as all five participants experienced the same event, but had different perceptions of the event to share. Furthermore, symbolic interpretivism is grounded in the following three assumptions: "people strive and act toward what represents meaning for them, meaning arises out of social interactions, and meaning is being dealt with and modified through interpretive processes" (Handberg, Thorne, Midtgaard, Nielsen, & Lomborg, 2015, p. 1023). Combining these three tenets of symbolic interpretivism allows researchers to synthesize that individuals who experience the same event will most likely interpret different meanings based on their interactions and previous beliefs and experiences. Implementing a professional learning community is a social process that participants interpret differently. Symbolic interpretivism was an appropriate methodological framework for this study, as five elementary school teachers were asked to share their individual thoughts and perceptions after experiencing the same event – the implementation of a professional learning community.

Methodology

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study, as the interviews tend to lead to a deeper understanding from details that are shared. The methodology that informed this study was a qualitative interview study. This method is fit this study, as qualitative interviews allow researchers to "attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view [and] to unfold the meaning of their experiences" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 1). Moreover, Weiss (1994) states that "through interviews … we can learn about occupations" (p. 1). The purpose of this study was to understand how the participants describe their experiences implementing a professional learning community within the occupation of education. Weiss also states that interviewing helps researchers "understand [how] a situation" is "interpreted by participants," while at the same time "[giving] us a window to the past" (pp. 7, 10). These benefits of interviews aided this study, as I only selected participants whose school had previously implemented a professional learning community. Furthermore, Weiss noted that "qualitative interview studies have provided descriptions of phenomena that could have been learned about in no other way" (p. 12). For the purposes of this study, the elementary school was assumed to have a unique culture in which participants were bounded by the beliefs, values, and attitudes unique to the stakeholders. This culture was assumed to shape the behavior and interactions of the group of teachers that work within the school. There are few better ways to gain insight into participants' individual experiences other than through interviews analyzed through a qualitative method.

Conceptual Framework

The empirical framework that informs this study is andragogy, or adult learning theory. Andragogy was first written about by Alexander Knapp in 1833, and Malcolm Knowles

separated the term andragogy from pedagogy in 1968, claiming andragogy to be the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Henschke, 2011; Knowles, 1980, p. 42, 1980). According to Knowles (1972) there are four assumptions of andragogy:

1. Changes in self-concept

2. Role of experiences

3. Readiness to learn

4. Orientation to learning (p. 34).

Knowles (1972) expands on the concept by stating that adult learners differ from children in that adults change their self-concept to become self-directed learners who draw upon a broadening base of experiences to which they can relate new learning. Furthermore, adults tend to approach learning from a problem-centered stance and want to immediately apply new learning to solve a problem. While andragogy has had its critics over the decades, Rachal (2002) argues that it is "the most persistent and best-known theoretical construct of the field of education over the last three decades" (p. 225). Henschke (2011) adds to this argument, stating that andragogy "continues to be a strong force in guiding the way adults learn" (p. 34). Andragogy, or adult learning theory, is rooted in historical research and has been shown to support a solid foundation for adult learning.

Andragogy was an appropriate conceptual framework for this study, as it focuses on adults drawing on their extensive experiences to apply learning to solve problems (Howard, 1993). As stated earlier, educators are currently tasked with increasing student achievement, which is a nationwide problem. One way that schools are attempting to solve this problem is by transforming into and operating as professional learning communities, which requires school

staff to apply new learning to their current situation. However, each adult learner will draw different meanings from his or her own personal experiences.

Possibilities and Limits of the Study

The findings of this study provide significant implications for administrators who are looking to implement professional learning communities in their building. This change initiative coupled with all other pressures and time constraints that are often placed on elementary classroom teachers, can result in a unique, yet seemingly undervalued, story that could potentially change how administrators implement professional learning communities. Furthermore, little research has been done detailing the experiences that elementary teachers go through as their administrator implements such a change. This research contributes to the field of education and offers additional information pertaining to implementing professional learning communities.

There are also limits to this study. First, asking elementary teachers to give up their time to participate in multiple in-depth interviews may have impacted their willingness to share personal information. Another possible limit was the participants' willingness to be open and honest about their experiences as they may have included negative perceptions of the implementation process. Knowing that the building administrator and other professionals had access to view the findings of this study might have hindered honest responses during interviews, even though every effort to maintain confidentiality was taken. To gain an accurate view of all aspects of the implementation of the professional learning community the researcher attempted to elicit information about informal happenings pertaining to school culture during the in-depth interviews.

Operational Definitions

1. Elementary school teachers – For the purposes of this study, five general education elementary school teachers were selected from a K-5 elementary building.

2. Implementation – For the purposes of this study, implementation refers to how the principal puts a professional learning community into practice within his or her building.

3. Professional Learning Community – For the purposes of this study, a professional learning community is defined as "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators" (DuFour et al., 2008, pp. 14).

4. Professional responsibilities – For the purposes of this study, the term professional responsibilities refers to any of the following:

   a. Interactions with stakeholders

   b. Record keeping

   c. Analyzing student assessments (formative and summative)

   d. Lesson planning

   e. Instructional practices

Chapter Summary

In summary, while a vast amount of previous research has shown the positive impact that professional learning communities have on facilitating school improvement, there is a lack of research on teachers' experiences during the implementation process (DuFour, et al., 2006;

Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Stoll, et al., 2006). Grounded in symbolic interactionism, this qualitative interview study sought to provide insight into five elementary school teachers' experiences with the implementation of a professional learning community.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review for this study is organized into four major sections: history of school reform, historical overview of professional learning communities, historical overview of the implementation of professional learning communities, and the history of andragogy. The first section examines the role that school reform has played in creating the educational need for professional learning communities. The historical overview of professional learning communities section takes a deeper look at how professional learning communities came to be and what value they have in the school reform process. The third section provides an in-depth look at what those who are prominent in the education field argue in reference to the implementation of professional learning communities. Next, I provide a history of adult learning theory as it relates to andragogy. The chapter concludes with a proposed synthesis of the research most pertinent to the research questions for this study:

1. How did the participants describe their experiences when a professional learning community was being implemented in their school?

2. In what ways did participants attribute the ways in which the professional learning community implementation influenced their professional learning experiences?

History of School Reform

Schools in America began to be established in 1635 in order to fulfill the needs of the changing job market. Prior to 1635, Americas workforce was based almost solely in agriculture

(Barnard & Burner, 1975). However, in the early 1600s education was influenced heavily by religious beliefs (Net Industries, 2016). At that time the philosophy of education was geared towards students acquiring the knowledge needed to preserve the types of jobs and beliefs of the colonists, not about how students learned (Net Industries, 2016). Since 1635, education has gone through many changes and reforms (Sass, 2015). These changes are a result of immigration across America (Net Industries, 2016). As cultures began to expand westward, so did their philosophies. It is difficult to predict where the philosophy of education will go as these cultures continue to evolve. As detailed in the following paragraphs, changes in education have been based on government policies and documents, sociological and cultural beliefs, the establishment of education organizations, and research conducted on how students learn. Edmund Sass, Professor Emeritus of Education at the College of Saint Benedict/St. John's University has written an extensive comprehensive review of the history of school reform, which I have used as a basis for this chapter.

In early colonial America, there were no formal laws, rules, or regulations regarding education. Instead, European societal norms influenced the system of education in a variety of ways (Gelbrich, 1999). For example, teachers were expected to remain unmarried and live in the schoolhouse in order to maintain their purity. Furthermore, the school schedule was aligned to the agricultural needs of the community (Gelbrich, 1999). During America's formative years a multitude of legislation was passed that shaped the future of education. This legislation was a direct result of religious pressures (Gelbrich, 1999). In 1635 the first two schools were established, both in the northern colony of Virginia. One school was a Latin grammar school aimed at serving boys in a high social class, as they were being prepped to work in a government role of some sort (Gelbrich, 1999). The other school was a free school that aimed to serve any

male whose family could spare them from farm work. In the Southern colonies, no actual schools existed as education was provided in the home by parents (Sass, 2015). Children in the Southern colonies didn't need formal education, as they would only need the skills to take over the family plantation (Gelbrich, 1999). This remained the status quo until the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which stated that all men were created equal. While this statement seemingly had nothing to do with education, it would become the basis for future court rulings involving education equality on the grounds that all children should have access to similar high-quality education (Net Industries, 2016). Furthermore, the Declaration of Independence allowed Americans to design an educational system that was different than that of European countries and fit the beliefs of those who lived in the new nation.

Three years later, in 1779, Thomas Jefferson began making drastic changes to the education system with the establishment of a two-track education system (Sass, 2015). One educational track was for children of the working class and a different educational track was created for children of the educated class. The division of the education system was necessary as there began to be a clear difference between the economic classes and their educational needs (Gelbrich, 1999). Jefferson stated that it was the responsibility of the government to educate all citizens, and the two track-system he created allowed all children to attend school (Sass, 2015). The passing of the 10th Amendment to the Constitution occurred shortly after this, and it furthered Jefferson's ideas by declaring education the responsibility of the state, not the federal government. With each state bearing the responsibility to educate its children, many states began looking more closely at the type of education offered compared to the demands of the job market (Net Industries, 2016). In 1837, Horace Mann started a movement in the Massachusetts school board and later in the Massachusetts Department of Education declaring his beliefs in "free,

universal public education" (Sass, 2015, np). Even though it would be many years before America saw a free and appropriate education for all students, the work began with Jefferson and Mann. Perhaps one of the first school reform efforts can be credited to the National Department of Education, which was established in 1867 with the mission of "establishing effective schools" (United States Department of Education, 2016, np). Unfortunately, following the creation of the Department of Education, the focus on education was halted as America experienced two financial emergencies (Sass, 2015). The first nationwide financial crisis was in 1873, and the result was an unemployment rate above 25% and an even higher percentage of drastically decreased wages (Nelson, 2008). With many families trying to survive, educational reform was no longer the priority. The nation and its citizens had just recovered when the United States entered into World War I in 1917 (Sass, 2015). During this war, many families were uprooted, and young men were drafted to serve in the military. In order to get by, many women and children were focused on the survival of the family and home; consequently, they had to give up school (Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Gordon, 1979). However, soon after the end of the United States's involvement in World War I, the focus was back on education.

In the early 20th century, educational reform was back in the public eye in many different ways. First, all states had compulsory attendance laws by 1918 that specified which age groups were required to attend school and for how many days each year (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2001). During this time, educators saw an increase in all states and social classes in regard to enrollment numbers, length of the school year, and expenditures per pupil (Meyer, et al., 1979). However, due to the Child Labor Law of 1914, many agricultural states had fewer required days of attendance and different age requirements (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2001). To highlight the impact that the compulsory attendance law had on education,

in 1870 only 6% of the states had compulsory attendance laws, but this had changed to 100% by 1920 (Meyer, et al., 1979). While Landes and Solmon (1972) argue that compulsory attendance laws are not the best predictor of attendance and enrollment increases, the laws tended to express public support for education. With the right to control education given to the states in the Constitution, each state had the freedom to determine what education would be appropriate.

Then, in 1929, the stock market crashed, ushering in what is commonly known as the Great Depression. By 1933, over half of the nation's banks had failed and unemployment rates neared 30% (A&E Television Networks, 2016). This resulted in a halt to funding for public education which caused schools to close and teachers to be laid off (Sass, 2015). Just as the economy and nation were recovering from the depression, the United States entered World War II in 1939. The United States economy would not fully recover from the Great Depression until the war ended in 1945 (A&E Television Networks, 2016). Even with these setbacks, the establishment of the Department of Education allowed for educational reform to flourish in the 1900s. While there were still drastic differences in what education looked like throughout the nation, the establishment of the Department of Education at the national and state levels set the stage for educational reform in upcoming years.

From 1945 to 1954, educational reform efforts remained relatively quiet until the landmark judicial case Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, which declared segregated schools unconstitutional (Sass, 2015). This event changed the culture of American schools as the once white and colored schools were now to be united. All students would, from this point forward, have access to the same quality of education. While the desegregation of schools was a drastic educational change, more work was also being done to address the quality of teaching and learning. In 1956 Benjamin Bloom created a "way of thinking about thinking," now known as

Bloom's Taxonomy (Wineburg & Schneider, 2009/2010, p. 57). For many, this taxonomy was a scientific way to classify tasks, which allowed educators to push students to the highest of six levels of thinking (Wineburg & Schneider, 2009/2010). The publication of Bloom's Taxonomy, combined with Russia's 1957 launch of Sputnik, worried Americans that students lacked the math and science skills to help the United States compete technologically (Fritzberg, 2012). In an effort to rectify the American educational system, federal resources were redirected toward the development of "rigorous curricula" (Fritzberg, 2012, np). The new curricula focused heavily on math and science in hopes of pushing American students further academically than students in other countries. In a three-year period, schools in the United States were being asked to teach all students at a much higher academic level than in previous years.

From here, educational reform continued to expand at the federal level. First, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965 and signed into law by Lyndon Johnson. This legislation addressed the "war on poverty" and established Title 1 and bilingual education (Fritzberg, 2012, np). Title I is a law that is aimed at "improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged" through financial support (Fritzgerg, 2012, np). Each student deemed to be 'at risk' had a certain monetary allocation, and if a certain percentage of 'at risk' students attended one school, the entire school was then deemed a "Title I school" (United States Department of Education, 2016b). Money received from Title I could only be spent on specific things to offset the effects of being 'at risk,' such as Reading First participation, migrant education programs, intervention programs and resources, dropout prevention, parental involvement programs, and comprehensive school reform efforts (United States Department of Education, 2016b). In order to receive Title I funding, each state had to submit a plan verifying that academic state standards exist, an accountability plan for academic growth, targeted annual

yearly progress on meeting those standards, goals to meet the annual yearly progress, and assessments to measure the states standards. Title I also required that assessments be developed and administered for students who do not speak English as their first language (United States Department of Education, 2016b). Even though Title I funds serve as a way to stream additional funding to districts and states and is not a school improvement strategy, it has been "credited with closing the achievement gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students" (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004, np). While each state was still allowed to control education, Title I federal regulations streamlined a nationwide focus on school improvement.

Based on successful Title I regulations, the 1970's brought a closer look at America's education practices. In response to state-level assessment scores not showing adequate student proficiency levels, the Effective Schools Movement began, and the school improvement process was created (Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Joyce, 2004). In 1975, "Why Johnny Can't Write" was a cover story for Newsweek magazine that called the nation to respond to the national literacy crisis (Sass, 2015). This article portrayed a student who was on the track to attend college but could not succeed because the schools in America had failed him. This article brought about criticism of America's schools and produced even more pressure for schools to complete school improvement plans. In response, the 'Back to the Basics' movement began. This social movement focused on bringing the focus of schools back to reading, writing and arithmetic and establishing standards of behavior (Morgan & Robinson, 1976). While there is no direct change that occurred as a result of this movement, the scrutiny of education continued into the 1980s.

The significance of the 1980s on education was immense and began with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, which claimed that American schools were failing. This open letter to the American people resulted in the creation of school reform plans that were government

regulated and required. As schools began embarking on their now-required improvement plans, attention was given to the effect of the work setting on learning and the context in which learning takes place (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). For the first time, attention was given to the type of environment that best supports learning. Also in response to *A Nation at Risk*, states across the country took part in the 'Excellence Movement,' which "offered an opportunity for educators to embark on serious reform of the educational system" and mandated that teachers work harder with less resources (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. xvi). This movement also recommended that the requirements to attend universities and colleges be raised, which put pressure on all levels of education to increase student learning objectives (Willie, 1985). After two major publications stating that America's schools were failing, states began to formalize the school improvement process.

In a different environment, yet at the same time, the business sector began studying the capacity of an organization to learn, which laid the foundation for the learning organization framework (Chan-Remka, 2007; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Merriam, 2008). After success in the business world, the learning organization framework would later become the starting point for professional learning communities in schools (Merriam, 2008). As educators began the school improvement process based mainly on instructional practices and test scores, the business sector was focused on improvement through the development of communities aligned to a shared vision and mission.

After six years of seeing little to no growth in standardized test scores, President George Bush called state governors together in 1989 to discuss the problems in education. As a result, Congress enacted the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which began the Restructuring Movement and introduced standards-based reform (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Goals 2000 highly

encouraged states to adopt statewide standards for learning and create standardized assessments (Fritzberg, 2012). While Title I had already laid the foundation for this work, districts that did not receive Title I funds had not been previously required to adopt the state standards or have students participate in standardized assessments. Then, in 1993, Massachusetts became the first state to mandate high stakes testing in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, causing many states to follow with similar legislation (Fritzberg, 2012). Under *Goals 2000*, all states would begin work toward the adoption of statewide standards and standardized assessments. With states now heavily involved in efforts to fix the claims made in *A Nation at Risk* and Goals 2000, education was beginning to change.

Before long the legislation around education caused more mandates to be enacted. In 1997 Congress funded the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, the goal of which was to rectify the seemingly ineffectiveness of Title I (Sass, 2015). While Title I required schools to share goals and data, it did not have consequences for schools that did not meet their chosen goals. As a result, Congress required schools to "adopt a research-based, results-proven program" to receive federal funding (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. ix). Congress also required that schools monitor all initiative outcomes. However, at the end of the 20th century, the government still did not consider the education system to be successful. As a result of Goals 2000 not providing the results that were intended, in 2002 Congress enacted No Child Left Behind with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization (Fritzberg, 2012; Huffman & Hipp, 2003). No Child Left Behind became a law and mandated that reading and math assessment data be reported at specified grade-levels. Schools not meeting their annual yearly progress two years in a row would face a number of sanctions varying in severity, the least of which being a revision of the school improvement plan and adjustment of resources for students not making progress

(Klein, 2015). The goal of No Child Left Behind was that all students be proficient in both math and reading by the year 2015. Individual states had the freedom to determine what constituted proficiency in math and reading, as well as what standards would look like for each grade-level (Klein, 2015). Then, in 2009, President Barack Obama added the Common Core State Standards to the No Child Left Behind legislation, which forced many states to once again redesign their adopted curricula (Sass, 2015). Obama also mandated that schools disaggregate student performance data by distinct populations (subgroups) in order to identify achievement gaps. Other changes to the original No Child Left Behind Act included labeling underperforming schools as 'priority' or 'focus' schools (United States Department of Education, 2016a). Once a school was labeled as either a 'focus' or 'priority' school, states were mandated to provide additional resources and monitoring systems to ensure the success of the students enrolled in the school (United States Department of Education, 2016a). Since 2002, educators have found themselves immersed in a world of high-stakes testing and mandated reforms (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). While the intent was to make education more seamless, in 2015 over 150,000 students opted out of high stakes testing due to increased pressure (Sass, 2015). This resulted in President Obama adjusting the assessment plan to limit standardized testing to no more than 2% of class time (Sass, 2015). With publications that declared that America's schools were failing, the government produced mandates and regulations that began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and transformed drastically into No Child Left Behind.

Since the establishment of the first school in 1635, education as a system has gone through many changes. The successful education of all children, regardless of race or financial status, is now mandated and monitored by state and government law. Furthermore, schools are required to publish disaggregated data to establish credibility and worth. While formal education

has evolved a great deal since its start in 1635, it remains an ever-changing field dictated by government policy and influenced by learning theory research.

Professional Learning Communities: Historical and Contemporary Discourses

Professional learning communities are a relatively new concept in the field of education. Although they are based in behaviorist research stemming from the 1930s, prominent work around professional learning communities did not begin in schools and districts in the United States until the 1990s (Merriam, 2008; SEDL, 1997). What started in the business world as learning organizations has now transformed the educational world as the most sought-after reform effort (DuFour, et al., 2008). The amount of work and research that has been conducted on professional learning communities and their effectiveness since 1990 may explain why so many schools and districts choose to adopt the professional learning community philosophy in hopes of increasing student achievement.

The concept of professional learning communities began as a look into the learning environment and how schools were functioning. Before 1930, there was little focus on the learner or the learning environment in schools. Beginning in 1930, behaviorist researchers instead put a focus on the individual learner (Merriam, 2008). More specifically, researchers looked at how the learner made sense of information as well as "how learning enable[d] the individual to become more empowered and independent" and later apply their knowledge to new settings and situations (Merriam, 2008, p. 94). However, schools in the 1930s were organized based on the scientific management theory (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Under the scientific management theory, schools were run as businesses and the principal served as the executive director, only managing from the office (Brooks & Miles, 2006). Following this theory, teachers were left alone in their classrooms to teach and handle most discipline as they were seen as the

resident experts in their field (Brooks & Miles, 2006). As behaviorist research began to influence educational settings in the 1940s, scientific management theory came into question, as the two theories contradict each other.

Behaviorist theory began to meld into educational leadership and professional educational organizations in the 1940s. Based on the pillars of this theory, during this decade principals were pushed to be "developers and implementers of policy rather than dictators" (Brooks & Miles, 2006, p. 3). As such, principals were expected to lead alongside their staff - as opposed to in front of them - when it came to designing school improvement processes and plans. Principals were also expected to lead democratically and involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process, including parent groups (Brooks & Miles, 2006). The ideas that teachers should have a voice in the design of the school and that there should be some sort of collective commitment to the process were new to education. This transparency and shared decision making also helped pave the way for the later development of professional learning communities as it required educators to communicate with each other and other stakeholders (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). By implementing the behaviorist theory into education in the 1940s, schools began to integrate open communication and shared leadership into decision making processes, which are included in the characteristics of a professional learning community.

The idea of collaboration and collaborative teams was introduced into education in the 1950s through team teaching. The team teaching movement was introduced under the assumption that a collaboration between two people is better than the work of an individual (McLane, Finkbiner, & Evans, 1969). McLane, et al. (1969) found the benefits of team teaching to be an increased ability for the teachers to focus on students' individual abilities, a greater chance that the teachers would be able to motivate students based on their interests, and the

opportunity to promote collaborative teacher talk about students' strengths and weaknesses. With two teachers planning for and teaching the same group of students, teachers were afforded the opportunity to spend more time strategically focusing on individual students rather than the whole class. This era was also influenced by the architectural reform movement, and schools became designed as flexible, open classrooms (Joyce, 2004). An open classroom simply meant no doors and in some circumstances walls that were able to be moved or constructed from other furniture (e.g., bookcases, file cabinets). Open classrooms were designed to promote active collaboration between both teachers and students (Joyce, 2004). Team teaching combined with the redesign of physical space allowed educators in the 1950s to become more collaborative with their practice.

Then, in the 1970s, research on the specific qualities of effective schools and the school improvement process began to regain attention (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). The effective schools movement that developed from this research "offer[ed] a structure" and "involve[d] faculties in the study of the differences between more and less effective schools as a base for making decisions about possible improvements" (Joyce, 2004, p. 80). Instead of more federal or state mandates, this movement came from teachers who instead wanted to research for themselves what caused some schools to show improvement and others to remain stagnant (Joyce, 2004). Also at this time, the actions of principals began to be studied and reported. From this research, the importance of the school principal in reform efforts was established (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Specifically, principals at schools that were deemed effective were actively involved in supporting the school improvement process (Joyce, 2004). By the end of the 1970s a clearer framework for effective schools had begun.

The collaborative nature continued to grow. In the 1980s, educators also began valuing the "context in which learning takes place," which put the spotlight back on classroom environments (Merriam, 2008, p. 94). This paved the way for educators to understand learning as a "complex phenomenon" that is "multidimensional" and not easily explained or studied (Merriam, 2008, p. 94). In addition, during this time reflective dialogue began to be seen as an added component to the learning process that could help learners process new information (Merriam, 2008). With the integration of these two beliefs, educators were pushed to discuss the learning of individual students, as it was thought that each student would have different experiences throughout the learning process. These varied experiences would result in the level of learning each student had while receiving the same lesson in the same physical space. These conversations required teachers to be reflective not upon their teaching, but on what the students had learned (Merriam, 2008). Focusing on each learner as an individual with different experiences and needs required teachers to be more collaborative.

During this time, the business sector began exploring how to increase the effectiveness of organizations. Specifically, business organizations began looking into "the capacity of an organization to learn," which would later be the basis for the modern professional learning community structure in education (Chan-Remka, 2007, p. 29). Specific attention was placed on how the work setting affected workers in different ways, such as attendance, attitude, and performance (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). As the business sector attempted to create more productive and cost-efficient workplaces, the impact of learning organizations was still unknown. The learning organization framework continued to evolve with the publication of *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge in 1990. This book sparked the redefinition of learning organizations with research that "provide[d] hope for organizational reform" within the corporate

world (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. xvi). Not only did organizations have hope for reform, they also were given a firm outline of what a 'learning organization' was. Learning organizations were described as results-driven places where people were life-long learners who trusted each other enough to take risks through inquiry (Senge, 1990). While this was separate from education, learning organizations in the business realm would later be the foundation for professional learning communities.

As the learning organization framework continued to gain momentum in the business world, educators began to adapt the model to fit the needs of education. With all of the major components of a learning organization remaining the same, educators renamed this model 'learning communities' (SEDL, 1997). Michael Fullan took these ideas one step further and "recommended a redesign of the workplace so that innovation and improvement [were] built into the daily activities of teachers" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. x). The idea of redesigning improvement plans to instead be rooted in the work already being done by teachers was claimed to "help principals and teachers become a community of learners," as it would require a higher level of collaboration (SEDL, 1997, p. 3). With the emergence of learning organizations and job-embedded inquiry into the educational field, the framework for professional learning communities became more solid. Then, in 1996 Linda Darling-Hammond added the dimension of shared decision making into the structure of learning communities as a means to accomplish successful educational reform (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Shared decision making went hand in hand with the collaborative structure that had already been introduced. Also, at this time, Knapp and Shields (1997) identified the six dimensions of a successful school reform:

"the scope, the degree of focus on teaching and learning, the time frame, the locus of authority for decision-making, the collaborative engagement of school people and other

stakeholders in decision-making, and the depth and range of professional development

opportunities related to the reform" (Knapp & Shields, 1997, p. 288).

These six dimensions of successful school reform aligned with the six characteristics of a

professional learning community almost seamlessly. Backed by research findings, the

components of a professional learning community were beginning to gain merit.

Throughout the 1990s, the concept of a professional learning community became refined

(Hord, 1997; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Knapp & Shields, 1997; SEDL, 1997). In 1997 the

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) published the first effort to

"understand, describe, and report" on professional learning communities, written by Shirley

Hord (SEDL, 1997). This report listed five attributes of a professional learning community:

"supportive and shared leadership, collective learning, shared values and vision, supportive

conditions, and shared personal practice" (SEDL, 1997, p. 2). These attributes were similar to the

attributes of a learning organization. This report by Hord was the first attempt to restructure

learning organizations and frame them as professional learning communities in the field of

education, although her work was closely followed by the work of Richard DuFour, Rebecca

DuFour, and Robert Eaker in 1998 with their publication *Professional Learning Communities at*

Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement. DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated that

"the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the

ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities" (p. xi). They went

on to define their definition of a professional learning community as "educators committed to

working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve

better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operated under the

assumption that the key to improved learning for students was continuous, job-embedded

learning for educators" (DuFour et al., 2008, p.14). They expanded on Hord's attributes, stating that a professional learning community should have the following six characteristics:

1. Shared mission, vision, values, and goals all focused on student learning

2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning

3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality

4. Action oriented: learning by doing

5. A commitment to continuous improvement.

6. Results orientation (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 17).

Put together, the work by Hord, DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker provided educators with a solid framework within which to base their work in becoming a professional learning community.

Since 1998, much literature has been written focusins on professional learning communities. Researchers began to "embrace the concept of professional learning communities as the basis for essential school reform" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. xvii). Furthermore, in 2003, the National Association of Elementary School Principals made the following statement:

If adults don't learn, then students won't either. No matter how good school goals are they cannot be met if the school isn't organized to accomplish them. The school operates as a learning community that uses its own experience and knowledge, and that of others, to improve the performance of students and teachers alike – a culture of shared responsibility is established and everybody learns from one another. (p. 5)

As more and more schools began implementing professional learning communities across the nation, more research was reported regarding their effectiveness. This aligned with DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker's publishing the second edition of their book in 2008, titled *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools*. The new

addition included more "specific and practical recommendations for transforming schools into professional learning communities" based on an additional ten years of research (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 2). Since 2008 research into professional learning communities has continued to expand. Many publications are authored by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, or Hord but are created as workbooks for schools to use as a guide for beginning the transformation work. Recent publications also focus on systemic professional learning communities (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). However, even with new publications, the basis for what a professional learning community is has not changed since the work of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker in 2008.

While the development of the professional learning community philosophy can be traced back to the 1930s, substantial development did not begin until the 1990's. Since that time, those leading in the field of education use the DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker model as the accepted structure of a professional learning community (Fullan, 2007).

Implementation of Professional Learning Communities

Since the development of a solid framework for professional learning communities, they have been implemented in many schools and districts across the nation. As such, some researchers have studied the implementation process and collectively identified many themes. The most prominent include ensuring proper training, devoting time to establish common beliefs, fostering teacher accountability and leadership, and a supportive leadership style. After addressing all of these themes, a rationale for this study can be made.

Research studies have made it evident that training is a necessary component for implementing professional learning communities effectively. Carpenter (2015) studied the perceptions of both teachers and administrators and found that all study participants shared a belief that "effective collaboration" (p. 690) was key to a successful professional learning

community, although participants had not received training in this area. While administrators in this study shared that training had been provided on collaboration, it did not appear to be substantial enough for successful professional learning community implementation. Around the same time, East (2015) found that teachers had an abundance of training and professional development on the idea of professional learning communities, but they did not report receiving enough training to successfully implement the initiative into their daily practice. It is evident that participants in these studies had a desire for professional development and felt that more in-depth training would be a key indicator to ensure the successful implementation of professional learning communities.

Furthermore, studies have shown that time must be devoted to all teachers to have in-depth, collaborative conversations in which they establish the foundation for a strong professional learning community. Stevens (2007) found the 'effective use of time' to be a theme in how elementary principals develop professional learning communities. More specifically, Doolittle, Sudeck, and Rattigan (2008) found that creating professional learning communities "requires time up front to establish ground rules, clarify the tasks to be undertaken, identify supports required for successful implementation, and ensure that a shared vision and mission exist between partners" (p. 303). Without devoting the time up front to establish these key professional learning community components, full implementation may never occur. For example, Kincaid (2014) found the main barrier to full implementation of professional learning communities to be a lack of time for teams to collaborate and establish a strong professional learning community foundation. East (2015) also found that participants named time constraints as a major challenge to effective implementation. To ensure full implementation and

sustainability, time must be provided for staff members to collaborate and establish a common set of values and collective commitments.

Establishing teacher accountability and leadership is another key aspect for ensuring full implementation of a professional learning community. Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, and Hathorn (2008) found that an "explicit reliance on collaborative norms and explicitly using processes such as dialogue protocols, distributing leadership responsibilities, and an inquiry focus based on data analysis" (p. 1270) helped support teachers in their effort to become a professional learning community. In most professional learning community collaborative sessions, administration is not present, which requires teacher leadership to emerge. Without an administrator in the room, teachers must hold each other accountable through the establishment of norms and conversation protocols to ensure productive use of their time (East, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2010). Without established norms and protocols, a communication barrier can hinder effective collaborations, as teams would have nothing to ground their work (Kincaid, 2014). In order to ensure that collaborative meetings are productive, teams must structure themselves to promote teacher accountability and leadership through effective communication and norms.

In addition to ensuring proper training, devoting time to establish common beliefs, and fostering teacher accountability and leadership it is also necessary for building administrators to support all professional learning community teams and offer shared leadership. Chan-Remka (2007) found that a lack of supportive leadership had profound negative effects on the establishment of a professional learning community. The negative effects reported in this study included teachers' lack of value in the work completed by their teams. Stevens (2007) also found leadership to be a necessary component for the successful implementation of a professional learning community - specifically a leader who led from behind the teachers, providing all

necessary supports and ensuring that no team or member falls behind. By providing all supports needed, administrators can experience the implementation barriers as they occur, adjusting supports as needed. Furthermore, Kincaid (2014) found that a lack of shared leadership was a barrier to professional learning community implementation. Shared leadership occurs when an administrator or building leader allows all voices to be taken into consideration before a decision is made, as well as the shared responsibility of ensuring the success of the students and school. By making success the responsibility of all, staff can find more value in the work of their professional learning community. In order to establish a strong professional learning community, a supportive leader who believes in shared leadership is necessary.

Although there have been studies detailing the perceptions of teachers throughout the implementation of professional learning communities, there was still a documented need for this study. Richmond and Manokore (2010) argued that "the question is not whether professional learning communities are important, but rather how to build, support, and maintain such communities in complex and challenging settings" (p. 569). Each school setting faces different challenges. Through my research, I did not find any studies that took place in a setting similar to the one chosen for this study. Furthermore, Stevens (2007) noted that more professional learning community studies need to be done from the "teacher's point of view" (p. 115). Peppers (2014) furthered this idea, stating that teachers' perceptions of the implementation process have an impact on the success of the professional learning community. There is still a need for a deeper understanding of how teachers' perceptions of the specific implementation process their school chose affects their understanding of professional learning communities. While I will not claim that the findings of this study will definitively answer this question, it is my hope that they do

provide insight for similar schools who are planning to implement a professional learning community.

Historical and Contemporary Application of Andragogy

The conceptual framework for this study is andragogy, commonly known as adult learning theory. Andragogy is an extension of pedagogy, the Greek roots of which translate to mean teaching children. Until the late 20th century, pedagogy "applied to any teaching-learning situation regardless of the age of the learner" (Peterson & Ray, 2013, p. 80). Age was not considered a factor, as almost all learning situations studied before the 20th century involved children. Prior to the 20th century, adults did not frequently have a reason to learn, as the "basic transmittal of known facts was appropriate only when the time span of cultural change was greater than the life span of the individuals" (Whitehead, 1931, p. xix). At that time, there was no cultural need in the United States for adults to learn, as the life expectancy of adults was much less than it is today. With life expectancy low, adults did not have the need to continue their education. As medical advances were made in the early 20th century, the life expectancy began to lengthen and there began to be a recognized need in the United States for adults to learn (Peterson & Ray, 2013). With adults now seeking education, researchers began studying in what ways age played a role in learning.

The first documented attempts to make use of information regarding how adults learn began in Europe. During the 1920s Eugen Rosenstock applied the idea of adult learning in Germany. Rosenstock was in charge of training German workers at the Academy of Labor in Frankfurt-am-Main, and he chose to use Alexander Kapp's andragogical beliefs that had been developed in the 1830s (Wilson, 2003, p. 4). Kapp provided the first documentation of the term andragogy, and his description of andragogy highlighted the internal human need for a "lifelong

necessity to learn," as well as the idea that adults use their "life experiences" to shape their learning (Henschke, 2009, p. 2). As Rosenstock's success in training workers by using an andragogical theory base continued to grow, researchers from around the world began to take notice. In 1926 American researcher Edward Lindeman visited Rosenstock at the Academy of Labor, studied his approach and teaching methods, and brought the ideas back to the United States (Wilson, 2003, p. 5). As the idea of adult learning began to be discussed in the United States, initially there were varying arguments on whether adults were even able to learn (Merriam, 2001). In 1926, Eduard Lindeman's book *The Meaning of Adult Education* reported that adult learners did not need to be required to attend classes to acquire new knowledge. Lindeman wrote that adult learners differed from children in that adults appreciated learning that was "focused on their needs and problems rather than assigned subjects" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 82). Lindeman (1926) also wrote that "adult learners thrive with collaborative learning" and that their "personal life experiences" contribute to their learning (p. 82). Lindeman's work suggested that adults learn best when learning is based on real issues that can be solved through collaborative problem solving. From this work, it was evident that adults were able to learn, but that their learning would look different if it occurred under a pedagogical theory.

Although Lindeman was perhaps the first to implement and apply the theory of andragogy, the term did not get public attention until Alfred Knowles published the article "Andragogy Not Pedagogy" in 1968. In this article, Knowles separated the terms andragogy and pedagogy, denoting clear differences between how adults learn and how children learn. After this publication, the term andragogy became widely recognized in the United States; so much so that the National Girl Scout organization began applying the principles of andragogy to train troop leaders (Henschke, 2010; Peterson & Ray, 2013). Shortly after this, Knowles (1970) brought

additional focus to andragogy when he clearly defined it as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 51). Even with this clear definition, andragogy in the United States faced strong criticism from educators who did not believe that the education of adults was any different than the education of children (Davenport & Davenport, 1984). To combat this, Knowles put the spotlight on other industries that were using the principles of andragogy to increase the capacity of adult learners. Knowles (1970) "declared that there was a growing interest in industrial corporations" (p. 51) with managers needing to function as teachers and train employees. He went on to state that andragogy offered "great potential for improving both interpersonal relationships and task effectiveness" (Henschke, 2010, p. 3). Based on earlier work by Lindeman, Knowles recognized that adults prefer to learn through social interactions. By applying the principles of andragogy to adult learning, Lindeman found that adults performed better when they learned together. While the clear definition and additional interest from the industrial field brought attention to andragogy, the theory itself continued to lack specifics.

Even with industrial corporations applying the principles of andragogy, Knowles recognized the need to provide a tighter structure to make the theory of andragogy more specific. In 1975, he published *Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning,* which served as a guidebook for teachers and adult learners. In this book, Knowles identified the nine competencies of self-directed learning for adults:

1. An understanding of the differences in assumptions about learners and the skills required for learning under teacher-directed learning and self-directed learning, and the ability to explain these differences to others.

2. A concept of [the learner] as being a non-dependent and a self-directing person.

3. The ability to relate to peers collaboratively; to see them as resources for diagnosing needs, planning the learning, and learning; and to give help to them and receive help from them.

4. The ability to diagnose personal learning needs realistically, with help from teachers and peers.

5. The ability to translate learning needs into learning objectives in a form that makes it possible for accomplishments to be assessed.

6. The ability to relate to teachers as facilitators, helpers, or consultants, and to take the initiative in making use of their resources.

7. The ability to identify human and material resources appropriate to different kinds of learning objectives.

8. The ability to select effective strategies for making use of learning resources and to perform these strategies skillfully and with initiative.

9. The ability to collect and validate evidence of the accomplishment of various kinds of learning objectives (Knowles, 1975, p. 61).

These nine competencies offered clear distinctions between how adults and children learn. To begin, Knowles stated that adults were capable of understanding that self-directed learning required different skills than those needed to learn with the guidance of a teacher. Adults were also able to self-motivate and self-direct their own learning, which allowed them to learn at an individualized pace. Another major competency that adult learners mastered was learning from their peers and being appreciative of the knowledge that was mutually shared. Overall, these competencies described adult learners as those who sought appropriate resources, set and monitored individual goals, and determined criteria for success. The establishment of

competencies that offered specific characteristics of adult learners provided a tighter structure around the broad theory of andragogy.

About this same time, research aimed to discover how leadership impacted adult learning was conducted in the corporate world. Specifically, John Ingalls furthered the structure of andragogy with an added nine identified dimensions that examined how leadership affected adult learning in the workplace (Ingalls, 1976). Ingalls's dimensions focused on ways in which a manager or leader can increase the learning of subordinates. The nine identified dimensions are listed below:

1. Create a social climate in which subordinates feel respected.

2. Treat mistakes as opportunities for learning and growth.

3. Help subordinates discover what they need to learn.

4. Assist the staff to extract learning from practical work situations and experiences.

5. Let staff members take responsibility for designing and carrying out their own learning experiences.

6. Engage staff members in self-appraisal and personal planning for performance improvement.

7. Permit or encourage innovation and experiments to change the accepted way of doing things if the plan proposed appears possible.

8. Be aware of the developmental tasks and readiness-to-learn issues that concern staff.

9. Try to implement a joint problem-finding and problem-solving strategy to involve staff in dealing with day-to-day problems and longer-range issues. (Ingalls, 1976)

Ingalls (1976) further declared that it was the manager's responsibility to help workers learn and stay current in their respective fields. While Knowles's work aimed to address the

unique characteristics of adult learners, Ingalls's work sought to identify how a leader could increase the learning that occurred in the workplace. Interestingly, their work yielded similar findings. First, self-directed, problem-based learning was a common finding in both studies which indicated that adults learn best when trying to solve a real-life problem. Second, an identified theme in both studies was the importance of a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Finally, both studies found that adults learn best when the leader is easily accessible for guidance and support, but only when requested by the learner. Ingalls's study allowed the workplace leadership style to be included as a component of andragogy.

Through the work of Knowles and Ingalls, andragogy as a theory became rooted in research. Mezirow (1981) developed a critical theory of adult learning and education that added to the development of andragogy. This theory shared many of the already identified components yet added 12 core concepts that "organized and sustained" adult learning (Henschke, 2010, pp. 5-6). Like Ingalls's work, these 12 core concepts addressed andragogy from the leader's role. Mezirow identified these 12 core concepts as a leader's ability to do the following:

1. Progressively decrease the learner's dependency on the educator.

2. Help the learner understand how to use learning resources-especially the experience of others, including the educator, and how to engage others in reciprocal learning and relationships.

3. Assist the learner in defining his or her learning needs, both in terms of immediate awareness and in understanding the cultural and psychological assumptions influencing the perceptions of needs.

4. Assist learners to assume increasing responsibility for defining their learning objectives, planning their own learning program and evaluating their program.

5. Organize what is to be learned in relationship to his or her current personal problems, concerns, and levels of understanding.

6. Foster decision making and select learner-relevant experiences which require choosing, expanding the learner's range of options, and facilitate taking the perspectives of others who have alternative ways of understanding.

7. Encourage the use of criteria for judging learning experiences.

8. Foster a self-corrective and reflexive approach to learning - to typifying and labeling, to perspective taking and choosing, and to habits of learning and learning relationships.

9. Facilitate problem posing and problem solving, including problems associated with the implementation of individual and collective action; recognition of relationship between personal problems and public issues.

10. Reinforce the self-concept of the learner by supporting progressive mastery; a supportive climate with feedback to encourage provisional efforts to change and to take risks; avoidance of competitive judgment of performance; appropriate use of mutual support groups.

11. Emphasize experiential, participative and projective instructional methods that include the appropriate use of modeling and learning contracts.

12. Make the moral distinction between helping the learner understand his or her full range of choices and how to improve the quality of choosing vs encouraging the learner to make a specific choice (Mezirow, 1981, pp. 21-22).

Even though Mezirow intended for this list to guide leaders, many of the ideas he published were similar to those previously identified by Ingalls. For example, both Ingalls and

Mezirow's findings positioned the leader as a support system for the adult learner instead of a manager. This added component of how a leader can foster the sustainability of adult learning was vital to establishing the credibility of andragogy, as the goal of learning would be sustainability. The work of Knowles, Ingalls, and Mezirow allowed the scholarly world to begin to understand the vast differences between the learning of adults and the learning of children. Their work also contained many of the core beliefs that are found in professional learning community research (DuFour et al., 2008).

Grounded in research, the study of andragogy continued to gain momentum. With the in-depth descriptions offered by Knowles, Inglass, and Mezirow framing andragogy, many doctorate studies were conducted on the topic of andragogy (Henshcke, 2010). By 1990, Heimstra and Sisco were able to cite 97 sources that justified the need for andragogy to be separated from pedagogy (Henschke, 2010). One year later, Long (1991) noted that Knowles's original work was strong enough to outlast criticism even though it was empirically weak. Knowles continued to publish books and articles as he kept "evolving, enlarging, and revising his point of view," but he avoided criticism because he made andragogy a "moving target" that was frequently altered as more research was done (Henschke, 2010, p. 16). In 1996 the term andragogy was first published in Webster's Dictionary; it was defined as "the methods and techniques used to teach adults" (Henschke, 2010, p. 77). Since 1996, andragogy has been commonly recognized as the term defining the adult learning theory.

Even though andragogy had become an official term, it was not considered a theory until 2000. At that time, andragogy was seen as an approach to adult learning with a primary focus on the needs of the adult learner (Henschke, 2010). With this basic philosophy, the theory of andragogy was designed around principals that had been found in research studies. First, it was

evident that adults appreciated learning that was related to their immediate problems and life experiences. Furthermore, adult learning was seen as necessary due to the "longer average life spans, but the half-life of knowledge due to rapid changes in technology and acceleration of social change" (Peterson & Ray, 2013, p. 81). In other words, the fast-paced society made it imperative that adults continue their education in order to remain current in their respective fields. In the field of education, andragogy was noted to be a "competing instructional paradigm" that allows adult learners to "plan their learning and make choices" that will best address their needs (Jafarigohar, Sharifi, & Soleimani, 2017, p. 1444). Because of this documented need for adults to learn, along with vast amounts of undisputed research, andragogy was explored as a theory. Andragogy as a theory was based on the argument that "given most, if not all definitions in the social science literature, andragogy could qualify as a theory" that could be applied to research studies (Henschke, 2010, p. 21). Since this time, the theory of andragogy has been "adopted by legions of adult educators around the word," but is not yet classified as an adult learning theory (Pratt, 1993, p. 21). At the university level, andragogy is viewed as "believing that most adults have a willingness and ability to participate in such management of their learning," which has guided countless distance education programs (Moore, 2016, p. 66). Even though andragogy is still an emerging adult learning theory, educators around the world are using the theory of andragogy and its principles in hopes of addressing the specific needs of adult learners.

While andragogy did not originate in the United States, the theory has grown a great deal since Malcolm Knowles published his first article in 1968. Knowles allowed the principles of the theory to grow and adapt, yet always remained true to the idea that adult learning is driven by self-motivation, related to lived experiences, and typically done to solve a problem. Combined

with the research done by Ingalls, Mezirow, and countless others, andragogy was eventually recognized as the official term to describe adult learning. Andragogy is now recognized world-wide as a separate term from pedagogy and is gaining momentum to be classified as a theory to describe and explain adult learning.

Chapter Summary

Through a thorough examination of the history of school reform, a historical overview of professional learning communities, a historical overview of the implementation of professional learning communities, and the history of andragogy, readers can begin to understand how professional learning communities came to be the most sought-after school improvement strategy in education. What began as a historical overview of education in the United States became the basis and underlying necessity for school reform initiatives. Once the pressure was placed on educators to increase student achievement, the need for a systematic way to accomplish this became evident. After successfully improving businesses in the corporate industry, the model was adapted for education and renamed professional learning communities. Though refined over the years, the basic foundations of professional learning communities remain rooted in andragogy, or adult learning theory. While studies have analyzed different aspects of the implementation process of professional learning communities in elementary school settings, there is a documented need for more research to be done to explore teachers' perspectives.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore how five elementary school teachers negotiated their professional responsibilities while their school implemented a professional learning community. Two research questions guided this study:

1. How did the participants describe their experiences when a professional learning community was implemented in their school?

2. In what ways did the participants attribute the ways in which the professional learning community implementation influenced their professional learning experiences?

Subjectivity Statement

Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2012) define subjectivity in qualitative research as "the qualitative researcher's obligation to situate the self in relation to inquiry, to elucidate research choices as a matter of position, without manipulating interpretation and representation of data" (p. 701). According to Peshkin (1988), the researcher must be aware of his or her subjectivity surrounding the chosen area of focus in order to remain impartial when delivering final data analysis. Once researchers are aware of their personal subjectivity, "they can be enabled to write unshackled from orientations that they did not realize were intervening in their research process" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). For these reasons, I have examined my own subjectivity surrounding professional learning communities.

I have always believed that people working together can solve any problem and that more heads thinking together are better than one. As I reflect on this, my experiences early in life shaped the beliefs I hold today.

From a young age, I participated in a mix of group and individual events. Starting at the age of three and continuing for nine years, I participated in competitive dance. This instilled in me the importance of working together, while maintaining personal responsibility. It took every member of the group working together to create a quality performance, and if one person was not in sync with the group, everyone failed.

At the age of 12 I decided that I would rather play a sport than dance, and thus began my five-year journey playing volleyball. I was incredibly nervous about starting something new at that age, as many of my peers who played sports had played them for many years and had really developed their skills. As I started practicing with the middle school volleyball team, I quickly realized that the specific volleyball skills were not what was important. It did not matter how well I could pass, set, serve, or hit because I was only one person on the court. The key to winning games was the ability of the six players on the court to communicate with each other and function as a team. While we each had our own particular role on the court and positions to play, we sometimes had to abandon our predetermined places to help a teammate and ensure the ball got back over the net. Through good communication, we all knew who was going to hit the ball, even in a chaotic environment. Yet again, one person not participating or communicating could be (and would be) our downfall. At the end of high school, I quickly realized that my individual volleyball skills were never of superb quality and my participation in the sport ended. However, these experiences instilled in me a lasting belief that the team will always be stronger than the individual, and I hold this value in all aspects of my life to this day.

After graduating college, I began my educational career in a small elementary school in which there was only one teacher per grade-level. This quickly became a point of frustration for me as I desperately wanted guidance and support. Without hesitation, I sought out teachers that

taught grade-levels above and below me with whom I could collaborate with. Looking back, this need for collaboration was a natural part of my belief system and I felt that everyone wanted to collaborate. I was naïve in assuming that all educators wanted to collaborate as I did, and this belief was not challenged until years later.

After five years in that building, I decided that it would be good experience for me to teach in a larger building. I found myself in a building that was staffed five times the size of my previous school. Each grade-level comprised four grade-level teachers, a special education teacher, and three paraprofessionals. Collaboration was expected, and I could feel the collegiality among my team well before the school year even started as we had organized planning days over the summer. Everything was shared, the work load was divided, and collaborative conversations occurred daily. I thrived in this environment, as did the students we were teaching.

At this point I began working on coursework to become an administrator and was encouraged to become a literacy coach in a different school. This experience was the most challenging I had faced in my professional career, as I still assumed that all teachers wanted a collaborative relationship with their colleagues. I quickly realized that this is far from the truth. I remained in this position for two years, and at the end of my time as a literacy coach I was just beginning to see teachers collaborate with each other. I watched as student scores continued to go down and the building became a focus school with a state-issued improvement plan. I listened to teachers complain about the amount of work they were taking home and how they did not have time to plan. Yet they still did not ask each other for help. My frustration in this situation continued to grow, and at the end of my second year I was offered an assistant principal position.

A new leadership position at a new building provided me with a chance to witness another school attempt to implement a professional learning community structure. Sadly, I

noticed that even with 90 minutes set aside each week for teams to collaborate, many teachers were hesitant to use the time to collaborate with each other. Week after week I watched teachers have face value conversations about what pages they were reading and what lessons they were teaching, but never delving deeper into what strategies they would use or sharing student data. When asked to try new things as collaborative teams, many teachers immediately stated they were not interested in those conversations. Again, I was left wondering why so many teachers felt the need to work alone in a profession that protected time in the day for them to collaborate. If any of these teachers were asked, they would quickly respond that the building was a professional learning community and that their collaborative team met every week. However, yet again collaboration in this case could better be described simply as planning time.

After one year as an assistant principal, I was offered a position as an elementary school principal in a different school district. My new school district proudly advertised that professional learning communities were the way they operated. All staff were trained on the model, and again time was protected during the duty day for teams to meet and collaborate weekly. As a new employee, I was even sent to a national professional learning community conference within my first year. I spent my first year mainly observing how teams functioned, and I was surprised to observe most teams sharing teaching strategies, data, and successes and failures. What made this school different than my previous school?

I continue to reflect on my experiences at each of these four schools in my administration work. As I learned more about Professional Learning Communities, I quickly realized that two of the buildings functioned exactly like the literature suggests. Based on my experiences and observations, I hold a strong belief that school reform starts with staff functioning as Professional Learning Communities. I am left wondering, however, why can some schools

function as professional learning communities, while others do not. I believe that the implementation process may be the key to answering this question.

Methodological Framework

A methodological framework is the lens through which researchers conceptualize their research design and negotiate understanding about meaning, truth, and reality as they interact with the participants and collect, analyze, and represent data. Symbolic interpretivism will be used as the methodological framework for this study, which is rooted in the epistemology of constructionism. Constructionism, or the belief that "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world," framed this study as the researcher sought to discover the perceptions of participants as they constructed personal meaning from their lived experiences (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Moreover, this epistemology allowed for the "construction [of] meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon," which promoted the study of more than one participant (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

George Herbert Mead, founder of symbolic interpretivism, spent a great deal of his life working at the Chicago School developing his beliefs. While his views spanned across disciplines, Mead believed that "human biological [organisms possess] a mind and a self" (Herman-Kinney, 2003, p. 214). While Mead "drew from behaviorism, [he] redefined human behavior as a response to individual interpretations of the world rather than to the world itself," which in turn meant that it is not the event that shapes behavior, but rather the individuals' interpretation of that event (Oliver, 2011, p. 410). Therefore, the power of understanding lies in studying the interpretations of the individual. Although Mead's work was not developed into a popular theory until later, the "features of [his] social psychological thought exercised great

influence on the research and scholarly perspectives" in the Chicago School (Blumer, 1979, p. 22).

While Mead was in fact the founding father of these ideas, symbolic interpretivism as a theory "was named and popularized by his student Herbert Blumer" at the Chicago School (Oliver, 2011, p. 410). Blumer extended the work of Mead, creating three foundations of symbolic interpretivism:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.

2. The meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, pp. 2-5).

These foundations laid the groundwork for symbolic interpretivism and allowed researchers to understand the importance of personal meaning making in human behavior. Currently, researchers aligned with symbolic interpretivism also believe that "humans act toward things on the basis of meanings these things have for them," highlighting the importance of personal interpretation of events (Bhattacharya, 2007, p. 39). Furthermore, researchers agree that in "symbolic interpretivism meaning making is a social process," which led researchers to understand that as people interact with others or their surroundings, they alter their behavior based on their new meanings (Oliver, 2011, p. 411).

While many empirical studies have used symbolic interpretivism as their methodological framework, the works of Salvini, Stroebaek, and Everitt specifically apply to this study. In 2010 Salvini conducted an empirical study seeking to determine what involvement symbolic

interpretivism had in the study of social networks. He determined that the study of social networks was within the limits of symbolic interpretivism through his in-depth analysis of networks. Networks become "the product of different processes of symbolization and attribution of meaning" (Salvini, 2010, p. 375). Social groups are considered networks, and in this study, networks are confirmed to fit under the tenets of symbolic interpretivism. In addition, Stroebaek and Everitt each conducted empirical studies using symbolic interpretivism as their methodological framework foundation. Stroebaek's (2013) study examined how individuals in a work setting build communities to cope with emotions. This study found that workplace communities develop first through formal interactions and then broaden to include more informal interactions among members. A significant finding in this study was that newcomers to the workplace were able to become part of the already established community. Building on Stroebaek's study, Everitt (2013) conducted an empirical study specifically relating to education as he examined how new teachers were accepted into professional social groups. Everitt's study concluded that professional socialization is an ongoing process of the individuals' ability to make sense of the organization, which is a key idea in symbolic interpretivism.

These three studies, while each different, helped me understand how to apply symbolic interpretivism to this study. While this study sought to determine how elementary teachers negotiate their professional responsibilities as professional learning communities are implemented, there was a social component that had to be taken into consideration. Professional learning communities require that teachers talk to each other to build a strong community (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Symbolic interpretivism sets the framework around which this study was designed as it takes into consideration the importance that professional interactions have on the participants' ability to make meaning from the implementation process.

For example, the data collection in this study was based on interviews, and I was also able to take note of the participants' body language and demeanor while they answered questions. A document analysis also provided information on the same topics, but it did not allow me to follow up with questions to truly understand how the participants made meaning from their experiences. After applying research from other empirical studies, symbolic interpretivism was the most appropriate methodological framework for this study.

Methodology

The methodology that informed this study was a qualitative interview study. This methodology was fitting to this study, as qualitative interviewers "attempt to understand the world from the subject's points of view [and] to unfold the meaning of their lived world" (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). The purpose of this study was to understand the participants' points of view as their school transformed into a professional learning community. Through qualitative interviews, I was able to understand how the participants made meaning from their experiences. Moreover, according to Weiss (1994) interviews are "a window to the past" and used to discover "what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions" (p. 1). Kvale and Brinkman (2009) add to this idea, stating that qualitative research interviews are done for the purpose of "producing knowledge" (p. 2). Participants in this study were asked to reflect on their perceptions of past experiences in an effort to produce knowledge of the event. In conclusion, an interview study was the best methodology for this study because the participants had already experienced the implementation of a professional learning community before the study took place, and I asked them to share their perceptions of this event.

Research Design

This study was driven by interview study research therefore I used in-depth semi-structured interviewing for data collection. Table 3.1 (found in Appendix A) shows the data collection methods and the number of pages collected. Table 6.1 (found in Appendix B) shows the timeline for data collection.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling intersected with criterion-based sampling. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for studies in which the researcher wishes to "frame who and what matters as data" and uses this data as "a mechanism for making meaning, not just uncovering it" (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2012, p. 700). Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study since I used participant perspectives to make meaning from their experiences.

Along with purposeful sampling, I also used criterion-based sampling to ensure that the participants experienced professional learning community implementation and had experiences to share. The criterion for participation in this study was that the participants must have been a classroom teacher in an elementary school in the Midwest when staff transformed into a professional learning community. Classroom teachers who met these requirements were allowed to volunteer, and the first five volunteers were selected to participate. All extra volunteer information was kept in case of attrition, but it did not end up being needed.

Figure 3.1: **Participant selection process.** This figure illustrates the process that was followed to select participants for this study.
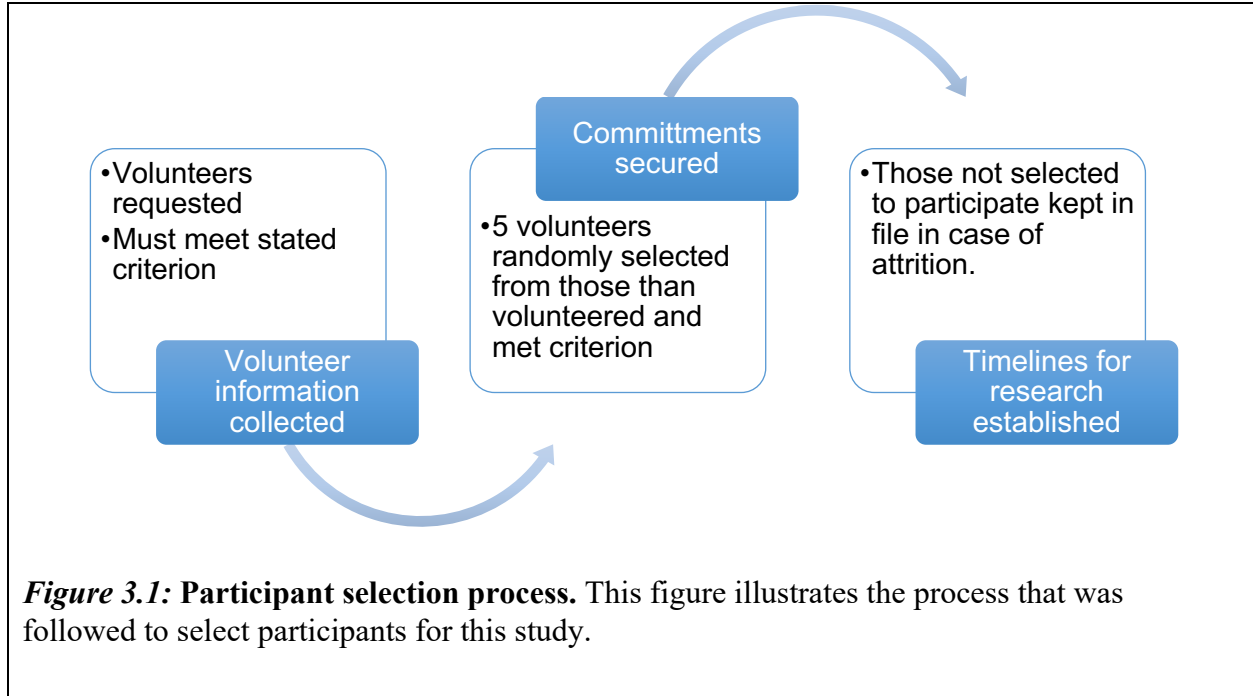
Research Site

Research took place at Bookworm Elementary School. The elementary level was chosen as it is the level of education with which I personally have the most experience with. The site was selected after I made contact with both district office personnel and the building administrator for approval. I then presented the proposed research study at a staff meeting to all certified staff who met the criteria and asked for participant volunteers.

Membership Role

In this study, I was primarily a participant observer, which allowed me the unique insider perspective. Advantages of being an insider (participant) in qualitative research include an already ingrained understanding of the culture and terminology, thus increasing the trust and cooperation of the participants (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). Furthermore, "it is increasingly common for researchers to be part of the social group they intend to study" as the unique cultural perspective is already known and familiar (Bonner & Tolhurse, 2002, p. 8). Since trust is

seemingly already acquired, the researcher is allowed to "go wherever you want, whenever you want, observe what you want, obtain and read whatever documents you require" (Glesne, 2011, p. 57). As I was already a member of the education community, participant observer was the best method for this study.

However, I did not conduct this research in the school in which I work, which also allowed me to have an outsider perspective during this study. Being an outsider impeded me from understanding the perspective of each participant as I did not have the "capacity to truly appreciate their experiences" (Buckle & Dwyer, 2009, p. 56). As an outsider, I remained somewhat engaged with participants throughout this study, and as the more time I spent listening to participant stories, the better I understood their experiences.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected over a period of 29 weeks (see Table 6.1 in Appendix B for timeline). The data collection methods for this case study included two semi-structured interviews and one object-elicited interview. I elected to include two different modes of data collection to increase the credibility and allow for triangulation of data (Glesne, 2011). The raw data for this study totaled 215.5 pages (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: **Data Inventory**

Source of data	Number of pages	Number of pages total
Researcher Journal Reflections	2 page per week – 29-week study duration	2 x 29 = 58 **58 pages**
Peer-Debriefing	Five thirty-minute sessions – 5 pages per half hour of transcription	5 x 5 = **25 pages**
One 1-hour interview per participant	13 pages per one hour of transcription	13 x 5= **65 pages**
Two 30-minute interviews per participant (10 interviews)	5.5 pages per interview	11 x 5 =**55**
Member Check of transcripts (15 minutes)	2 pages per 15 min of transcription – Five 15 min. member checks	5 x 2.5 = **12.5 pages**
	Total Pages	**215.5 pages**

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

      The purpose of qualitative research interviews is "to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives" (Kvale, 1996, p. 27). Weiss (1994) claimed that

people can convey they experiences through language, which can be accomplished through interviews. My interviews with the participants focused on their lived daily experiences surrounding the research purpose, and I used the interviews to gain insight into their unique perspective.

A semi-structured interview model was best for this study as it is "neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire" (p. 27). I used an interview guide (Appendix C) to focus on certain prompts centered on the research questions (Kvale, 1996). The interview guide served as a starting point, with the interviews themselves occurring in a conversational manner. Through the interview process, deMarrais noted the importance of the interviewee and the interviewer collaborating to construct and make sense of the stories that rose to the surface (2014). The following interview prompts were used:

1. Tell me about a time when you first learned about professional learning communities.

2. Tell me about the process for professional learning community implementation used at your school.

3. In what ways do you feel becoming a professional learning community influences your work?

4. Tell me about your experiences in a grade-level collaboration before a professional learning community model was implemented.

    a. How did this collaboration impact your work?

5. Walk me through a grade-level collaboration now.

    a. How does this collaboration impact your work?

6. If I sat at your grade-level collaborations, what words or phrases would I hear?

7. If I sat through a professional development session or leadership team meeting, what words or phrases would I hear?

8. Is there anything else you would like me to know that I did not ask you?

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews "are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions" of the participant regarding "complex" issues that might require "probing for more information and clarification of answers" (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). For example, while answering question five, Susan began openly reflecting on her experiences in the past year:

Looking back, I think we would need to be more purposeful and I think that was one area that we were like, okay, we need to come up with a goal. And we weren't very intentional or meaningful in developing those goals. So, I want to begin the year by revisiting our strengths and weaknesses from this past year and then really focusing on those goals for this upcoming year, and then hitting them at every single meeting.

Without the open-ended question stem and the freedom to expand as thoughts came to her, Susan most likely would not have shared specific weaknesses that she found in her team. Her reflection allowed me to see a deeper component that was potentially missed through professional learning community implementation at Bookworm Elementary School. If teachers were not working with their professional learning community to set meaningful goals and develop plans to achieve them, then teachers potentially would not see the value in spending time working together.

The purpose of this study was to focus on the experiences of teachers whose school has implemented a professional learning community; therefore, an in-depth semi structured interview was vital to gaining access to these experiences.

Object-Elicited Interviews

Object-elicited interviews are used in qualitative research as a route into participant's memories and narratives to provoke responses otherwise hidden (Harper, 2002; Hoskins, 1998). While the semi-structured interviews provided me with participants' experiences, the object-elicited interviews were helpful as they allowed me to understand how the participants "extended meaning towards things" (Woodward, 2015, p. 4). This deeper connection demonstrated how the participant made connections between professional learning communities and objects in their lives.

In this study, each participant was asked to bring to the second and third interviews one or two items that demonstrated their experiences with professional learning communities. During these interviews, I used an interview guide and protocol (see Appendix C and D) (Kvale, 1996). The following prompts were asked about the object each participant brought (and repeated for the second object):

1. Please describe the first item you have brought.

2. Why did you choose to bring this item?

3. How does this item relate to your experiences with professional learning communities?

4. In what ways do your two items relate to each other? (if applicable)

5. Is there anything else you would like to share about this item?

I began the first interview by reviewing the purpose and data collection methods of this study with the participants and completing the informed consent documentation. The second and third interviews were then tentatively scheduled. I recorded each interview using a Sony digital recorder, which was in plain view of the participants during interviews. Each participant gave

verbal consent to be recorded. The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes each depending on participant answers and the number of clarifying questions asked. Throughout all ten interviews, I asked specific questions to elicit stories to inform my research purpose and questions.

As an example, during the second interview Harper brought a picture of herself with her Young Life group in college. When asked why she brought this item (question 2), she gave this response: "That picture reminds me of the commitment I have, not only to the [Young Life] organization itself, but to kids, and helping kids. So not only sharing with them who Christ is and whatnot but just being there for them." Harper could have told me that she was committed to helping her students without the picture, but this picture allowed her to describe her commitment at a deeper level. Without this picture, I never would have known that her commitment to helping her students is rooted in her faith.

Researcher Journaling

Research journaling allows a researcher to take part in personal reflection through continuous writing, which helps to ensure trustworthiness and rigor (Piercy & Benson, 2005). For this study I engaged in reflective writing each week over the 29-week study. These reflections took place after I had immersed myself in interviews, transcriptions, data analysis, or writing. These reflections were done via free writing, and as a result, thoughts were jumbled and often left in incomplete sentences. However, reflective writing allowed me to process my thoughts at a slower pace, which in turn created new responses.

For example, after completing the process of moving from codes to categories to themes, I was not satisfied with the themes. The following is an excerpt from my reflective writing:

Themes appear sterile and bland. While themes identified make sense there is nothing

moving about them. What isn't evident in these themes is the emotion that participants

conveyed in their interviews. Their personalities have been lost, and through interviews

those personalities were the driving force behind their work in their professional learning

communities.

This reflection was what prompted me to start analyzing the codes again but from the perspective

of highlighting the different personalities that were found in each of the participants. Reflective

journaling allowed me the creative space to freely expand on my ideas in order to make new

discoveries.

Member Checks

After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed them and conducted member checks.

Member checking "can provide a researcher with corrections to the transcript or even further

elaborations as an informant reflects on what was said" (Brenner, 2006, p. 368). In order to

ensure that the participant's experiences are accurately portrayed in the transcripts, a member

check is necessary. After I completed transcribing each interview, I shared the documents with

each participant via Google. This allowed participants to add comments without changing the

original transcript.

One participant, Olga, made a change to her original comment. In the first interview,

when describing what the focus of her grade-level team was, Olga stated, "We want [students] to

learn the responsibility to turn work in on time." This statement was a narrow statement that

made it appear the focus of her professional learning community was not on student learning, but

instead on students' missing assignments. However, after reading the transcript, Olga requested

to change this statement to, "Are the students gaining the skills they need for middle school?"

This broader statement allowed me to understand that getting students to turn work in on time was not the sole focus for this grade-level team, but just one component of a bigger goal.

Peer-Debriefing

Peer-debriefing is the practice of sharing raw data with someone in hopes that they can provide feedback to the researcher. Peer debriefing allows researchers to "explore research design, data collection process, and data analysis" through an impartial source (Figg, Heilman, Schneider, Wenrick, & Youker, 2010, p. 20). By examining the research from "multiple perspectives," peer debriefing also "ensures the trustworthiness" of the study (p. 20). The person I chose to provide feedback, Mark, was someone who was also at the researching stage of his dissertation. Mark was well versed in qualitative and interview study research, and therefore was able to look at the transcriptions from an analytical point of view. His feedback came in the form of additional follow-up questions, areas that needed elaboration, and observations. One example of a critical observation that he made was one that I could have missed. Mark read all of the transcripts in a short amount of time, and therefore was able to see a similar response to one of the questions from all five participants. All five participants used almost identical words when describing what a professional learning community looked like- they all said it was "focused on the curriculum." When compiling individual codes to begin the analysis process, this code would have potentially been noticed as a repeated code. However, at that stage of data analysis a repeated code would not necessarily mean that all five participants made this statement as a response to the same question stem. Mark's observation allowed me to understand the importance of this code.

Data Management and Data Analysis

Data Management

I collected 215.5 pages of data during this study. To manage the data, I employed a variety of methods. I recorded each interview using a Sony digital recorder and completed the transcription within two weeks of the interview. Each transcript was typed and saved as a Microsoft Word file on an external hard drive labeled with numbers that only I have access to. I shared each transcript with participants and Mark via Google Drive for their review. To maintain confidentiality of the participants, I masked all names on the documents and photographs and assigned pseudonyms to each participant. To ensure security, all materials pertaining to this study were kept in a locked fire proof safe to which only I had the key.

Data Analysis

After gathering the data, I used inductive analysis as my method of data analysis. First, I transcribed all of the interviews and then engaged in preliminary coding. I completed first cycle coding using In Vivo coding, which is defined as pulling out "words or phrases from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldana, 2013, p. 91). As an example, the following excerpt was taken from the transcript of Bonnie's third interview:

H - So, going through that, did it affect your PLC at all?

Bonnie - Yes. Well yes and no. We just, at the beginning of the year, it was, it just set the tone. We were like, all right, well it's us three….Even the smallest things, like who was making copies, it was a realization that she just wanted to do things by herself. And even we would, like, something so small, we would do them for her. But as we went on, it was just kind of a norm. Ultimately, it didn't affect how we chose to function. We would still

60

==eat lunch together,== or during our actual set PLC time. So yes and no. I think us three were

able to carry it and do what we needed to get done.

I took one phrase of text from most lines in the transcript to become codes. By using the

participants' exact words as codes, I was able to reflect on the experiences using direct quotes

instead of ascribing my descriptive labeling of the participants' experiences. This process

allowed me to get close to my data to conduct an in-depth analysis.

After first cycle coding was complete, I used focused coding as the method for second

cycle coding (Saldana 2013). Similarly, focused coding seeks to categorize data into "the most

salient categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). One benefit of focused coding is that it allowed me to

compare codes from multiple participants' data to assess for "comparability and transferability"

(Saldana, 2013, p. 219). As this study had five participants, focused coding provided me with the

structure to compare codes across each participant. During focused coding, I read each section of

transcript and looked for large chunks of text through the lens of the research questions. After

each section was read, I changed the text color of the sentence or sentences that provided the

basis for the code. The code was then written immediately following the colored text. As an

example, the follow excerpts were taken from Bonnie's and Harper's second interview

transcripts:

Heather - Okay, so how do you feel this relates to your work in PLCs?

Bonnie - Because everything we do is surrounded by what's in this notebook. Our data

that we look at. All of our current data, so here is my Fountas and Pinnell stuff in page

protectors. It allows us to compare data [pause] Aims Web data. We discuss that and we

are able to talk about kiddos we are concerned about, and our data is there. We base it off

of our data. ==(CODE – Focus on data and data analysis)== We work on planning. The very

first thing we do is talk about where we are at. I am the kind of person that I have to write everything down or it gets lost, so just documentation and making sure we are on the same page. And my colleagues have, they don't necessarily have a binder, but I like to have mine all in one place. (CODE – Personality type) This, is just everything we do. Our data, planning, pacing, talking about the various assessments, benchmarking, and then using that data to plan interventions, and plan our instruction.

Below is another example, taken from a different participants' transcript.

Heather - How does that item relate to what you have experienced with PLCs?

Harper - I think with our PLCs, they are a lot different. I mean the topics that we talk about aren't really the same exact things as when I was doing it beforehand. (CODE – Differences in PLC functions) But I think they relate. Like I would, if I was going back to read some of them, which I didn't go back and read every single PLC, it would be, like if we weren't totally sure what we were talking about and we needed to bring something up, I would look back in my notes and see if there were questions or concerns that I had brought up myself and my own teaching, that [pause] I lost my train of thought. Oh, I would write down things that, if somebody said something, and I thought, you know, this might be something I need to consider someday, or need to know about, then I would be able to address that within my own PLC (CODE – Personality type). It was a good start into expectations and relating that PLC to this PLC (CODE – Differences in PLC functions). I don't really know if I would have ever gotten those questions answered within my school district if I hadn't written them down in the first place. So it was nice having a PLC beforehand and then going into another one. I just wouldn't feel that I have a group to go and talk to. I mean there's a lot of people at Bookworm who are there for

you and stuff, and I definitely feel that it would have come about at some point, but it would have just been one person. It wouldn't have been a team of support, a team of people supporting you. And I think that's really nice that everybody has that, as long as they use that wisely. (CODE – Value of PLC)

Focused coding allowed me to easily turn large chunks of text into one code, and then to quickly see connections across transcripts. Specifically, I was able to see how the code "personality type" came up multiple times in all transcripts. This led me to analyze what types of personality types were prevalent within the words that participants used.

As I went back and forth between data sources to code, I began to group similar codes together in hopes of identifying categories. I did this by copying and pasting all first and second cycle codes into a new Google document. Within that document, I was then able to cut and paste together codes that were similar to create categories. An example of the codes that created the category "those are my people" is below:

Those Are My People (Category)

i.   Discuss it as a whole team together (Bonnie)

ii.   Ultimately, my team is everything to me (Bonnie)

iii.   Building those relationships with one another [pause] so we feel more comfortable not beating around the bush (Susan)

iv.   Community (Harper)

v.   She helped me through that (Harper)

vi.   It didn't affect how we chose to function (Bonnie)

vii.   It makes your work environment more enjoyable (Bonnie)

viii.   We decided (Kayla)

ix.   They are comfortable with one another (Susan)

x.   We support each other (Olga)

xi.   You're a team (Olga)

xii.   We are there for professional support (Bonnie)

xiii.   I need them to help me (Kayla)

xiv.   They are my own group (Harper)

xv.   We talk about everything (Harper)

xvi.   We have to be able to have positive communication (Bonnie)

xvii.   We worked through it (Olga)

xviii.   I can think of one grade-level who they have been together, all four of them, for

seven years now. They work like a true PLC (Kayla)

xix.   Knowing she was supportive within the meeting and then coming and checking

on me was nice (Harper)

xx.   We met with the OT and PT (Kayla)

xxi.   We all come together, and we have to figure out what is going to be best for our

team (Harper)

xxii.   Picture of my team because when I think of PLC I think of my team (Bonnie)

xxiii.   We are all working toward helping each other and doing the best for each other

(Harper)

xxiv.   Learning how to depend on a PLC when you aren't with them every day (Susan)

xxv.   Sometimes PLCs are a little more lax and comfortable with each other (Susan)

xxvi.   I've depended on my PLC these past several years just to be successful (Susan)

xxvii.   We do everything together (Bonnie)

xxviii.	We lean on each other (Bonnie)
xxix.	Just being there for them (Harper)
xxx.	Pictures of us, because they are my closest co-workers (Bonnie)
xxxi.	Making sure we are all together (Bonnie)
xxxii.	That was the decision of the PLC (Olga)
xxxiii.	We all rely on each other (Bonnie)
xxxiv.	I just wouldn't feel that I have a group to go and talk to (Harper)
xxxv.	Support each other (Olga)
xxxvi.	I've done everything I can to support them (Kayla)
xxxvii.	I kept it even when cleaning out my notebook (Bonnie)
xxxviii.	Are always making sure that everything is okay (Harper)
xxxix.	We help each other all the time (Kayla)
xl.	We are coworkers but I also consider us friends (Bonnie)
xli.	Free share whatever is on my mind (Susan)
xlii.	Support that might need to be outside of school too (Bonnie)
xliii.	I don't think she had ever been part of a collaborative team (Bonnie)
xliv.	Team of support, a team of people supporting you (Harper)
xlv.	Those are my people (Bonnie)
xlvi.	The people on my team (Harper)
xlvii.	We are pretty cooperative (Kayla)
xlviii.	Eat lunch together (Bonnie)
xlix.	That picture reminds me of the commitment I have (Harper)

These codes, from across all 15 interviews, show the similar passion the participants shared when describing their professional learning community teams.

Once I constructed the categories, I then started to group them together if they had similar meanings, concepts, experiences, and so forth. Then I looked across and within categories while keeping the conceptual framework of andragogy and the methodological framework of symbolic interactionism in mind, to identify themes, which were patterns across/within categories. I used a trinity configuration, which allowed me to plot major categories and the codes that supported them, looking to group the categories into themes (Saldana, 2013). By using the trinity model, I was able to see visually how the codes and categories fit into a theme (see figures 3.2 and 3.3 below). A visual representation of my data analysis process in shown in Figure 3.3. All data not used for this study will be kept on file for one year, then erased or destroyed.

Figure 3.2: **Trinity model.** This figure illustrates the trinity model symbolizing the movement from codes to categories to themes.
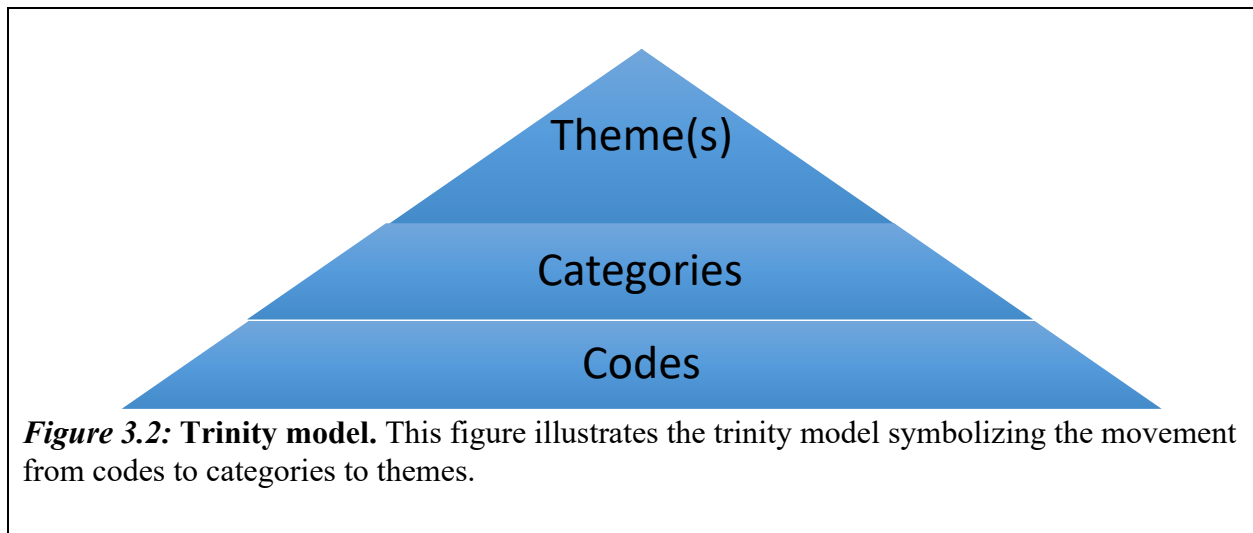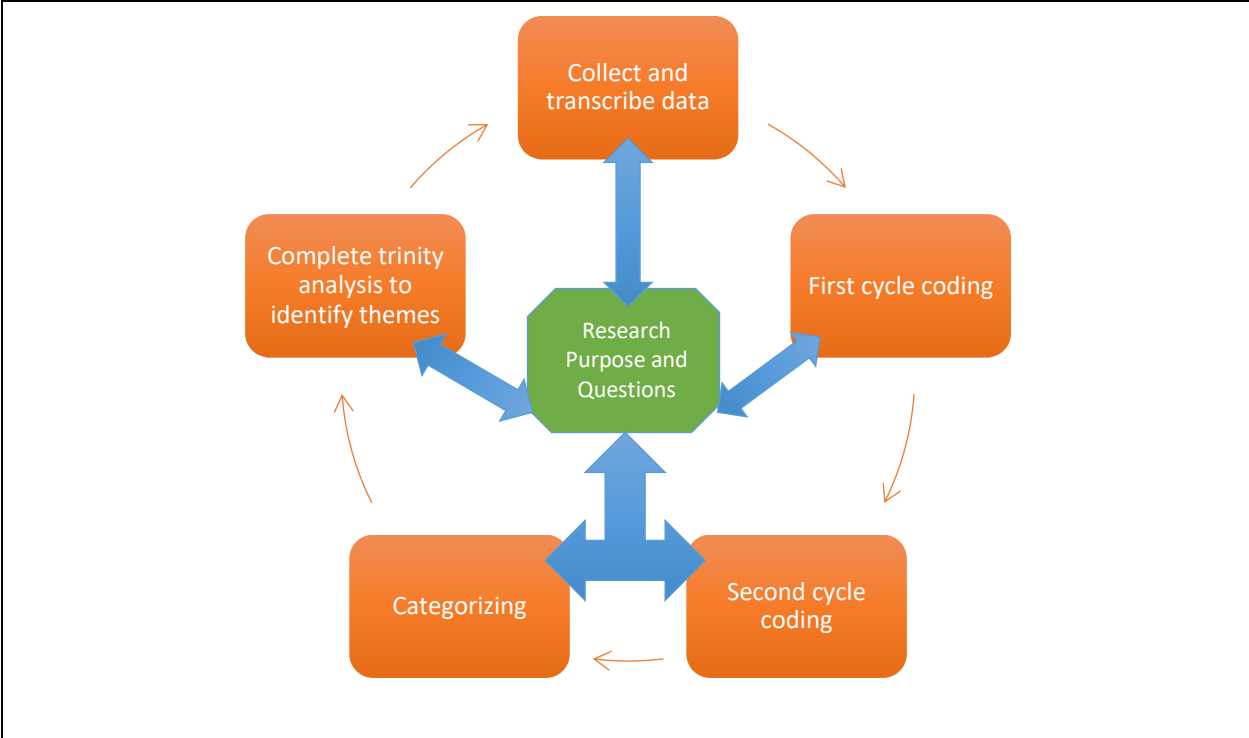
Figure 3.3: **Data analysis process.** The above figure illustrates the process that guided the data analysis in this study.

Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3 demonstrate an interactive process of analysis and meaning-making of data. In this process, I went back and forth between the raw data and chunks of data that I coded, sometimes multiple times, grouping codes according to similarities in semantic units of meaning. During the coding process I read the codes and identified codes multiple times to ensure I had consistency with the data that was pulled from the transcripts. I then labeled such groups as categories and identified salient patterns within and across data sources. Salient pattern identification came from the guidance of the research purpose and questions and associated theoretical frameworks. The process included free-writing exercises, peer-debriefing with someone who is familiar with the study and the methodology and working with the participants to verify understanding. Eventually, I identified the following themes: Leading with Heart: The

Tin Man; Leading with Courage: The Lion; Leading with Brains: The Scarecrow; and Leading with Leadership.

<p align="center">**Reciprocity and Ethics**</p>

Reciprocity

Reciprocity in research refers to the researcher giving back to the participants (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Failure to create a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and participants can "diminish the potential effect of the evidence," thereby having a detrimental impact on the research findings (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013, p. 1000). In this study I asked that participants willingly give up hours of their time and reflect upon their experiences. No monetary or tangible items were given to participants as reciprocity during this study. However, once the study concluded participants were given the option to engage in coaching conversations to overcome any challenges they disclosed during interviews. As a trained instructional coach, I offered three one-on-one coaching sessions per participant.

Ethics

Ethics in qualitative research focuses on protecting the participants and managing all foreseeable risks (Connolly & Reid, 2007). While ethics is a moving target situated in social contexts, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the participants in the study are not intentionally put in harm's way (King & Stahl, 2015). In this study, one foreseeable risk for participants was that their identity might not remain confidential. To help mitigate this risk, certain measures were put in place to help ensure the safety and confidentiality of participants. First, all participants and other identifiable information (school name, district name, city name, etc.) were referred to using pseudonyms. I am the only person with access to true names and locations. Second, any identifiable information was either encrypted or removed from the

research. Third, participant privacy was maintained during interviews, and interviews were conducted in a private space outside of the school that the participants chose. This increased confidentiality, as no other members of the staff knew whom I was interviewing. Furthermore, no findings from this study were reported without participant consent. Finally, all data (electronic and hard copies) was stored in locked or password-protected formats so that they were only accessible to me. Before beginning the interviews, participants were informed that if, at any time, they felt uncomfortable or wished to be removed from the study, they would be allowed to do so with no penalty.

Data Representation

After analyzing the data, I used an arts-based approach to represent the identified categories and themes. According to O'Donoghue (2015), there is no single definition or common understanding about what arts-based inquiry and representation should be. However, professionals in the field commonly agree that arts-based inquiry, in simple terms, "is a genre of research . . . based in reflective dialogue" (Finley, 2013, p. 86). Finley extends this definition to arts-based representation of data, which portrays the reflective dialogue in an artistic way so that readers can gain a deeper understanding. Piantanida, McMahon, and Garman (2003) describe the purpose of using arts-based representation as an "artful representation serving as a vehicle for engendering discussions about the subject and results of an inquiry" (p. 189). They go on to specifically list school reform as a genre of work that arts-based inquiry and representation is commonly used to study. Just like artists hope to engage the viewers in a conversation about the piece, researchers use arts-based representation in hopes of starting a conversation. Types of arts-based representations might include a photomontage, personal journaling, scripting, poetry, reader's theater, or ethno-drama. Even with no definitive definition of arts-based research and

representation, many prominent researchers in the field argue that arts-based representation is a way to invoke conversations among readers.

There were many benefits to using an arts-based representation in this study. Finley (2013) claims that in arts-based inquiry the researcher becomes the artist and portrays the qualitative data in a way that the community can find it useful or meaningful. Barone (2001) continues this explanation in claiming that using arts-based representation invites the audience to deeply understand the research findings and opens the possibility for analysis of social constructs. This can be done by creating empathy between the reader and the research findings and creating a space for the readers to relate these findings to his or her personal life (Eisner, 2008). By using art to represent the research findings, readers are left to draw their own conclusions about findings. Thus, in turn, can diminish the likelihood that the researcher is viewed as passing judgment or stating absolute truths. This creates a space for readers to apply findings to their situations as they see fit.

Piantanida, McMahon, and Garman (2003) state that arts-based representation in qualitative research must meet the "logic of justification," or answer the question, "what role will art play in accomplishing the research purpose?" (p. 186). An arts-based representation is appropriate for this study because I investigated a cultural change inside of an elementary school, and "critical inquiry as performance art is particularly well suited to researchers who anticipate experiences of cultural resistance and positive social change through inclusive and emotional understandings created among communities of learner/participant/researchers" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 87). Moreover, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) state that "arts-based research makes use of affective experiences, sense, and emotions" (p. 104). When investigating the experiences of a change initiative such as becoming a professional learning community,

emotions are often present in the data. In order to highlight those emotions and experiences, an arts-based approach was fitting.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

There is no way to ensure that the due diligence with which I engaged in this study will be trusted by every reader or be considered of value or rigor, since each reader is free to make his or her own interpretation. However, using existing literature as a guideline, I employed the following measures to ensure trustworthiness and rigor in this study.

I cannot, and will not attempt to, claim any findings as absolute truth. Tracy (2015) claims there are eight criteria to ensure quality qualitative research: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence. As stated in Chapter 1, there is a lack of prominent research on professional learning community implementation, which makes this topic a worthy one in the field of education. To confirm rich rigor in this study, I collected a plentiful amount of data to ensure themes that arose were rooted in a wealth of supportive data. Also, I have based my methodology and data collection and analysis practices around current best practice literature. By ensuring rich rigor in this study, I simultaneously "provided face validity," as well (Golafshani, 2003, p. 599). To achieve sincerity in this study, I have examined my own personal beliefs regarding this topic and compiled a subjectivity statement. In this way, I monitored myself throughout the research process to examine my trustworthiness (Peshkin, 1988). Furthermore, in order to ensure that the findings of this study are credible, or trustworthy, I sought to make this study replicable through my detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis methods. Moreover, with the use of multiple data sources, I was able to triangulate the data, which also heightened the credibility of this study (Tracy, 2015). Triangulation is the process in which "the use of different methods in concert

compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits" (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). In addition, I ensured credibility in this study by conducting frequent member checks with my participants, as well as peer-debriefing sessions. Member checks were conducted with the participants, while peer-debriefing was done with an "impartial peer" (Spall, 1998, p. 280). According to Spall, peer-debriefing "supports the credibility of the data . . . and establishes overall trustworthiness of the findings" (p. 280). Both member checking and peer-debriefing offered me a "fresh perspective" on the information as well as challenged my assumptions (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). According to Tracy (2015), resonance refers to a researcher's "ability to transform the emotional dispositions" of the readers (p. 844). By using an arts-based approach, I hoped to create writing that is aesthetically pleasing to readers and, in turn, evokes emotions (Tracy, 2015).

Moreover, this work will make a significant contribution to the field of education, as it will improve the practice of educational leaders who are seeking to implement a professional learning community with their staff (Richardson, 2000). My hope is that they can gain insight into what works and does not work based on experiences shared in the findings section of this study. The next criterion to meet is ethics. In order to ensure this study was conducted in an ethical manner, the research process was approved by the IRB. I also took into consideration participants' emotional state and well-being and did not publish results that could cause them harm in any way. Finally, I sought to maintain meaningful coherence as defined below:

- Achieve the stated purpose.

- Accomplish what the study espouses to be about.

- Use methods and representation practices that partner well with espoused theories and paradigms.

- Attentively interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings. (Tracy, 2015, p. 848)

Achieving the stated purpose for this study involved staying focused in the data analysis and reporting process. I had to stay focused on my research purpose and questions to prevent myself from getting distracted in the plentiful amount of data in order to accomplish my stated purpose and goals. This was also important to guide my findings and implications. Through planning for data collection and analysis, I did thorough research related directly to interview studies and andragogy. Through the above methods, I justified my efforts to maintain trustworthiness and rigor in this study.

Chapter Summary

Through the lens of symbolic interpretivism I conducted a qualitative interview study of five elementary school teachers to examine their experiences as their building implemented a professional learning community. Over a 29-week period, I asked participants to share their experiences in both semi-structured and object-elicited interviews. Once data were collected, I transcribed all information and completed first and second cycle coding. I grouped codes into categories and reported on the themes that developed. After data analysis was completed, I determined that arts-based inquiry would be used to report the findings. Throughout the research process, I employed a variety of methods to ensure trustworthiness and rigor within this study in hopes that the findings can be used by others in the education field.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The five participants in this study were selected because they worked as certified elementary teachers during the implementation of a professional learning community. They matched the selection criteria and volunteered to be participants in this study. All five participants taught at Bookworm Elementary School during most, if not all, of the professional learning community implementation process.

The premise of this study was that teachers can provide valuable insight into the process that is used to implement professional learning community models. As teachers are the primary implementers of professional learning communities, they are the experts on their experiences, and as such, their recollections are invaluable. This information resulted in substantial findings for scholars and educational leaders seeking the development of a formalized process for professional learning community implementation. The five participants and I worked collaboratively through this process to co-construct a sense-making of their experiences. These experiences shaped the way that participants viewed the process of implementing professional learning communities and the ways in which the implementation influenced their daily professional responsibilities.

Below, I provide a brief description of each participant. I then explain the process by which I made sense of the four themes and how the participants were mapped through each of them. Through data analysis, I identified four personality-driven themes that were used to reflect the ways in which the participants engaged in professional learning communities. Through my own journaling and concept mapping, I realized that the personalities were emotionally charged/driven by relationships, intellectually charged/driven by academics, action charged/driven by innovation, or leadership charged/driven by personal beliefs. I do not claim

that these boundaries are distinct or fixed, but rather a depiction of preferences that became salient during the study. In thinking about how the participants related to each other, I began to see similarities with these personality types and their tendencies to be similar to the four main characters in *The Wizard of Oz*. Participants in this study either displayed tendencies to lead with or without the identified personality types. This was similar to the characters in the movie, who spend time both with and without their desired characteristic. Throughout the movie, the four characters must work together in a variety of stressful situations, just like teachers must work together in schools to identify possible solutions to their challenges.

The four themes identified in this study are as follows: (a) Leading with the Heart? The Tin Man, (b) Leading with the Brain? The Scarecrow, (c) Leading with Courage? The Lion, and (d) Leading with Leadership? Dorothy. A more detailed description of the characteristics of each personality, as well as how these personalities interacted with each other, can be found in the following sections. Please note that these themes are also represented with question marks to denote the lack of fixed identify and to make space for interrogation and complexity. In the following sections, I offer a site description before discussing the thematic personalities.

Site Description

Bookworm Elementary School is an urban school in the central United States. It is one of seven K-6 elementary schools that feed into one middle school and one 6A high school. At Bookworm Elementary School, there are approximately 520 students and 70 staff members. In 2017, 48% of students at the school were classified as "economically disadvantaged" by the State Department of Education, with 34% and 38% of students being College and Career Ready in math and English language arts, respectively. Staff at Bookworm Elementary School are generally happy, with a turnover rate of between five to ten staff members each year. The

participants in this study described the culture of Bookworm as ever changing as the staff

changes. The same principal who opened Bookworm Elementary School nine years ago is still

serving as the administrator and therefore has been able to build strong relationships with the

community.

Bookworm Elementary School has been implementing professional learning communities

over the last five years. The process began at the district level but was done over many years in

slow stages. As a district, the first steps to implementation involved establishing common

planning times and early release, both of which allowed teams to meet at least one time each

week for 40 minutes. The next steps involved training for administrators and all staff. This

training has included bringing in speakers from Solution Tree, an education based professional

development publishing company, as well as sending teams each year to the Professional

Learning Community Summit. All other professional development was conducted at the building

level by building level staff.

At Bookworm Elementary School, the staff have done two book studies over the five-

year period, read numerous articles about professional learning communities, and participated in

multiple professional development sessions led by the principal. The building principal also

designed and designated a notetaking form for teams to use when they meet.

Participant Descriptions

The five participants varied in age and levels of professional experience, yet they all

expressed their passion for education and student learning. The findings of this chapter represent

the five participants' lived experiences expressed through their beliefs and attitudes as they

pertain to the implementation of professional learning communities. As the implementation

process was not speedy, participants also described how their beliefs and attitudes changed over

time. They shared rich and elaborate details of their experiences in hopes of improving the ways in which professional learning communities are implemented. Some aspects of participants' descriptions have been abbreviated in an effort to protect their identifiable details.

Harper had worked at Bookworm Elementary School as a special education teacher for the past three years. While she did not work there when they began the implementation process for professional learning communities, she had been there for the majority of their implementation. She accepted the job at Bookworm Elementary School immediately after graduating from college. Harper is a White woman and who grew up in the area that Bookworm serves.

Susan had worked at Bookworm Elementary School for the past eight years as a classroom teacher. She had taught multiple grade-levels and had never worked at another school. Susan is a White woman who grew up in the Bookworm area.

Olga had worked in multiple schools and districts throughout her teaching career. She had worked at Bookworm Elementary School since it opened ten years ago as both a classroom teacher and a special education teacher. Olga is a White woman who does not live in the district that Bookworm serves.

Kayla had been a special education teacher at Bookworm Elementary School for the past four years. She had previously worked in other certified and classified positions for the district. Kayla is a White woman and a native to the city in which Bookworm is located.

Bonnie had been a classroom teacher at Bookworm Elementary School for four years. She had remained in the same grade-level during her time there, and Bookworm was the only school she had worked at. Bonnie is a White woman who resides in the city in which Bookworm is located.

Through the data analysis process, four different themes in the form of personalities and their counterparts were identified from the data. These themes describe the participants' sense making of their experiences in professional learning communities and the ways in which their participation in them created or impacted certain beliefs and attitudes they have about the role of professional learning communities in K-12 public education.

In the following paragraphs I explain each of the four personality types and their counter parts, and I then describe how the participants were mapped through them. Throughout each theme, I explain the codes and categories that informed the theme most saliently. The identified personality categories are not fixed, and participant responses are found woven throughout each of them. Each theme was informed by multiple categories as seen in Figure 2. Therefore, to offer a thematic narrative, I provide details from the study that informed each of the categories that support the overall theme. For example, a thematic narrative of Leading with the Heart? The Tin Man would contain narratives that inform the six categories within this theme: (a) these are my people, (b) whatever it takes to help students, (c) it's just so important, (d) lone wolf, (e) there's no need for professional learning communities, and (f) convenience. Note that the short narratives informing the categories are presented to demonstrate the complexity of each theme and the participants' conflicting attitudes and beliefs. At the end of the categorical narratives, I offer a summary that explains the overall theme informed by these categories.

Leading With the Heart? The Tin Man

Participants who lead with their heart are driven by relationships and feelings relating to both their colleagues and students. This personality informs how they approach a professional learning community, as those who lead with their hearts are concerned first with people, not academic scores or agendas. Those who do not lead with their hearts do not see the value in

collaboration with others and prefer to work alone. When forced to be a part of a professional learning community, they will put forth little effort in the work of the team. Because leading with the heart is complex, crossover sometimes occurs between the two columns presented in Figure 4.1. Participants were not fixed in one column in any theme for the entire duration of the study. Mapping a participant in a certain column merely represents the saliency of preferences as demonstrated through their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. Figure 4.1 shows the categories used for this theme, which I explain in more detail below.

/

Figure 4.1: **The Tin Man. Categories for this theme were chosen based on an analysis of codes. Through this process, it became evide**

nt that there were conflicting personalities embedded into the theme, as listed above. The categories listed on the right describe the

participants who lead with their heart while the categories on the left describe the participants who do not lead with their heart.

Those Are My People

Being a member of a professional learning community requires participants to work intricately with the other members on their team. Participants who led with their hearts felt especially connected to their team members. This connection allowed them to bond as friends, not just as coworkers. Participants who felt a strong connection to their team members were relaxed during meetings, shared personal stories, told jokes, and were surprised at how often they had the same ideas. They supported and defended each other at all costs, and this dynamic was reflected in the work their team was able to accomplish.

Throughout the three interview sessions, some participants repeatedly referred to how much their team members meant to them on both a personal and professional level. Bonnie and Harper even brought pictures of their team for the object-elicited interviews and stated that when they think of professional learning communities and the implementation process, they think of their team members. When talking more about the picture she kept in her collaboration binder, Bonnie stated, "We are coworkers, but I also consider us friends." The picture was of her with her professional learning community team on Halloween. The team had decided to dress up as construction workers. Once she started talking about the picture, Bonnie realized that it actually was a picture from the previous year, but that was still the team that she thought of as her team in the current year even though her team had a new member. One of the team members had moved to a different district and had been replaced by another teacher. Bonnie quickly shared that the new team member was not a good fit for their team and would be leaving after the year ended. Bonnie later stated, "Ultimately, my team is everything to me. Those are my people." It was apparent how passionate she felt about the other teachers on her grade-level team. Harper shared Bonnie's sentiment for her team as well, stating repeatedly how she views her collaborative team

as a support group for both personal and professional issues. When I asked Harper why she kept the picture in her collaboration binder, she stated, "This picture reminds me of the commitment I have." While Bonnie and Harper showed the biggest passion towards their team members, all five members, at some level, stated how much their team members were an integral part of their understanding of professional learning communities. Teams supported each other throughout the implementation process, and the commitment they had to the other members of their collaborative team was what drove some of them to do the work of a professional learning community.

While the work of a professional learning community is not always easy, participants who felt a strong connection to their team members were seemingly driven to do things that would support their colleagues. Meetings of teams that felt connected were described as enjoyable and fun and did not feel like work.

Whatever It Takes to Help Students

The participants who led with their hearts applied this through their professional learning community work relating to students, as well. They were passionate about ensuring the success of their students. This passion drove them to seek advice from their team members and try new ways of teaching. Their close relationships with their team members created an atmosphere for open dialogue in which participants felt safe to be vulnerable. The drive to have all students succeed pushed some participants to actively engage in the work of the professional learning community.

During one interview, Harper stated that she enjoys the work of her professional learning community because her team "can keep focusing on how we can make the student's better." Harper liked the structured focus on student achievement, and the continued pressure to push all

students to new levels. Bonnie added to this argument, stating that the work of the professional learning community "is good for the kids." When asked how, she elaborated on this thought by sharing that as her team analyzed data, they were completely focused on "[figuring] out what changes need to be made" to help the student(s) succeed. These conversations often led to sharing specific strategies or researching as a group. While Bonnie would not ever have dug deep into her data analysis on her own, she was driven to work with her team to do everything she could for her students. Like Bonnie, Harper also stated that the structured conversations with her professional learning community pushed her to expand her thinking and consider other strategies and approaches to teaching.

Through a professional learning community, the analysis of student data is taken to a heightened level. Participants who lead with their heart are often driven by their desire to do whatever is necessary to help all students succeed. This includes changing their current practices and thinking in order to expand their thoughts and teach with new strategies.

It's Just So Important

Throughout the interview process, participants discussed the many years they had spent working to implement the professional learning community model. Participants who lead with their heart feel passionately about the work their teams are doing in the professional learning community, and this drives their willingness to work through the implementation process.

Many participants compared their collaborative work before and after the implementation of a professional learning community model. For example, Harper shared that professional learning communities were "very helpful" in her "reflect[ions] on [her] teaching." Before implementing a professional learning community, she would teach a lesson, enter student scores, and move on to the next lesson. Now, she shares her data with her team and looks for ways to

reteach and enrich the content based on student scores. Harper also stated that before the implementation of a professional learning community, the only option she would have had to collaborate with her team was through email. Now that her team was meeting weekly, she was able to build a solid relationship with her team and openly sought their advice. Likewise, Kayla shared that since the implementation of a professional learning community, she felt that collaborations were "extremely beneficial" because she was able to get "expertise from different angles." The expertise Kayla described was from those in certified support roles (such as occupational therapy, speech and language pathology, or physical therapy). When reflecting on the differences between collaboration before and after the implementation of the professional learning community, Kayla quickly shared that professional learning communities are "just so important" to the success of the students at Bookworm Elementary School.

Through participants' comparisons of their experiences before and after the implementation of a professional learning community, it was evident that those who led with their hearts found that the structured conversations with support from a variety of other staff members helped promote their professional growth.

Participants who led with their hearts were driven by the personal connections that they made with their team members and students. These connections created new spaces for professional learning community conversations to occur. For some participants, these conversations brought new relationships with other colleagues into their daily routines. In the next section, I discuss the categories that informed the narratives of those who did not lead with their hearts.

The Lone Wolf

Participants who did not lead with their hearts had contradicting experiences when sharing their views of their team members. The lone wolves fell into two categories: (a) those who chose to work alone and (b) those who were in a situation in which they had to work alone. I labeled those who chose to work alone as self-imposed lone wolves. Self-imposed lone wolves were those who did not see any value in making personal relationships with their colleagues. They did not say good morning to their team members when arriving at work, ask questions about what they were doing in their lessons, or choose to eat lunch with their colleagues. They attended professional learning community collaborations because they were required to be there, but they offered nothing of substance to the group. I labeled those who had to work alone due to the structural organization of the school as forced lone wolves. Forced lone wolves yearned for a building-based professional learning community with which to bond, but they could not find others who did what they did. They attended other team meetings when they could make it work with their schedule; however, since they did not have a regular meeting to attend, creating a strong connection with a professional learning community was challenging.

Kayla was a forced lone wolf. As a special education teacher, she did not have a professional learning community in the building. Rather, her team was instead a district-wide team, but she struggled to make connections with staff whom she did not see every day. Kayla stated that she was "in [her] own little world" and that she "feel[s] like [she's] just floating out there." This imposed isolation changed how Kayla felt about professional learning community implementation and was a contributing influence on the little role that professional learning communities played on her professional responsibilities. While Bonnie led with her heart, she had previously worked on a team in which one team member acted as a lone wolf. She described

her former teammate as one who "had never been a part of a collaborative team" before. Bonnie detailed how that teacher just did not understand the purpose of professional learning communities and lacked the desire to be a part of a collaborative team. Bonnie shared that her team tried multiple times to include the lone wolf in their conversations, until finally, "it was a realization that she just wanted to do things by herself." Bonnie noted the influence that this one lone wolf had on her team dynamics, stating that they spent more time trying to find ways to include this team member, which took time away from the conversations they really wanted to have and the work that they wanted to get done together. When asked if the staff member returned the following year, Bonnie shared that not only did that teacher leave Bookworm Elementary School, but nobody knew where she ended up or kept in contact with her.

Whether a forced or self-imposed lone wolf, participants demonstrated similar characteristics. Participants who either were a lone wolf or had a lone wolf on their team shared similarities regarding the effect this had on their professional learning communities. There was a dramatic difference in the lone wolf's desire to accomplish the work of a professional learning community and the community itself eventually lost interest in the lone wolves.

"There's No Need" for Professional Learning Communities

Throughout the implementation process, some participants struggled to see the value in the professional learning community model. Those who did not see the value were also disengaged in the conversations that their teams were having. They were not active problem solvers who sought additional resources to improve student learning. Instead, they were more concerned with the other tasks they could be working on, growing more irritated the longer they sat in a team collaboration.

Kayla, for example, stated, "I have trouble understanding how helpful that is to me as a teacher. I don't have a choice, though." Recall that Kayla, as a special education teacher, did not have a professional learning community in the building in which she worked, but instead was a member of a district-wide team. This team would meet one or two times a month, but Kayla stated that by the time they determined where they left off at their previous meeting, there was not much time left to discuss specific strategies based on student data. Many members remained quiet during meetings because "we didn't want to step on each other's toes" by offering suggestions or help to those struggling. During meetings, Kayla realized she was "just wasting [her] time" and wished she could be back in her classroom taking care of other tasks. For Kayla, implementing professional learning communities has had little influence on her professional responsibilities.

Olga, a classroom teacher, shared Kayla's sentiment for professional learning communities. During one interview, she stated that she felt "there's no need" for professional learning communities or the structured conversations they require. When asked to describe the ways her team collaborated with certified support staff, she shared that her team "didn't invite people in" during collaborations. Susan, who taught a different grade-level, explained this further by stating that others on her team did not like outside staff to attend because they had "a mindset of 'They don't know what we are doing, [so] why are they going to come in here and tell us what to do?'" This perspective about working with others outside of the collaborative team hindered many conversations. Once everyone on the team had run out of ideas to try, there was nothing left but to give up and move on.

Teachers who struggled to find value in professional learning communities often they did not find value in the collaborative conversations their teams were engaged in. This was also

evident in their unwillingness to invite others to attend their collaborations to share ideas outside of the norm. Those teachers who did not see the need for professional learning communities struggled to understand why they were forced to sit through meetings that were irrelevant to their practice. This attitude was more apparent than many of them realized, as evidenced in the way some participants described their team members.

Convenience

Participants who do not see the need for professional learning communities, but were forced to implement them with their teams, tended to continue to do what was convenient for them. In team meetings, participants who acted out of convenience would sit silently while their team discussed various topics. They might appear to be taking notes, but instead were drawing or making their grocery lists, as they had no intention of following what their team decided. It was easier for them to continue teaching the way they had in the past, and the building principal forcing them to sit in a team collaboration once a week was not going to change that.

This disposition was evident in the responses that Olga shared. For example, the building principal dictated the day and time each professional learning community would meet for collaboration. This was done due to the structure required to provide time for teams to meet together. Teams used their common planning time one day each week and then at some point during that same day teachers had a different plan time that was covered by either the librarian or art teacher. For example, Olga's team had collaboration time every day at 11:00 a.m. On Wednesdays, her team was scheduled to meet as a collaborative team during this time. Teachers on Olga's team then had their personal planning time at another time on Wednesdays, while their students had art or library. After receiving the schedule at the beginning of the year, Olga's team "moved the collaboration time because [they] wanted to eat lunch earlier." However, moving

their scheduled collaboration prevented the special education teacher and instructional facilitator from attending their collaborations. Olga's team didn't mind the lack of attendance by others, because it was more convenient for them to have lunch earlier. Furthermore, even with the expectation set by the building principal that teams would collaborate weekly, Olga shared, "We did not meet unless we needed to." That need was determined based on upcoming big assessments or the need to share what assignments students were missing before report cards. When prompted further about the expectation set forth by district and building administration, Olga simply stated, "What the district needs to do is understand that it's going to take teachers time--well, some of the older teachers--time to understand that they have to share information about what their students are doing." This statement demonstrated Olga's journey with the implementation of professional learning communities. Even though Bookworm Elementary School had been working through implementation for five years, she was still not ready to collaborate with her team for the purpose of changing her practice.

Professional learning community implementation forced participants to step outside of their comfort zone and try new things. Those who were not willing to put forth the energy, or those who did not find value in the work, were not just ruining the experience for themselves but also their colleagues. Some collaborative teams began acting out of convenience by doing what was easiest for them. Other teams were heavily influenced by a staff member who was disengaged in the work that the team was doing. Either way, acting out of convenience had a profound impression on the implementation process.

Participants who did not lead with their hearts did not find value in relationships with their colleagues. Either by choice or force, some participants did not appreciate the knowledge that others possessed. Those who did not lead with their hearts did not feel that the collaborative

structure and guided questions were worth the trouble to implement the professional learning community model.

Summary

Participants who led with their heart went through the implementation process looking through a relational lens to participate in and build professional learning communities. Participant examples and testimonies fell into two distinct categories: those who lead with their heart and those who did not. These dispositions shaped not only how participants viewed their team members and students, but also how they viewed the implementation of professional learning communities and the effect that they had on professional practices. Those who led with their hearts were driven by their supportive team and did what was best for students at any cost. Working with team members who did not value relationships was difficult for those who led with the heart, and they resisted working with colleagues until the relationship had been developed. Those who lead with the heart needed to feel that the work they were doing would help students and viewed everything from a team perspective. For those who led with their heart, the power of education laid in relationship and community building, so that long after meetings ended, they could use each other as a support system.

Those who did not lead with their heart, either by choice or force, struggled to find value in sharing information with their colleagues. They valued their independence, and while they were willing to work hard to get results, they often viewed collaborative meetings as a waste of time. Others who did not lead with their heart saw nothing wrong with their current, isolated practices. They felt that others should adjust to their structure and style of teaching, and they were not interested in new ideas. For those who did not lead with their heart, professional learning communities held little value.

While two distinct sides of this personality were evident in the specific stories that participants shared, these categories held some stability in this study for the duration of my encounter with the participants. The sides were delineated for explanation purposes, but it is possible for overlap to occur between the two contradictory sides in other professional learning community contexts. There may be times when someone who leads with the heart can become fatigued, or when someone who does not lead with the heart does whatever it takes to help their students. Participants in this study shared examples that showed a clear preference, but this does not imply that their experiences are fixed and that their preferences are immutable.

Leading With the Brain? The Scarecrow

Participants who lead with their brain are driven by data and research-based best practices. This disposition informs how they approach a professional learning community, as those who lead with their brain are interested in specific strategies that are used to help students master concepts. They are not interested in making decisions based on feelings and perceptions. Those who do not lead with their brain do not see value in sharing strategies with others and want to spend their collaboration time discussing management items and behavior. Figure 4.2 shows the categories used for this theme, which I explain in more detail below.

Figure 4.2: The Scarecrow. Categories for this theme were chosen based on an analysi

s of codes. Through this process, it became evident that there were conflicting personalities embedded into the theme, as listed above. The catego

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Data-Informed Decision Makers

Participants who led with their brains were only interested in making data-informed decisions. During collaborations, participants who had this preference expected their team to either bring data or have it pre-entered into a common document, focus their conversation around the data and what can be inferred from it, and leave with a plan of what the next data points will be. They did not appreciate team members who wanted to discuss unrelated topics, or who did not have their data ready to discuss. Those who were data driven struggled to understand and relate to others who relied on their 'teacher gut' to describe student mastery.

Susan was a strong participant in this category, stating that her goal for her team was to "be more systematic with [their] data." She described how they would share whatever was relevant at the time, but they did not ensure that they followed up on re-teaching or creating common formative assessments in time. She wanted to push her team past just looking at data or making obvious observations to the level in which they were "focusing on tiers one, two, and three intervention grids" to adjust supports for specific students. This could only be done through a more systematic approach in which the team created common formative assessments, set deadlines to have data entered into a common document, and came prepared to discuss specific strategies to fill specific conceptual gaps. Susan felt that the conversations during collaborative meetings should be about "only student data" and that all other topics should be discussed during

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informal team meetings. She did not appreciate using collaboration time to discuss things that could quickly be decided in an email or over lunch. Bonnie shared this same viewpoint, stating that the "focus should just be data" and not other topics, such as schedules or behavior. However, when describing her team, Bonnie took this idea further and shared that her team only used "hard core data," which eliminates what team members thought or felt about student mastery. Instead, they focused on the question, "Do we have the data to prove it?" This intense focus on data allowed both Susan and Bonnie to illustrate how they preferred to make decisions on their team about student interventions or enrichment plans.

Those who were data-driven appreciate the conversations found in the structure of a professional learning community. While having a collaborative conversation without data is possible, answering the four guiding questions would not be.

More, Please!

Participants who led with their brains were frequently interested in continued professional learning, so much so that they sought it out on their own. During collaborative meetings, those who sought professional learning were always looking for ways to increase their structure and elevate their conversations. They were completely comfortable sharing new learning, but they expected others on their team to implement what they had learned without hesitation. Participants were irritated by others who waited for professional development to be planned by the building principal, as they were willing to plan and implement their new learning.

When detailing what the implementation process looked like and what continued professional development staff at Bookworm Elementary School had received, Susan shared that many staff members had stated that, "ultimately, we just need more training." Specifically, she looked for articles and books to read, anything written or influenced by Rick or Rebecca DuFour,

the founding creators of the professional learning community model used for this study. The information she learned was still broad-based, and she struggled to apply what she learned to her specific situation. Susan also stated that, personally, she would like to receive more building-level professional development and to revisit more frequently "what a true professional learning community looks like." She felt that it was easy for teams to get lost in the variety of tasks teachers are asked to do and noted that conversations could drift from the four guiding questions. After a group of people went to the national Professional Learning Community Summit, Susan spoke with them to gain insight into what she could do better on her team. After that, Susan made plans to lead a book study with her team.

Participants like Susan were the champions of continued professional development. They were actively engaged in continuing not only their personal growth with professional learning community implementation, but also the growth of their teams. They expected others to be as excited about continued learning as they were and grew frustrated at the thought of others not implementing what was learned. This self-motivated desire to learn allowed these participants and their teams to expand their understanding and implementation of a professional learning community.

I Like to Use My Brain When I Come to Work

Participants who led with their brain appreciated how professional learning community conversations pushed their thinking and ability to analyze student data. Those with this preference were enthusiastic about solving their problems with their team members. They were not motivated by someone else telling them specifically what to do or how to fix a problem. They liked to take part in action research projects and were completely comfortable taking suggestions and ideas from others.

Susan repeatedly talked about how she pushed her team members to engage in specific conversations about weekly formal and informal data. Her team shared "formative and summative" results and used those results to design "meaningful re-teaching opportunities." By addressing student learning concerns as a team, each member felt that they were being treated as the professionals that they were. With their years of experience and a variety of advanced degrees, they had all of the tools they needed to do what was best for their students. Furthermore, even though Kayla did not lead with her brain, I coded her interviews predominantly in this category. She approached student learning from the perspective of "this is my end goal, so how do we get there?" She also stated that she found it helpful to "just sit down and say what is going on, and how do we fix it?" As a special education teacher at the school, she did not have a team at the building level. Based on her responses to the interview questions, it was evident that while Kayla might appear as not leading with her brain, she might if she had a site-based professional learning community with whom to collaborate with. When asked about what struggles she had faced, she stated, "I like to use my brain when I come to work." Her current structure did not allow her to collaborate and apply her knowledge with other grade-level teams, which was her ultimate goal.

With or without a professional learning community, participants appreciated feeling like they had ideas to offer others. When given the opportunity, Susan and Kayla took full advantage of using their collaborative meeting time and structure to solve their problems. They both felt completely comfortable openly sharing their students' data with their team, as well as implementing suggestions for new strategies to try.

Those who led with their brains approached collaborative meetings with a data focus, eager to share and discuss a variety of data points. They wanted to use their pedagogical

knowledge to improve the learning for all students. In the next section, I provide descriptions from the narratives that participants shared that created the categories for those who did not lead with their brains.

I'm a Professional

During the analysis process, it became clear that certain participants held tightly to the belief that they were professionals and should be treated as such. Believing one was a professional implied not needing a team with which to share ideas with. Participants who felt this way did not find value in brainstorming as a team, as they felt that they could solve their own problems based on their past experiences. This belief had a dramatic effect on how those participants felt during the implementation process and the ways they interacted with their team members.

For example, Olga shared that she would often get irritated while meeting with her team, as she did not think that it was necessary to use spreadsheets or other data collection methods. She stated that when it came to data, she "had it all in the back of [her] mind" and did not see the need to formally document anything. Olga also did not appreciate having to record strategies that she had tried with a student as documentation. She was passionate about her preference, stating that, overall, the structure of the professional learning community was "a bone of contention" for her, as she felt that she was not being treated as a professional who knew what she was doing. Olga felt it was a waste of time to look at data as an entire grade-level, and that all she needed to look at was the data for her class. Kayla shared this viewpoint, stating, "There needs to be more freedom" when discussing the collaboration structure that professional learning communities required. Specifically, Kayla was looking for flexibility to discuss new ideas that were not necessarily related to student data, such as the creation of sensory spaces. Sensory spaces defined

a support for students who struggle to manage sensory input and output on their own and, at times need a space to reset their senses. There were no data points used to determine when, or if, students needed to use such a space. Finally, while Susan did lead with her brain, she acknowledged that she could easily tell that other staff members were "bitter about [the data focus]." This bitterness came across when team members arrived unprepared, appeared irritated while sitting in meetings, and were not engaged in the conversations about different teaching strategies.

While some participants viewed professional learning communities as a way to be treated as professionals, others felt that the implementation was an infringement on their professional judgement, as it forced them to do things that they did not value. By setting specific questions to be answered, some were frustrated that they were forced to spend their collaboration time sharing strategies with other teachers when they wanted to use the time doing something on their own that they valued.

Coblabberation

Urban Dictionary defines coblabberation as "the conversation held between two or more people, usually during a social event, who discuss ideas and possible collaborative activities only to have all efforts fall flat and nothing become of it" (www.urbandictionary.com). Any conversation that is coblabberation would not be considered part of the professional learning community format for collaboration. The collaborative conversations of a professional learning community are structured around four guiding questions: What do we want students to know? How will we know if they have learned it? What will we do for the students who already know it? What will we do for students who don't learn it? Throughout the interviews, all five participants discussed, in some manner, the template that the building principal expected teams

to use at Bookworm Elementary School (Appendix E). This form was meant to serve as a guiding document for teams during collaborations. However, it was up to each team to interpret the questions with depth, which did not always happen.

When asked to bring an object that demonstrated their understanding of professional learning communities, Bonnie, Susan, and Harper each brought the note form designed by their principal. Susan brought just the form, while Bonnie and Harper brought their binders with pictures of their team in the front and all of their team note pages inside. The two participants who did not bring their notes pages were also the two participants who expressed that what they felt is important to talk about during collaboration meetings were management items. When asked what words I would hear in a collaboration meeting, Olga stated I would frequently hear discussions related to field trips, scheduling, management, deadlines, making sure student names are correct, and behavior management systems. However, what Olga was "most concerned about [was] missing assignments" from students and having time to talk with her team members about which students were missing which assignments. When asked this same question, Harper expressed her irritation with these conversations, stating that when she was able to attend a grade-level's collaboration meeting, she was frustrated to listen to conversations about "testing and grades and things the teachers have to enter" instead of focusing on student data. As a special education teacher, Harper was unable to attend all collaboration meetings. On the rare occasion that she was able to attend, she hoped the conversation would be one that she could participate in by hearing what specific strategies the team felt their shared students would benefit from. She recalled that "a lot of what was talked about this year was scheduling" instead of strategies and alternative teaching techniques. Harper also discussed one team meeting at which the team "wasn't totally sure what [they] were talking about," which increased her level of

frustration. After being disappointed with the lack of collaborative conversations, Harper stopped trying to attend grade-level collaborations. When asked what the next steps were for professional learning community implementation, Olga stated that the building principal needed to "make sure that teachers [were] allowed to talk about things other than what kids [were] learning." Participants' viewpoints of what should be talked about during a collaborative meeting influenced the effect that implementing a professional learning community had on the participants professional responsibilities.

Olga and Harper both shared examples of how simply creating a form with guiding questions did not automatically change team conversation from coblabberation to collaboration. Each participant understood the guiding questions to mean different things, and therefore applied them to their conversations differently. However, each participant was able to state that her team did use the notes form provided by the building principal. In order to truly engage in collaboration instead of coblabberation, staff must be willing to use specific student data to engage in conversations about the state standards.

Let's Talk About Behavior

For some participants, student behavior was a big topic of discussion at professional learning community collaboration meetings. Some participants felt that they were doing the work of a professional learning community through their application of the four questions to specific behavior concerns they had.

During the object-elicited interviews, Olga and Kayla both shared items dealing with student behavior. Olga brought a fidget spinner (Appendix F), and when asked how this item related to professional learning communities, she stated that it was a main topic of her team's discussions throughout the year. The team had decided that the fidget spinners would not be

allowed in classrooms, yet students continued to bring them to school. When asked to describe a typical collaborative meeting, Olga shared that frequent topics included things that students brought from home, fidget spinners, missing assignments, behavior concerns, students who were not working during class time, and brain breaks. In general, she stated that her conversations with her collaborative team "gave [her] more of a sense of the behavior--not necessarily learning concerns, but behavior concerns." I then asked Olga if her team answered the four guiding questions that were provided, and she replied, "Yes, when we discussed what we wanted students to learn at our grade-level, we decided we wanted them to learn responsibility to turn their work in on time." Her team decided this at the beginning of the year, and it became their focus. With behavior being the most pressing item in their minds, Olga's team did not understand the true nature of a professional learning community, nor what the four guiding questions were designed to elicit.

Instead of bringing an object, Kayla took me to visit the sensory space in her classroom (Appendix G). This space was a small space in the room that she taught in that contained a variety of calming smells, fidgets, and weighted items. Kayla shared that through her district-level collaborative meetings, she had the opportunity to learn about different types of sensory items she could request through the district office. She continued to partner with both the occupational therapist and physical therapist to build a sensory space for her classroom. She shared that the creation of this space had "changed [a student's] entire day." Even though Kayla's team collaborations were focused on student behavior, she had still managed to find value in them.

Without proper professional development on the four guiding questions of a professional learning community, the structured conversation was left open for the teams to interpret. The

danger in such a move is that teams were likely to believe that they were acting as professional learning communities when they were not. When not all of the discussions are creating change in student learning outcomes, they did not meet the purpose of creating a professional learning community.

Participants who did not lead with their brains were most irritated with collaborative meetings' sole focus being on student data. They would rather have the freedom to discuss student behavior and other upcoming events with their teams. However, these types of conversations that are not rooted in student data do not fit into the four guiding questions of a professional learning community.

Summary

Participants fell into one of two distinct sides: those who led with their brain and those who did not. This personality trait shaped how the participants wanted to run their professional learning community collaborations and the topics that they felt were important to discuss as a team. Those who led with their brain went through the implementation process preferring to use an evidence-based lens to inform their practices. Those who led with their brain were driven by analyzing student data and determining specific strategies to use to help students achieve mastery.

Those who did not lead with their brain, approached professional learning community discussions from more of their "gut" experience with students. They wanted to discuss management items and student behavior, and they felt that they should be trusted to do what they needed to do in their classrooms without providing proof.

Like the previous thematic narrative, the dispositions presented in this section represent a freeze frame of the participants' preferences. However, the participants themselves were able to

move between the two columns presented in Figure 5, and the broader context of a professional learning community. There could be participants in this study who have dispositions that blur the boundary between the two sides of this preference. A participant could also occupy multiple preferred spaces, leading with both the heart and also lead with the brain. Conversely, one could not lead with the heart or the brain as their disposition. Therefore, there were multiple ways in which a participant's disposition could be mapped across these thematic classifications.

Leading With Courage: The Lion

Participants who led with courage were driven by their willingness to implement new ideas quickly. This disposition informed how the participants approached a professional learning community format, as those who led with courage were eager to be completely transparent with their data and what strategies they had tried. They were not interested in listening to people complain or wasting time with people's excuses. Those who did not lead with courage hid behind barriers and unclear expectations. Figure 4.3 shows the categories informing this theme, and I explain these categories in more detail below.

Fig ure 4.3 : Th

e Lion. Categories for this theme were chosen based on an analysis of codes. Through this process, it became evident that there were conflicting per

sonalities embedded into the theme, as listed above. The categories listed on the right describe the participants who lead with courage while

the cat ego ries on the left des cri be the par tici pan ts wh o do not lea d wit h cou rag e.

Putting It All on the Table

Participants who led with courage were ready to throw everything on the table and get to work. They were not embarrassed or scared to share the ugly truth about what was going on in the classroom and with student data. This category was closely connected with the "Those Are My People" category in that the participants who felt a solid connection and level of trust with their teammates were therefore more willing to be completely open and honest with each other. In a collaborative meeting, those who led with courage were able to maximize their time with their team members and focus completely on student learning.

When describing her views on professional learning community collaborations, Susan shared that she was always prepared to "bring up the uncomfortable topics" with her team. These uncomfortable topics included things such as student assessment data, instructional strategies that did not result in student mastery, and faulty assessment questions. When asked why she was able to be comfortable sharing the uncomfortable, Susan stated that she believed "building relationships" with her team had made all the difference in how their professional learning community functions. Susan went on to say that her grade-level team was just as willing to share because they were all "comfortable with one another" and had developed a high level of trust. She gave credit to their team norms, which allowed her team to set the stage from day one as a safe place to share anything. From Susan's perspective, strong relationships were key to her leading with courage.

Through the interview process, it became clear that Bonnie also led with courage. During one interview, Bonnie stated that she found collaborations much more effective and "enjoyable" when her team was able to "put everything on the table instead of e-mailing back and forth." While e-mail is sometimes deemed to be a more efficient way to communicate, Bonnie understood the value of face-to-face meetings with her team as another way to build relationships. She stated that sometimes the context was lost in e-mail communication, and that could cause some team members to get upset. Instead, Bonnie knew the importance that maintaining "positive communication" had on the team being able to openly and honestly share information with each other.

Those who led with courage believed in the importance of having brutally honest conversations with their teammates during collaboration meetings. However, they knew that this was only possible when trusting relationships were the basis of the conversations.

Willing to Try Anything

Those who led with courage were also unafraid to take risks with their teaching. They were humble enough to look to other professional colleagues for new ideas and strategies to try with students. They were willing to look beyond their grade-level team when necessary for new ideas, including colleagues in their building or district and those found via social media. Those who led with courage were unafraid to fail; however, when failure occurred, they openly shared this with their team. Ultimately, those who led with courage were willing to try anything to maximize student success.

Susan led her professional learning community with courage, and during the interviews, she was almost shocked at the possibility that other educators might be resistant to try new things. When describing a typical professional learning community collaboration, Susan stated that really, her team was "just skimming the surface" with helping students. She stated that her team stayed focused on the four guiding questions, but that the conversations could have gone much deeper to analyze student errors and discuss specific teaching strategies based on the errors made. When asked what was holding her team back from having these deeper conversations, Susan stated that time was a major factor. Collaborations were built into the weekly schedule for forty minutes, and Susan said this was just not enough time. As a result, sometimes her team would also "plan at a separate time, like lunch." The willingness to give up their lunchtime in order to continue the professional learning community conversations showed that Susan and her team were devoted to trying anything in order to maximize student learning.

Likewise, during the interviews, Kayla shared her willingness to do anything to help her students. As a special education teacher, Kayla viewed this from two different angles. First, she talked about her experiences with her collaborative team, which was made up of other special

education teachers in the district. During one of their collaborative conversations, Kayla recalled that she shared her frustrations about the lack of progress one of her students was making. Another special education teacher in the district began explaining what she did, and they decided it would be beneficial if Kayla found time to visit her classroom. Without hesitation, Kayla found time after school to visit the other school. When describing the experience, Kayla had tears in her eyes. She said that being able to see the other teacher in action and then implement what she did resulted in a turning point for this particular student. Specifically, Kayla said that the new strategies "really changed his day" and allowed him to feel successful for the first time that year. Had Kayla not been willing to do whatever it took, this student would most likely have continued to struggle.

Second, as a special education teacher, Kayla was also sought after by grade-level collaborative teams in her home building. These meetings occurred during the instructional day, so Kayla did not attend them in person. However, she shared that she could tell which teams were willing to try anything because they would ask to meet with her before or after school to bring her into the conversation. She admired their perseverance and shared that she wished more teams would ask themselves, "What else could we be doing?" based on non-classroom teachers' "area of expertise." While Kayla did not claim to have all of the answers, her professional learning looked much different than what classroom teachers experienced. She discussed how this different viewpoint and perspective were not always something that grade-level collaborative teams took advantage of. She acknowledged that in order for this to happen, grade-level teams would have to be willing to meet at times outside of their scheduled professional learning community collaboration.

Both Susan and Kayla led with courage, and within that they are always eager to try new things or collaborate with other professional colleagues. While this approach came risks and sometimes failure, both Susan and Kayla only discussed the successes they had by being willing to try anything to help their students.

Participants who led with courage were not afraid to be vulnerable with their collaborative team. They were willing to share data, successes, and failures. With little time available to meet as a collaborative team, participants who led with courage did not hesitate to get down to business answering the guiding questions. In the next section, I expand upon the narratives the participants shared that led to the categories that described those who did not lead with courage.

But . . .

Those who did not lead with courage were quick to share reasons why the professional learning community model was not working as well as intended. These were not excuses, but rather barriers that existed and had to be overcome. The difference between those who led with courage and those who did not was that those who led with courage were willing to do whatever it took to overcome those barriers, while those who did not were waiting for others to remove the barriers for them.

One barrier that was discussed by all five participants was the lack of time to meet as a professional learning community. Bookworm Elementary School followed the plan set forth by the district, which allowed each grade-level team 40 minutes per week to meet as a collaborative team. The district also had early-release days approximately two times each month, which provided all staff with 60 additional minutes to meet as a collaborative team. However, when discussing a typical collaborative meeting, Susan stated that her team "would never get an

opportunity to discuss reading" because they ran out of time. Susan acknowledged that her team followed the collaboration template (Appendix E) and stayed on topic, but the conversations were too extensive to complete in the amount of time they had. Bonnie shared similar experiences and noted that she wished they had "more time" to "make a plan of action" when discussing student data. She felt that the "lack of time" forced her team to rush their conversations, at times skipping over important topics that needed to be discussed.

Olga, Kayla, and Harper all expressed their frustration with how the lack of time affected the certified support staff, who only met as a collaborative team during early release times. Harper recalled this lack of time, stating "it wasn't very often" that she got to meet with other special education teachers. The lack of time to meet with those in her field left Harper feeling isolated. Kayla shared Harper's feelings, stating that the special education teachers "need more time to just be together" to share ideas, discuss struggles, and create a bond with each other. From a classroom teacher's standpoint, Olga stated that the special education teachers rarely attended grade-level collaboration meetings. When asked to share more, she said that "it became difficult to get other members of the staff involved in the collaborative team when they had their responsibilities, as well." Based on information shared by the participants, the structure outlined to create time for staff to implement professional learning communities was not designed to include all certified support staff. The only way that certified support staff could attend grade-level meetings was if that team met outside of the duty day. While some teams and staff were willing to do this, those who did not lead with courage were waiting for the structure to change so that all staff could be included in the meetings.

Another barrier that was discussed was the lack of professional development surrounding professional learning communities. When asked about the first time she remembered hearing

about professional learning communities, Susan stated that she read an article in one of her college classes. However, it was not a topic for discussion in any of her classes. When Susan accepted her job at Bookworm Elementary School, she "did not really understand what the concept of a professional learning community was" and looked forward to additional professional learning opportunities. While her hopes were originally high, Susan shared that since joining Bookworm Elementary School seven years ago, professional development has been provided by the building administrator, but it has typically been just a few hours at their back-to-school professional development meetings. While some staff in the district had attended the national Professional Learning Community Summit, Susan noted that she "has not had a deeper understanding . . . by going through a professional training." With the lack of professional development, Susan stated that she believed her team was doing the best that they could to implement a true professional learning community. When asked what supports she needed, Susan shared that she would like to see "some better guiding line items" on their agenda template. The current agenda had the four guiding questions and each content area, but she felt that those were left up to interpretation too often. Susan believed that if the agenda had better questions to prompt team discussions, the conversations would go to a deeper level.

While there were many barriers to implementing a professional learning community, participants from Bookworm Elementary School believed that lack of time and lack of professional development were two main ones they experienced. Through these barriers, it was evident that each participant still believed in the professional learning community model but struggled to implement it as designed. When faced with a barrier, those who led with courage were ready to think outside the box and create a solution. Those who do not lead with courage

were ready to share their concerns, but they waited for someone else to remove the barrier for them.

What Do You Want From Me?

Those who did not lead with courage needed clear expectations. They did not appreciate open-ended or guiding questions, but rather desired clear and consistent guidelines. Participants who did not lead with courage shared frustrations in the ambiguity found in their professional learning community collaborations. They related this back to the implementation process and lack of ongoing professional development surrounding professional learning communities. Those who did not lead with courage struggled to believe in the professional learning community model because they simply did not know if what they were doing was correct or not. They were eager to hide behind ambiguity, which allowed them to not take responsibility for student learning.

Some participants described ambiguity from early on in the implementation process. When discussing the specific implementation process that Bookworm Elementary School used, Harper stated that she "didn't feel prepared enough," even after receiving professional development on professional learning communities. She stated that while she understood the concept, actually implementing the model was more difficult than she expected. Harper shared that during professional development, the model seemed simple; however, when she met with her team, she was not getting much out of the collaborative conversations because the four guiding questions were being answered at face value. Likewise, when describing a typical collaboration meeting, Kayla stated she was "confused as to what they are wanting to get out of it sometimes." During collaborative meetings, Kayla shared that the team would follow the agenda the principal required them to use, but the questions were too broad to spark a deep conversation. This left the team believing that they were holding a professional learning

community conversation, when instead, they were not getting much accomplished. Even though both Kayla and Harper received professional development on the model, they were not prepared to implement professional learning communities with their teams.

Participants who did not lead with courage preferred to have clear and consistent expectations set, with little room for variance. Without these expectations in place, participants openly shared their frustrations with the process. For example, Olga shared that throughout the implementation, she was "looking for more guidance" from administration because she "didn't know what was expected" during collaborations. She shared that her team focused a lot on students who had missing assignments because that was an issue that they felt was important. Instead of talking about specific learning standards and content, they proceeded through the four guiding questions with the goal of work completion. When her team was told this was not supposed to be the focus, Olga expressed her frustration and stated what she needed was for administration to just tell her "this is what I would like to see you do" or even provide "some specific examples of what a professional learning community might do." Olga shared that it was frustrating for her when her team was told they were not correctly collaborating. When describing what was needed next, she became more emotional and appeared defeated. From what Olga shared, it was evident that she had tried her best to implement professional learning communities; however, when she received this feedback from her administration, she simply gave up. Looking to the future, without more specific professional development and coaching, Olga did not plan to try to implement professional learning communities again.

Susan shared many of the same desires as Olga. Susan had the opportunity to visit other grade-level collaborations, and as a member of the building leadership team, she also analyzed building-wide data. When describing what she felt the next steps for the building were, Susan

shared that the staff needed to go back to reviewing the model again to make sure all staff understood the "purpose of [professional learning communities] and how they can be beneficial to student learning." While this was reviewed early on in the implementation, it had not been reviewed recently. When discussing the effects that the lack of continued professional development surrounding professional learning communities had, Susan shared that she believed over time, staff had forgotten what the purpose was and had gotten off track. She then stated that to help with this, the leadership team needed to clearly "define what [collaborations] should look like and what it should not look like." Without these clear expectations, Susan believed it had become too easy for teams to lose focus and create excuses for lack of student achievement. Susan's viewpoint on what the next steps for Bookworm Elementary School should be specifically addressed removing frustrations for those who did not lead with courage. By clearly stating expectations and providing specific examples of what professional learning community conversations should sound like, those who did not lead with courage would know the exact expectations.

Those who did not lead with courage struggled with ambiguous expectations. They wanted to do what was expected but were defeated when they missed the mark. To help, concise and specific guidelines were needed along with examples. The four guiding questions were too vague for those who did not lead with courage as they did not automatically require the depth that was needed.

Participants who did not lead with courage were not problem solvers, even when they had identified issues that were impeding the implementation of a professional learning community. They could be quick to blame others or the structure as a whole instead of offering solutions. Participants who did not lead with courage needed clear examples of the work that was expected

of them in order to be successful. When left to their own accord, they tended to answer questions at the surface level instead of how they were intended to be answered.

Summary

When describing their experiences implementing a professional learning community, all five participants passionately shared different aspects. Within their passion, a theme of courage was found. Those who led with courage did not let anything stand in their way. If they were confused by something or needed more information, they sought it out on their own. They were risk takers, eager to learn from failures and do whatever was needed to increase student achievement. Those who led with courage were frustrated by those who did not lead with courage and their timid approach to professional learning communities. Contrastingly, those who did not lead with courage were afraid to fail. They hid behind barriers and waited for others to find solutions for obstacles that impeded professional learning communities. Those who did not lead with courage were frustrated with the lack of professional development and clear expectations from administration.

As with previous narratives, it was evident in this section that participants often overlap between multiple categories that informed various themes. Given that a participant could lead with heart, brain, and courage simultaneously, dynamics within a professional learning community can become complicated as dispositions cross between these categories.

Leading With Leadership? Dorothy

Participants who led with leadership were driven to accomplish goals and make the most of their time with their team. This personality informed how they approached a professional learning community, as those who led with leadership not only wanted to accomplish goals, but also to bring their team members along with them. They were motivated to make the most of

their team and be as productive as possible. Those who did not lead with leadership struggled to

feel confident when making decisions and understand the purpose of their team. Figure 4.4

shows the categories used for this theme, which I explain in more detail below.

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ed on an analysis of codes. Through this process, it became evident that there were conflicting personalities embedded into the theme, as listed abo

ve. The categories listed on the right describe the participants who lead with leadership while the categories on the left describe the participan

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Laser Focus

Those who led with leadership kept a laser focus during collaborative meetings. They did

not get distracted with things that did not explicitly address student learning. To keep this laser

focus, participants who led with leadership described different tools that they used to keep them

organized and on track. Those who led with leadership did not want to spend collaboration time

off topic or completing tasks. They preferred to spend this time discussing specific student

learning data and developing plans of action. Participants who led with leadership had a clear

understanding of the work of the professional learning community, and they worked hard to

accomplish it.

Susan led with leadership and used this ambition to keep the focus during collaborative

meetings on the four guiding questions. When describing a typical collaborative meeting, Susan

immediately said, "We focus on the data." When asked to elaborate, Susan shared that her team

starts by reviewing recent student data they had previously agreed to bring. The team first

identified students who had mastered the standard or concept assessed to determine if those

students needed enrichment. If they did, a specific plan was developed. The team then moved to

look at students who did not master the standard or concept. Susan continued, stating "If they

didn't, we would determine how we were going to address [their struggles]". Susan shared that this part of the conversation took the longest and, at times, included analyzing specific work samples to look for misconceptions or re-teaching opportunities. At times, other staff members were consulted, as well. Susan stated that many times this conversation did not get completed in one collaborative meeting and had to be continued at a later time or via email. However, because of her leadership, the conversation was never forgotten. Susan kept her team laser focused on the four guiding questions during collaborative meetings.

When asked to describe what tools helped her keep track of unfinished conversations, Susan discussed the professional learning community template that was used at Bookworm Elementary School (Appendix E). She referred to the "weekly template" being used to "guide discussions" and keep her on track. Susan also mentioned that she would make sure that everyone on the team and the building administrator would get a copy of the template after each meeting so that everyone had the same information. During one interview, Bonnie also discussed how the template helped keep her focused during collaborative meetings. Specifically, she said that "it guides [her] focus" so that other topics do not derail the conversation. When asked what she meant, Bonnie clarified and stated that sometimes team members wanted to discuss field trips or personal issues, but if she had the template in front of her, she could keep her team focused on what they needed to discuss. While Bonnie kept the team focus, the template was a tangible item that she could refer to when the discussion went off topic. While all teams were required to use this template, Bonnie and Susan both used it to anchor their collaborative conversations and maintain a laser focus on student learning.

Three out of the five participants also used a binder to stay organized and keep their focus on student learning. During the object-elicited interviews, Bonnie and Harper brought their

binders with them. Interestingly, they used them for different purposes. When talking about her binder, Bonnie shared that "everything is here." As we walked through the sections, she had her lesson plans, her collaboration templates, her assignment checklist, her standard checklist, her student roster with important family notes, and her monthly calendar. For Bonnie, keeping everything in one place ensured that she would always have the data that she needed and could adjust her lesson plans immediately. She also stated that she liked to review old collaboration notes to ensure that she had implemented everything her team had discussed. Susan's binder was similar to Bonnie's and contained many of the same items. However, Susan also pointed out that she kept her objectives in her binder. When taking a closer look, Susan shared that these were "objectives that [she] needs to achieve, although they aren't always achieved." By listing them out and looking at them multiple times a day, Susan was able to keep her focus on student learning. Harper's binder served a different purpose. In the front, she had a picture of her Young Life group and her students, which were her passion. Harper said that these pictures reminded her of what her purpose as an educator was, and she said that she always wanted to do what was best for students. Inside the binder, Harper showed a variety of old notes from college, professional development sessions, or articles and books she had read. These artifacts kept Harper's focus on student learning and gave her inspiration when she was feeling defeated. All three participants said that these binders go everywhere with them during the school year and that they would be lost without them.

Participants who led with leadership all desired to keep a laser focus on student learning and achievement during collaborative meetings. While they accomplished this through the use of different tools and strategies, underneath those was a passion for student learning and

achievement and a desire to do what is best for students. Those who led with leadership did not have time to spend on anything else.

Accountability and Productivity

Those who led with leadership were driven to accomplish tasks and used time wisely. They were focused on making the most out of their collaborative time and appreciated meetings that were productive. Participants who led with leadership described the benefit of establishing meeting norms as a collaborative team, as well as a variety of tools that helped team members hold each other accountable to each other.

As special education teachers, both Bonnie and Kayla worked with multiple grade-level collaborative teams. As such, they were a part of grade-level and special education collaborative meetings. When describing what she appreciated from these meetings, Bonnie stated meetings that were "efficient" were ones she looked forward to attending. When asked what efficient meant to her, Bonnie went on to say that these meetings had agendas, so she knew when to arrive for the conversations that pertained to her. She also knew that certain teams were "all about just getting stuff done" during collaboration meetings. Attending grade-level collaborative meetings was not easy for Bonnie, and when she did attend, she appreciated teams that did not waste her time with a lack of productivity. Kayla shared the same appreciation for attending "meetings that were super productive" and task oriented. Like Bonnie, it was difficult for Kayla to attend multiple meetings each week, so when she did attend a collaborative meeting it needed to be for a distinct purpose. Even though participating in professional learning communities was not easy for Kayla due to her being a member of multiple collaborative teams, she shared that collaboration meetings were "so much more productive than going and listening to people" present on topics that did not pertain to her. While attending every meeting might not have been

the best use of her time, Kayla still felt that implementing professional learning communities had a bigger influence on student learning than other professional development sessions she had attended. With the many scheduling demands placed on special education teachers, when Bonnie and Kayla were able to attend collaboration meetings, they both appreciated meetings that were focused and productive. When meetings started to veer off topic, both Bonnie and Kayla led with leadership and refocused the team.

As a classroom teacher, Susan shared many of the same sentiments as Bonnie and Kayla. When Susan was asked to describe how she kept her team focused during collaborative meetings, she went in depth to describe the effect that establishing common norms had on how her team functioned. Susan shared that during back-to-school professional development, her team would meet to review the professional learning community foundations. For her team, Susan said that it is always a "priority that [they] set norms, establish them, and share them" with the building principal. These norms served as promises to each other and included things such as being on time, bringing agreed-upon data, and staying focused. Susan said that her team would "always revisit" their norms at each meeting to set the tone. At times, the team needed to "refer back to them multiple times." Having agreed-upon team norms allowed members of the collaborative team to respectfully confront each other if needed. While it did not happen often, Susan stated that the norms served as a method for her team to hold each other mutually accountable to each other. Through the use of meeting norms and her leadership, Susan's team was able to make the most of their collaborative meetings.

Furthermore, Susan discussed her role on her collaborative team in terms of their notes template. Susan shared that this template was vital to keeping the conversation focused on what needed to be discussed. When discussing the template further, Susan stated that the template

originally was created during the first year that Bookworm Elementary School implemented a professional learning committee when the "principal discussed what she wanted to see" during collaborative meetings. Since then, the principal had continued to review the template at the beginning of each year. It had become "an accountability piece" to ensure that teams were regularly meeting. However, Susan stated that she never viewed the template as an accountability measure but, instead, had made it a "non-negotiable" for her team. Susan led her team through the different components of the template during each meeting and pushed her team to accomplish as much as they could. Susan said that using the template allowed her team to "make sure we were really outlining what the lesson should look like" instead of only discussing pacing guides. While it would be easy to put less effort into completing the collaborative meeting template, Susan's leadership on her grade-level team continued to push their conversations to a deeper level.

Those who led with leadership thrived in meetings that were productive and focused. They appreciated having established and enforced meeting norms that fostered mutual respect and were encouraged by the use of templates to guide conversations.

Follow Me!

Leading with leadership was about more than the needs of the participants. Participants who led with leadership openly shared the importance of helping members of their team understand professional learning communities. Those who led with leadership endeavored to create new paths when none existed in order to establish a solid foundation for collaboration. Participants who led with leadership thought about more than themselves and focused on the success of their team.

When describing teams that functioned as a professional learning community, participants described the forward thinking that at least one member on the team possessed. While Kayla did not have a building-based professional learning community, she attended multiple collaborative meetings at Bookworm Elementary School. She stated that teams that she believed to be the most successful had a leader who forced the entire team to take "ownership in the process," which in turn made them "buy into it more." Creating ownership was reflected in various ways, including setting common norms as a team, holding each other accountable for meeting deadlines, and committing to stay focused throughout collaborative meetings. While a building administrator can require these same things, Kayla believed that having a member of the team take the lead was what made the difference in the successfulness of the professional learning community. As a classroom teacher, Bonnie agreed with Kayla and also described how important leadership was on each team. However, Bonnie added that successful team leaders "know what a healthy professional learning community looks like." Based on her experiences, Bonnie felt that when someone on the collaborative team had a deep understanding of professional learning communities, their leadership was an invaluable component of leading a successful team. Informal leadership at the team level was described as being a factor in the overall success of the professional learning community implementation process.

Effective communication amongst team members and between other colleagues was a topic that was brought up multiple times by participants. Those who led with leadership found effective communication to be an area to which they were devoted. Bonnie, for example, repeatedly stated that "effective communication" was vital to collaborative meetings with her team. She described effective communication as listening, taking notes, and ensuring everyone on her team knew what the team had decided. For Bonnie, "making sure [her team was] all on

the same page was really important" in ensuring a successful collaborative meeting. Bonnie, who led with leadership, took it upon herself to take notes for her team members, copy the notes, and share them after the meeting. She would also send reminder emails before collaborative meetings so that every team member knew what to bring and was prepared. Likewise, Kayla was passionate about effective communication and the vital role it played in a professional learning community. As a special education teacher, this was increasingly difficult for Kayla, because she was relying on multiple grade-level teams to communicate with her, and she was not available to attend their collaborative team meetings often. As a leader, Kayla was committed to "finding ways to get everyone on the same page without having to speak to everyone." While she understood the value of meeting with colleagues in person, in her role, there was no way for her to accomplish this. Instead of complaining or giving up, Kayla was committed to finding a solution that allowed for the professional learning community collaborative conversations to occur, even with the constraints that she faced. Those who led with leadership were committed to creating structures that allowed for effective communication, which they felt was a vital component of a successful professional learning community implementation.

Throughout the interviews, Susan's passion for leadership was clear. When discussing her beliefs about what created a successful professional learning community implementation process, Susan shared that she believed the "success will depend on how they are established at the beginning of the year." When returning to a new school year at Bookworm Elementary School, the building principal revisited the foundational components of a professional learning community: shared mission, shared vision, shared values, shared goals, team norms, and the four guiding questions of collaborative meetings. Susan said that while reviewing these and re-establishing team norms, she could tell "who is willing to stick to the true professional learning

community model" by their body language and participation in the professional development session. She said that her colleagues who took the work seriously tended to be on more successful teams, in her opinion. When asked about her team, she said they were committed to the work and to each other. While she took the lead on creating agendas and starting team collaborations, her entire time was invested in the process and the work. When discussing the success of other teams, Susan shared that "it just depends on the leaders." With a strong leader on each collaborative team leading the commitment and work, Susan believed the team had a greater chance at functioning like a professional learning community.

Those who led with leadership understood that their impact came from changing the work of others. By leading their team in a way that allows each member to take ownership of the process, establishing effective communication practices, and modeling a commitment to the work Bonnie, Susan, and Kayla ensured that their team members were active participants in their professional learning community.

Participants who led with leadership kept a laser focus on student data in their collaborative team meetings. They put structures in place to keep team accountability mutual and productivity high. In the next, section I provide a narrative description of participants who did not lead with leadership.

What Are We Doing?

Participants who did not lead with leadership struggled to understand the purpose of a professional learning community, and throughout the implementation process, they did not understand the value of the collaborative structure. In this study, this viewpoint was brought out mainly by what other participants, who led with leadership, shared as outsiders looking into those teams. Participants who led with leadership were often irritated by those who did not lead

with leadership, as the contrast was evident during staff and leadership team meetings. At times, participants who led with leadership had to work closely with someone who did not lead with leadership, which caused friction, as described in the following paragraphs.

Those who did not lead with leadership were categorized as being clueless during collaborative meetings by those who did lead with leadership. When describing the collaboration meetings that other teams have, Susan stated the meetings "did not have clear objectives" or a focus. Because of this, meetings were often unproductive and seemed to cover an array of topics, such as field trips, who was going to make copies, and other upcoming events. Susan stated that teams were required to use the collaboration template, but that some teams would "just utilize it as proof rather than a purposeful document" to guide discussions. This was compounded by the lack of a leader on the team to hold the team members accountable. Those who do not lead with leadership -- and who do not have someone on their team who did -- would still turn in required documentation, but they would not necessarily complete it as it was intended. Bonnie added her perception of teams who functioned without a leader, stating that "there have been concerns, questions about the direction, the productivity" of their collaborative team meetings. She stated that those team members often expressed concerns about feeling as if the work that was being asked of them was pointless and just another requirement from the district. Without a leader who believed in the power of professional learning communities present to provide guidance and support, these teams were seen by others as oblivious to the work of the school.

Olga, unknowingly to herself, did not lead with leadership. Throughout her interviews, Olga expressed her frustration with professional learning communities as a top-down initiative that was not needed. In her opinion, the requirements were a waste of paper and time. When asked what her team focused on during collaborative meetings, Olga shared, "I do not know if

we concentrated on the students, but a lot of time it focused on the curriculum" and what lessons were being taught that week. When I asked her if her team co-planned lessons and shared instructional strategies, she stated that their time was really spent making sure everyone had the copies that they needed for the week. Susan had spent some time talking with Olga's team at one point, and when describing them, she said it appeared to her that "they were just kind of making lessons up and hoping they worked." Susan shared that this was in stark contrast to how her team functioned, which was to work together to identify standards, develop common assessments, share results, and develop action plans based on student data. Without a member of the team who led with leadership, Olga's team seemingly filled the requirements of the building and district, but they did not embrace the true work of a professional learning community.

Without a member of the team who led with leadership to guide their work, collaborative teams were left without guidance and understanding of what work they were supposed to be doing. In this study, participants who did not lead with leadership struggled to develop a true understanding of the work that was being required of them. However, they made no effort to seek to understand the purpose behind the work of their collaborative teams.

Pointing the Finger

Participants who did not lead with leadership were quick to blame others for their lack of understanding, success, and implementation of a professional learning community. There was a strong sense of emotion prevalent in this category as participants shared frustrations with the implementation process, the continued professional development opportunities, and the support offered.

Many participants expressed the desire for other colleagues outside of their team to attend collaborative meetings. When discussing a typical collaborative meeting, Harper described how

specific student needs were often discussed. While it helped to share struggles, Harper

mentioned how meetings would be more productive if support staff attended and could help

solve problems in the moment, but "she never came to any meetings." Bonnie shared this same

sentiment when describing her team meetings, except she believed "it would be nice if the

principal could come" to answer questions. Harper and Bonnie were freely willing to describe

how collaborative meetings would be better if others attended, but they did not ask them to

attend. Likewise, Olga's team was assigned a collaboration time by the building principal that

allowed the special education teacher to attend. Olga shared that her team did not like their

collaboration time, so they moved it to a different time of day. The new time, however, did not

allow for the special education teacher to attend because "she had things to do" at that time. Olga

appeared oblivious to the idea that the special education teacher was working with students at

that time and that it was not an option for her to attend the grade-level collaboration meeting. As

such, Olga was left feeling like "the support was not there" for teachers. Without support staff in

attendance at meetings, many participants felt that they were left to figure things out on their

own instead of with the support of others. This perceived lack of support made it easy for those

who did not lead with leadership to blame their lack of successful implementation on others.

Participants who did not lead with leadership also discussed their irritation with the lack

of continued professional development that was offered. Kayla struggled to answer the interview

questions at times due to her lack of understanding of what a professional learning community

was. She had worked at Bookworm Elementary School since the beginning of the

implementation process, but she still expressed a lack of confusion as to what a collaborative

meeting was supposed to look and sound like. At one point, she said, "If we talked about it, it did

not stick [with me]," but she admitted that she also did not ask for more professional

development or clarification. Likewise, Susan expressed her frustration with the lack of continued professional development offered at the district level. She stated that every year, the district sends a few staff members to the national Professional Learning Communities Summit, and that those staff members are asked to share their learning with staff across the district. However, Susan stated that "it was one of those things that just did not happen" throughout the year. For Susan, this was a source of frustration, as she was never offered an opportunity to attend and was not able to access the information from those who attended. Susan had a strong desire to continue her professional growth, and when sharing her experiences, she also expressed frustration with her colleagues' lack of willingness to participate. Susan, who led with leadership, struggled with those teachers who did not lead with leadership and their lack of willingness to continue their professional growth. She said that while she would love to do a book study on professional learning communities, she knew "a lot of people might not want to." Those who did not lead with leadership were not interested in taking control of their learning and professional growth, but instead were willing to complain and blame the administration and institution for their problems.

Participants who did not lead with leadership shared their frustrations concerning the lack of support and continued professional development that was offered pertaining to professional learning communities. Participants who led with leadership were willing to continue to take charge, while those who did not lead with leadership instead relied on blaming others for their lack of understanding.

Complacency

Participants who did not lead with leadership were described by others as having a sense of complacency towards professional learning community implementation and collaborative

team meetings. As other participants described typical collaborative meetings, their experiences with those who did not lead with leadership were brought up. Those who did not lead with leadership accepted their unproductive and unfocused collaborative meetings as the norm for professional learning communities.

When describing what a typical professional learning community collaborative meeting looked and sounded like, those who led with leadership described their frustrations with other teams. Recall that Kayla, a special education teacher, got to experience multiple collaborative team meetings. She noted that on certain teams, there was "way too much sitting around" and not enough action. For Kayla, time was always a precious resource. She found it irritating that some teams seemed to take their collaborative time together for granted. Instead of working efficiently, teams without a member who led with leadership struggled to be productive with their work. For Kayla, the teams who were "getting too complacent" with their collaborative meetings were ones she stopped trying to attend. She noted that there was a vast difference in the overall atmosphere for teams who were all working together and staying focused on student achievement. Likewise, Bonnie described her experience working alongside a team without a strong leader as "not really professional" in their interactions with each other. She stated that without someone on the team who had a clear understanding of the work of the professional learning community, the team members were quick to get off topic. Having a member of the team who leads with leadership is one way to avoid having a team become complacent in their collaborative work.

Without a member who leads with leadership on the collaborative team, meetings were not focused on the four guiding questions. Collaborative teams often shared agendas and meeting notes with each other, and Bonnie stated that the work towards discussing the four guiding questions on some teams was "kind of hit and miss." Without a member who leads with

leadership, teams did not have anyone to bring up uncomfortable topics and ask difficult

questions. Instead, it became easy for teams to become complacent with their work. As a special

education teacher, Harper noticed that some teams "were not very consistent" with their

conversations and work. As she was able to attend multiple collaborative meetings, Harper noted

a stark contrast between the conversations that occurred when a leader was present at the

meeting. Professional learning community conversations were not something that could happen

sporadically. As a member of a team without a leadership personality, Olga stated that she knew

her team "structure needed to be stronger." When describing a typical collaborative meeting,

Olga shared that her team would not focus on the template required by the building principal.

She and her teammates viewed the template as a document that took too much effort to complete.

Susan described other teams, like Olga's, as unproductive. She stated that for those teams, "the

four questions are just kind of up there" because they were required to be, not because members

were discussing them. Without a member who leads with leadership, teams quickly lost

concentration on the collaborative focus that should have been present in a professional learning

community meeting.

Those who did not lead with leadership expressed a general confusion when trying to

understand what teams were supposed to be doing during collaborative meetings, as well as what

the purpose of professional learning communities was. When something went wrong, they were

quick to place blame on their colleagues, building administration, district administration, or the

process as a whole.

Summary

Participants who led with leadership consistently disrupted the status quo amongst their

teams. They took charge and led collaborative meetings with a forceful approach, unafraid of

failure or defeat. The kept an unwavering focus on the four guiding questions of professional learning communities. Those who did not lead with leadership spent collaborative meetings discussing medial topics that did not focus on the four guiding questions. In this study, participants who led with leadership were overly willing to share their opinions of how other teams functioned, and they struggled to understand their colleagues who were on such teams.

Just as was found in previous narratives, participants often overlapped between the categories that informed the themes. It was possible for a participant to lead with heart, brain, courage, and leadership. Contrastingly, it was possible for a participant to lead with heart, brain, and courage, but not lead with leadership. As such, team dynamics within a professional learning community could become complex.

Chapter Summary

In this study I examined the experiences that five certified teachers had as Bookworm Elementary School implemented professional learning communities. The first five volunteers who met the selection criteria were selected. Participants for this study were either classroom teachers or special education teachers, but all five had worked at Bookworm Elementary School throughout the implementation process.

I sought to explore the valuable perspectives that teachers had from implementing a professional learning community. As primary implementers, teachers served as the respective experts of their experiences. As such, their stories and testimonies were invaluable when seeking to understand the implications from their experiences. Through multiple interviews, the five participants helped me understand the wide variety of aspects that made up four personality types that were similar to the four main characters in *The Wizard of Oz*. Participants who led with their hearts were akin to the Tin Man and were emotionally charged/driven by relationships with their

team and their students. Participants who led with their brains were akin to the Scarecrow and were intellectually charged/driven by academics and data. Participants who led with courage were akin to the Lion and were emotionally charged/driven by innovation and risk taking. Participants who led with leadership were akin to Dorothy and were emotionally charged/driven by personal beliefs and feelings. Within these four personalities, participants either did or did not lead with them, just as the characters in *The Wizard of Oz* spent time with and without their desired characteristic. Just as in the movie, these four personalities must cooperate and collaborate in order to achieve the final outcome.

For purposes of explaining the personalities, I kept participants fixed in their columns. However, in real life, it is plausible that a participant could fluctuate between personalities and lead with or without them depending on the specific situation they encountered. In the next chapter, I explain more about how the personalities relate to each other and the discourse that can occur throughout the varying combinations.

Chapter 5 - Photomontage, Cross-Comparison, and Discussion

The five participants in this study were all certified educators who taught at Bookworm Elementary School throughout the implementation of a professional learning community model. Through code and category analysis, four personalities were evident in their narratives. These personalities were similar to the four main characters in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*: the Lion, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and Dorothy. I mapped the five participants into categories for each of these personalities as those who led with the disposition and those who did not.

In Chapter 4, I explained where each participant was positioned in each of the four themes, using their words and experiences to navigate how they approached the implementation process of professional learning communities. In this chapter, I expand upon each of the five

participants though the use of photomontages. Each photograph in the photomontage was used to represent a disposition that the participant possessed. I explain why each photograph was chosen and how it relates to the implementation of a professional learning community model. While some of the photographs will be a clear translation of the participants' experiences, others are metaphoric. In using creative approaches, one has to be expansive and generative. Therefore, photomontage became a way for me to frame the disposition of each participant and their contexts and engage in creating insights that I could not generate otherwise.

After describing each participant, I then provide a cross-comparison analysis of all five participants. While understanding where the individual participants are mapped in the four identified personalities offers insight into how they navigate their professional responsibilities, understanding how the different personalities relate to each other and navigate situations together was crucial in determining how they implemented a professional learning community. Implementing a professional learning community model required the participants to collaboratively work together, however, the cross-comparison analysis made it evident that some personalities do not work well together on collaborative teams.

Bonnie

Bonnie had worked at Bookworm Elementary School as a classroom teacher for the past four years. During those four years, she remained at the same grade-level. Bonnie led with all four dispositions: heart, brain, courage, and leadership. Bonnie's photomontage is shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: **Bonnie.** The photomontage for Bonnie contains pictures that

represented her dispositions. Each picture was chosen to specifically exemplify how Bonnie approached and completed her professional respon

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Stained glass is known by many for its intricate patterns and vibrant colors. Each small detail plays an integral part in creating a bigger piece of art. Multiple small pieces of glass must all be in their exact positions, or the artwork could be ruined. Leading with her brain, Bonnie viewed the organizational components and structure needed for professional learning community implementation in a similar way. She organized every detail of her team's weekly collaborative meeting and put structures in place to ensure that nothing fell through the cracks. For Bonnie, there were many individual components vital to success: fully answering the four guiding questions, upholding team norms, documenting specific instructional strategies based on data analysis, and continuing to seek out additional professional learning opportunities. When all of these pieces were in place and worked together, Bonnie viewed the end result as a work of art.

Bonnies' desire for strong organization created tensions with those who did not keep all of the components strong. For example, Bonnie did not appreciate working with colleagues who did not meet deadlines or make decisions based on student data. Bonnie took pleasure in the binder that she brought during one interview, and she proudly showed off the components. It was almost as if her worth to her team was defined by the organizational structure that she

maintained. As such, it would be difficult for Bonnie to be on a collaborative team with those who do not lead with their brains.

Even with her strong desire for organization, Bonnie also enjoyed making waves and implementing new ideas, much like a whale diving into the ocean. Whales are notorious for flying into the air and then splashing down into the ocean water. For Bonnie, collaborative team meetings were most effective when her teammates were willing to make a splash with her. Instead of holding back data and teaching strategies, Bonnie instead preferred to put everything on the table without fear of ridicule or shame. During collaborative meetings, Bonnie eagerly shared student data with her team members, even when student performance was low. She was enthusiastic about learning from her colleagues and exploring new teaching strategies.

While Bonnie worked best with others who were willing to jump in with her and splash around, she was not slowed down by those who were reserved. During collaborative meetings, Bonnie could become irritated with team members who were hesitant to share data and strategies, but this did not stop her from persistently having the courage to make a splash in the conversation.

Bonnie led with her heart more than any other leadership disposition. Throughout her interviews, Bonnie repeatedly shared pictures of and stories about her team members. For Bonnie, her team was more than people with whom she happened to work. Instead, her team members were everything to her. Her heart was her lifeline. Without her personal connections to her team members, Bonnie would be lost while at work.

Tigers are well known for being savage and territorial. While this is an extreme view, these qualities existed in Bonnie in a subdued fashion. Thus, the tiger I chose to represent her is one that is caring, yet fierce. Bonnie shared many sentiments detailing how her team was the

most important thing to her and how she would do anything to protect them if needed. She consoled them when they were upset, defended them when they were questioned or attacked by others, and took a genuine interest in their well-being. Bonnie ensured that no member of her team missed a deadline. Instead, she would check in with team members frequently and offer to help if they were falling behind. This protective nature was engrained in Bonnie's core.

Like a bridge, Bonnie wanted to create connections to others. She never wanted anyone to be alone or to feel left out. Bonnie talked to everyone, even if she did not know them. She made others feel welcomed, appreciated, and valued. When faced with challenging decisions, Bonnie wanted to include everyone in the conversation so that no feelings were unintentionally hurt. During staff meetings, Bonnie made sure that everyone had a place to sit and that nobody had to stand off to the side. While not always appreciated by her colleagues, Bonnie found joy in making others feel valued.

There was a strong tension between Bonnie and those who do not lead with their hearts. Bonnie described a team member who did not value personal relationships and connections. Despite Bonnie's repeated efforts, this team member chose to eat lunch by herself each day. During collaborative team meetings, this team member sat with the team but would not participate beyond what was required of her. To Bonnie, this was the ultimate stab in the back. In all three interviews, Bonnie shared how hurt she was by this team member's actions. Leading so strongly with the heart, it was difficult for Bonnie to work with others who did not lead with theirs.

Last, much like a dog herds sheep, Bonnie took pride in keeping her team together. She corralled her team members and kept everyone going in the same direction. During the implementation of a professional learning community, Bonnie was willing to do extra research to

make sure that her team knew what they were supposed to be doing. She took notes during collaborative meetings, then copied them for each team member, so that everyone knew what was discussed and was aware of approaching deadlines. Bonnie viewed herself as a team leader and took responsibility for her team's successes and failures. She did this in a caring but firm way, just the same as a dog will nip at the sheep to keep them in line, but will not hurt them.

When faced with a rogue team member, Bonnie's stress level quickly rose. She put a lot of pressure on herself to keep the team together. When a teacher would stray Bonnie, viewed that team member's failure as her own. It was possible for Bonnie to work with someone who did not lead with leadership, but it was not easy for her to accept.

In summary, leading with all four personalities created a unique situation for Bonnie. She was passionate about her team members and students and would do anything for them. Leading with both heart and courage created a unique space for her. She prided herself on making sure that her colleagues felt included and would defend them to others. She protected her team members from any harm, including missed deadlines set by an administrator. At the same time, Bonnie led with her brain and leadership, which created some internal discontent. While she cared deeply for her colleagues, she also continued to set extremely high expectations and hold team members accountable to reach those expectations. Her team members were not offended by Bonnie's increased expectations because they knew that she cared about them and would help them along the way. Balancing these four leadership dispositions was something that Bonnie did well.

Harper

Harper, a special education teacher, had worked at Bookworm Elementary School for the past three years. She accepted the position there after college graduation and had never been a

classroom teacher. Harper led with heart and leadership, but not with courage or the brain. The

photomontage depicting Harper's dispositions is shown in Figure 5.2.

Fig ure 5.2*:* **Ha rpe r.** The pho to mo nta ge for Har per con tain s

pictures that represented her dispositions. Each picture was chosen to specifically exemplify how Harper approached and completed her professio

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Harper led with her heart. She valued her relationships more than anything else. During staff meetings, Harper arrived early to save seats for her team. She often brought their favorite drinks or a homemade treat to share. Throughout the day, Harper would check in with her team members multiple times to share stories through email or text. She was excited to spend lunch with her team members to hear more about their lives. For Harper, the development of genuine relationships was vital to her happiness. To keep herself grounded in stressful situations, Harper would often look at pictures of people she loved. In each of these photos, Harper was embracing the other people in a hug. She kept pictures with her wherever she went of her grade-level team and other colleagues with whom she was close. She took pride in bringing her team together and creating a family feel.

However, leading with her heart became a barrier for Harper when she had to work closely with those who did not lead with their hearts. For example, Harper enjoyed having lunch

with her team members every day. One of her team members preferred to eat alone and did not value social interactions like Harper did. Harper was distraught over this and struggled to understand why anyone would rather be alone than with the group. This same team member also preferred to sit somewhere else during staff meetings and really only interacted with others when she was required to do so. Harper tried, over and over, to create a relationship with this team member, until she finally realized that it was not going to happen. When talking about her team to others and planning upcoming social events, Harper eventually stopped associating this person with her team. In the pictures that she loved so dearly, Harper did not have one that included this team member. The lack of a relationship between the two, in turn, shaped how Harper viewed her teammate as an educator.

Harper viewed implementing new ideas in the school much like a game of tug of war. She, along with others who lead with leadership, were on one side of the rope working to pull the non-believers along. This did not pertain to any single change effort, but instead was the daily style for Harper. When sitting in a staff meeting or professional development session, she always remained positive about new initiatives, changes, or reminders that were given. When given a new task, Harper immediately thought about what she needed to do to make it happen. However, because she led with leadership, Harper thought about others as much as, if not more than, herself. When looking at a task that needed to be accomplished, Harper made sure that others were also implementing what had been agreed upon. Most of the time, this became more like pulling others along with her. During a collaborative team meeting, Harper was the first one to bring up new items that needed to be implemented. She was often met with silent protest and a lack of volunteers to help. Harper had learned to meet this silence with addressing the reasons behind the change or initiative, or why it was important to follow the structure of the

professional learning community, and then sharing the benefits of doing so. She then had to set strict deadlines and guidelines for her team, many times offering to pick up some of their workload in order to get the new idea off the ground. Even when met with great resistance, Harper continued to pull her team members along with her.

Harper did not lead with courage, which created a tension inside of her. For most people, leading with leadership would coincide with leading with courage, as it takes courage to confront others and lead a team. For Harper, leading with leadership partnered with leading with her heart. Her willingness to pull her colleagues along stemmed from her passion to not leave anyone behind. Harper's strong passion for the success of all students and colleagues was much like iron links; deeply intertwined and almost impossible to break. Not leading with courage, however, created a tension for Harper. Instead of expecting her colleagues to follow her and teaching them how to be willing participants, Harper spent her time and energy doing the work for them. Carrying this weight and extra workload caused her to begin to resent colleagues who were not appreciative, which created a tension inside of her.

Another tension for Harper came from her being a forced lone wolf, as described in Chapter 4. In Harper's case, she was a forced lone wolf as she did not have a grade-level team. As a special education teacher, she attended a variety of collaborative meetings, but she did not necessarily get to meet with other special education teachers that often. There were two other special education teachers at Bookworm Elementary School, but they did not collaborate as a team. Harper, however, was reflective by nature. The tension for Harper was found in her desire for – and her inability to have -- a consistent team which whom to collaborate and reflect with. Much like a bubble sitting on top of the water, Harper was sitting on the outside of the reflective

pool. She could not access the same reflective conversations that her colleagues could. This tension made her fragile, like a bubble, in her daily work, as she felt isolated.

Finally, Harper did not understand the purpose of professional learning communities or how the concepts applied to her. During professional development sessions, Harper would sit with other special education teachers instead of grade-level teams. The model of professional learning communities that was presented to staff was presented for the majority of the group, classroom teachers. There were never follow-up sessions to differentiate the professional learning, and because Harper did not lead with her brain, she did not seek out resources, request professional development, or ask questions. While Harper wanted to know more and grow as an educator, she was content to wait for others to realize her needs and act upon them. Harper had many questions, symbolized by the question marks in her photomontage. Many questions marks fill the screen, but few of them are red. This symbolizes the ratio of questions that Harper had (black) versus how many she actually asked (red). Not leading with her brain allowed Harper to be at peace with her lack of understanding the professional learning community model and how it pertained to her role at Bookworm Elementary School.

In summary, Harper led with her heart and leadership, but not with her brain or courage. Harper cared more about her colleagues and students than anything else and would do whatever it took to help them achieve success. This disposition complimented her disposition to lead with leadership, creating a strong desire in her to pull others along so they were not left behind. This did, however, create a tension for Harper as carrying the weight of her colleagues was increasing her workload. Another tension for Harper arose from her desire to implement a professional learning community, but her lack of willingness to ask questions or seek resources about how to do so. Balancing these tensions was something that she was managing at the time of this study,

but it is conceivable that, over time, these tensions might become true barriers. For example, spending so much of her energy pulling others along could cause Harper to lose interest in doing so, especially if it begins to damage her relationships with her colleagues.

Susan

Susan had taught multiple grade-levels as a classroom teacher during the past eight years. Bookworm Elementary School was the only school at which she had worked. Susan led with her brain, courage, and leadership. She did not lead with her heart. A photomontage representing Susan's dispositions can be found in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: **Susan.** The photomontage for Susan contains pictures that represented her dispositions. Each picture was chosen to specifically

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Much like a magnifying glass, Susan kept a sharp focus on student data. During

collaborative meetings, Susan was the first to bring up student data. She repeatedly led the

conversation with her team, prompting a deeper look at individual data and asking the difficult

questions to determine the root cause of a student's struggle. Leading with her brain brought out a disposition in Harper that was intensely focused on data-driven decision making. She was eager to share formative (informal) and summative (formal) assessment results with her team and engage in discussions surrounding the results. While her colleagues would dread these conversations, Susan did not take students' struggles as a personal attack. Instead, she viewed students' struggles as a piece to the larger puzzle that was yet to be solved. Overall, Susan's appreciation for data-driven decision making was her leading disposition during collaborative meetings.

When the model for professional learning communities was presented, Susan loved the focus on collaborative problem solving. She did not appreciate the haphazard conversations that her team typically had, and instead looked at collaborative problem solving in a systematic way, searching for patterns and procedures, much like the patterns found in a brick wall. Leading with her brain, Susan believed that if her team followed the agenda, answered the four guiding professional learning community questions, and used a strategic process to analyze student data, then student achievement would rise. She led her team through this process each week during collaboration and did not allow her colleagues to veer from the agenda. If the system was disrupted, Susan would do everything in her power to get the bricks back in order.

Furthermore, Susan was hungry for knowledge and training. Much like grass soaks up rainwater and sunlight, she was eager to soak up new information. Susan took advantage of every professional development opportunity that was presented to her. Most of these opportunities required her to attend workshops or seminars on her own time after school. She participated in book studies and Twitter chats, and she read a variety of blogs written by other educators. At times, she would even give up her weekends to participate in professional

workshops. Susan already had one master's degree and was contemplating starting her second. Beyond continued learning, Susan was also quick to implement new ideas and strategies. She got energy in her soul from trying new things and exploring new options for her students. Susan's desire to continue to grow as a professional was not one that was shared by many of her colleagues, but she was more than willing to learn alone.

Beyond leading with her brain, Susan also led with courage. Her passion for student success fueled her to unknown heights, much like a rock climber, who must push herself both mentally and physically. While Susan appreciated working with her colleagues, when they were not engaged or were unwilling to do the hard work, Susan was content climbing alone. What was important to her was that the work was done, the data were analyzed, and the strategies were implemented. Susan would push herself to the point of exhaustion to ensure that quality work was completed. To her colleagues, Susan was viewed as dedicated, compassionate, and driven. Susan did not view her to-do list as tedious hard work, but instead as a challenge that she would conquer. Leading with courage partnered well with leading with her brain, as Susan had the drive to both soak up new knowledge and then implement what she learned.

Susan also led with leadership. Much like a mother duck, she expected others to follow her. She remained out in front of her colleagues, leading the way and clearing the path. She brought new ideas to her team members, many times also providing them with the tools so that they could implement the new ideas in their classrooms. Susan led her colleagues in a peaceful way and assumed they would follow her lead. She did not push them from behind or pull them with her. Instead, she presented new ideas and guided them to new places. When others did not follow her lead or when they went astray, Susan did not worry. She was only concerned with those who were eager to follow her and implement ideas that she presented. This style of

leadership allowed Susan to focus on her passions instead of spending her time pulling her teammates along behind her.

Although she led with brains, courage, and leadership Susan did not lead with her heart. This created a tension for her, as she needed to lean on relationships with others in order to have effective implementation of her ideas and in order for others to have a desire to follow her. Susan understood this hurdle she faced, and while she knew that she needed to keep her relationships open she could not help but close the door and lock it behind her. While Susan would eat lunch with her team and sit with them during staff meetings, she was not concerned with others' feelings, wishes, or desires. As discussed previously, if a colleague did not follow her lead, Susan was not concerned about leaving him or her behind. Susan approached her team with the mindset that if they wanted her help, they would ask; if they wanted to follow, they would -- and if not, then that was not her problem. Even though her other three leadership styles were strong, without heart, the level of implementation was often weak.

In summary, Susan led with courage, brain, and leadership. These three dispositions allowed her to eagerly tackle challenges without fear of failure, while paving the path for others to follow. She was not easily overwhelmed by problems, obstacles, or extra work if it meant that students would have a better chance at academic success. When interacting with her colleagues, she was not often concerned with their thoughts, feelings, or willingness to follow behind her. Instead, she was ready to take charge and lead those who were willing to follow.

Olga

      Olga had worked at Bookworm Elementary School since it opened. Previously, she had taught both in the classroom and as a special education teacher for another school district. Olga did not lead with any of the dispositions – not with heart, brain, courage, or leadership. Figure 5.4 contains a photomontage representing Olga's personality.

Figure 5.4: **Olga.** The photo montage for Olga contains pictures that represented her dispositions. Each picture was chosen to specifically exe

mplify how Olga approached and completed her professional responsibilities at Bookworm Elementary School.

Olga was often alone during the day. She did not eat lunch with her team, sit with them during staff meetings, or stop by their rooms to informally chat. Her teammates would celebrate each other's birthdays, surprise each other with favorite drinks and treats, and often send text messages in the evenings and weekends. Contrastingly, Olga was at work to do her job. She did

not care to create relationships with others and did not view her colleagues as a source of entertainment. While this did not bother Olga, others around her viewed her as a cactus in the flower bed. Other staff were viewed as bright, cheery, and full of life, while Olga was viewed as dull, prickly, and different. Olga's demeanor changed the culture of her team, as it was evident that Olga only attended collaborative meetings because it was a requirement. She would seldom join the conversation unless she was specifically asked a question. Like a cat, Olga preferred to be alone and watch from afar. Her intention was never to cause harm, but she did not see the value in developing meaningful relationships with her colleagues.

Olga did not lead with her brain. She loathed meetings and felt that they were a complete waste of her time. She would show up to staff meetings late and would sit in the back of the room so that others would not notice her lack of participation in the conversation. During required collaborative team meetings, she would arrive on time but not participate in discussion. She made sure to meet her deadlines so that she would not get in trouble, but she did not want to take part in any additional tasks. She was always checking her watch, impatiently waiting for the time she could return to her space and close the door. Part of the structure of professional learning community collaboration meetings is to ensure that the team moves forward as one unit, leaving no member behind. Olga despised it when others would check up on her or asking her to share her lessons, ideas, and materials. She felt it was insulting, and she should be treated as a professional. Olga's lack of leadership in this area often caused her team members to collaborate without her, which Olga appreciated.

Furthermore, Olga did not lead with courage. She was slow to grow professionally, much like a cactus. She would listen to the information that was presented, but she was slow to implement new requirements. She typically waited until an administrator not only required

implementation, but also visited her classroom to observe the application. While she was a member of the staff and her team, she stood out like the red cherry in the picture. Many times, she merely co-existed with the staff at Bookworm Elementary School. Olga's lack of leadership with courage prevented her from taking risks with her teaching, and she preferred to do the same things each year. This, combined with her lack of leading with her brain and heart, made it easy for her colleagues to move on without her.

Finally, Olga did not lead with leadership. Much like a compass, Olga expressed a strong desire for clear directions and guidance on what the expectations were. She appreciated checklists, rubrics, and exact timelines. When given these tools, Olga would always comply. However, when a new idea or strategy was implemented, she was eager to hide behind any ambiguity that existed. Unclear expectations or implementation timelines meant that she could simply not do the work. This became a point of frustration for her grade-level team, as they would repeatedly attempt to be consistent across their classrooms. In these instances, Olga would often find the loophole or gray area and use that as a reason for not getting it done. This would either slow her team down and create more managerial conversations, or they would simply not expect her to implement what they were doing. Either way, Olga reminded them that if she had clear guidelines, she was more than happy to follow along.

Olga's lack of leadership in the four dispositions created a difficult dynamic for others who needed to work with her. She outwardly expressed her irritation with being required to attend so many meetings and participate in professional learning community conversations. In a perfect school, Olga would be told exactly what the expectations were from her administrator and then be left alone to accomplish the work in her classroom. She saw no value in collaboration and was not interested in trying new things. Her unwillingness to lead with any of

the dispositions created many tensions among her colleagues, but Olga had no desire to do her job any differently.

Kayla

Kayla had been a special education teacher at Bookworm Elementary School for the past four years. Before this position, she had previously worked in other positions for the district, both as a certified and classified staff member. Kayla led with her heart, courage, and leadership. She did not lead with her brain. A photomontage of Kayla's personality can be found in Figure 5.5.

***Figure 5.5**: **Kayla**.* The photomontage for Kayla contains pictures that represented her dispositions. Each picture was chosen to specifically

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Kayla loved being connected to her colleagues just like the two interconnected hearts.

She walked into Bookworm Elementary School each morning eager to check in with others. As a

special education teacher, Kayla did not have a consistent team with which to collaborate. She

went out of her way to build relationships with other staff members, specifically those who worked in classrooms around hers. It would have been easy for her to become bitter about her circumstances since she wanted to have genuine connections with a team. She would go out of her way to attend collaborative meetings with other grade-levels just to be connected to her colleagues. This desire for relationships also created a tension for Kayla, as she was a forced lone wolf due to the structural organization of the school and district. Instead of accepting this as the way it was, Kayla overcame her tension with hard work and extra effort to create relationships with her colleagues.

Kayla also led with courage. She approached new learning like a poker player, ready to gamble and take risks without fear. She knew when to take bigger risks and when to cut her losses and fold. When presented with new information or strategies to implement, Kayla would have to adapt them to fit her instructional model with special education students. While other teams were able to lean on each other to try new ideas, Kayla had to be strong in isolation. Like a flame, she was self-sufficient when working alone; however, any collaboration time with her colleagues fueled her like oxygen. Leading with courage allowed Kayla to continuously take risks for her students without fear of failure.

Kayla viewed situations as pieces to a bigger puzzle. Leading with leadership, she enjoyed manipulating different pieces and combining them, often failing more than she succeeded. For Kayla, this disposition partnered with courage to create a space for her to take risks with her teaching, but also to look at failure as another piece to the puzzle. She shared her experiences with her team members and provided opportunities for them to easily follow in her path. This disposition also paired well with Kayla's disposition to lead with her heart, as her

solid relationships with her colleagues allowed them to take risks with her and follow her lead. Leading with leadership allowed Kayla to see the bigger picture within her collaborative work.

While she led with her heart, courage, and leadership, Kayla did not lead with her brain. She was not interested in reading research or looking at data to determine where weaknesses were. She also did not appreciate being locked in to an agenda or template to guide conversations. When presented with an issue, Kayla was ready to think outside of the box to solve it. She did not care what the research said or about what other professionals in the district thought about her solution; she simply wanted permission to try something new. Like the marble in the middle, Kayla wanted to roll with her gut decision, but she felt that there were often others blocking her from gaining momentum. Kayla needed to work with colleagues with whom she trusted, but who also could find the balance of keeping her grounded in the values of the school and rolling into new paths. With the right team around her, Kayla could harness this disposition and become the leverage her colleagues needed to take their own risks.

In summary, Kayla led with her heart, courage, and leadership. As a forced lone wolf, her desire for genuine relationships with her colleagues created a tension for her. She tried to get to know other staff at Bookworm Elementary School, but she did not view this as extra work. The professional learning community structure might have forced Kayla into isolation, but collaborations with others fueled her fire. She was more than eager to take risks and implement new ideas with little fear of failure.

Cross-Comparison

While understanding how each of the five participants' dispositions affected their professional responsibilities related to professional learning communities, what holds an even bigger impact are the implications these have for creating and sustaining professional learning

community collaborative teams. Teachers are often assigned to grade-level teams based on their interest in the position. Therefore, on any given team, there will be a variety of different dispositions found. Certain combinations of dispositions can allow for teams to automatically have an increased likelihood for successful implementation of a professional learning community. Table 5.1 is a quick reference detailing the dispositions for each participant in this study.

Table 5.1: Cross-Comparison

	Susan	Olga	Harper	Kayla	Bonnie
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Table 5.1 shows that Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie lead with their hearts while Susan and Olga did not. Likewise, Susan and Bonnie lead with brains, while Olga, Harper, and Kayla did not. The table can also be read individually by participant. For example, Susan did not lead with her heart, but did lead with her brain, courage, and leadership. By looking at the table as a whole, it is possible to compare dispositions across the five participants, which allows for a cross-comparison analysis.

While the five participants in this study did not interact with each other often at Bookworm Elementary School, for purposes of the cross-comparison analysis, I discuss how they might navigate their professional responsibilities if they were on a collaborative team

together. While collaborative teams are tasked with discussing all content areas, the focus of the cross-comparison analysis is how the five participants might plan a math unit. This analysis examines how the team may have worked together to answer the four professional learning community guiding questions: What do we want students to know? How will we know if they have learned it? What will we do for the students who already know it? What will we do for students who did not learn it? Working through these questions tends to result in specific tasks, such as choosing standards, and developing pre- and post-assessments, planning lessons, and analyzing data to adjust intervention plans. These tasks are integral components to a successful professional learning community and ones that collaborative teams are expected to work through weekly.

Pre-Meeting Work

For most members of the collaborative team, the work to prepare for their weekly team meeting started a few days prior to their scheduled meeting. Bonnie, leading with all four dispositions, emerged as the natural team leader. Four days prior to their scheduled meeting, Bonnie emailed the entire team and asked for agenda items to be submitted to her. Susan, leading with her brain, courage, and leadership, was the first to respond that she felt the team needed to discuss the upcoming math unit. Harper responded to the email as well, stating she wanted to discuss the upcoming bridal shower of a colleague if there was time. Kayla read the responses but had nothing to add, so she did not respond. When Bonnie sent out the final agenda, she asked for team members to bring any materials needed to plan their next math unit, and if possible, to look over the standards found in that unit. Olga did not read the emails between her team members and dreaded the weekly team meeting.

The collaborative team met every week at 2:00 on Tuesdays. Throughout the day, Bonnie would make her way to each of her teammates to remind them of what they needed to bring to their meeting. When she would interact with Harper and Kayla, these quick reminders turned into conversations between friends. Susan appreciated the reminder, but quickly dismissed Bonnie so that she could get back to preparing for her students. Bonnie dreaded any interaction with Olga, and no longer expected a warm welcome. Entering Olga's classroom, Bonnie was not greeted at all and had to call Olga's name to get her attention. After reminding her of the materials that were needed for the meeting, Bonnie walked out without waiting for a response.

As the team dropped their students off for their physical education and music classes, Bonnie rushed back to her room to ensure the meeting table was cleared off. Harper arrived with the favorite candies of her team members. Kayla brought napkins and a few extra colored pens to share. Susan arrived with her math materials, as well as some additional professional math resources she loved. Olga entered four minutes late with just a pad of paper because she had stopped at the bathroom.

The work of a professional learning community is not defined by the work done during a weekly collaborative team meeting. Thus, it is important to understand how the members of the team navigate interactions with each other as they prepare to meet. These interactions guide the tone of the meeting and how well the team will navigate their professional responsibilities together.

What Do We Want Students to Know?

In order to answer the first guiding question, collaborative teams must look through both the learning standards and instructional resources adopted by the school district. Standards and instructional resources cover a plethora of content, and it is typically left up to collaborative

teams to identify the standards that are most important, sometimes referred to as power standards. Identifying power standards is not something quickly accomplished, as it requires team members to agree upon which standards are the most important. This work can quickly become a discussion of values among the team members, and it can take multiple meetings to come to an agreement. If the five participants in this study were on a collaborative team together, their weekly team meeting may have been somewhat volatile.

Bonnie opened the meeting asking if anyone had celebrations to share. Olga dismissed herself to get a pencil from her classroom, while Harper, Susan, and Bonnie each shared a variety of personal and professional celebrations. After eight minutes, Kayla ended the celebrations and asked that the team get back to their math discussion. Olga re-entered about this time, sat down quietly, and scooted her chair back from the table. None of her team members cared that she had missed their celebration time, fully aware that Olga did not care about getting to know them.

Bonnie switched the conversation to the upcoming math unit. The team's first task was to identify which of the standards covered in the unit would become their power standards. There were five standards to be taught, but the team could not focus on all of them. Bonnie started by presenting the five standards that the unit taught, then asked her team members to share which they felt were most important. Susan immediately responded that she had already looked at their year-long plan to identify which standards would also be covered in different units. She felt that the two standards that should be power standards were those that were only taught in the upcoming unit. Bonnie agreed quickly with Susan, and they both looked at the other three members of their team. Harper was not sure she agreed, but she did not have the courage to cause a disagreement. Kayla agreed with the two standards that were shared but believed an additional

standard should be added. After she presented her case, Kayla eagerly looked around at her team members for a response. Bonnie was not sure she agreed, but she did not want to hurt Kayla's feelings by telling her so. Harper nodded her head, while Olga drew on her notepad. Susan was not a fan of adding an additional power standard, and she voiced her opinion openly and honestly. Not leading with her heart, Susan was not concerned with hurting Kayla's feelings. Susan asked pointed questions, relentlessly attempting to prove her point and win the disagreement. Kayla quickly realized that if Susan did not agree with her, it would not be worth the time to try to convince her. Kayla politely stated that she thought the standard should be a power standard, but she was willing to move on if others did not agree. Bonnie, ready to move on from the conflict, looked around the table and stated that the team had officially picked their two power standards.

After the discussion over the power standards, there was not much time left. Olga eagerly checked her watch, ready to escape the required meeting without having to participate at all. Bonnie reminded the team that they had just a few minutes left to set their next agenda, update their notes for the building principal, and assign any tasks that needed to be completed. Susan took charge, abruptly stating that at the next meeting, the team needed to create the pretest and posttest, and that in order to make the most of their time, each member should bring between three and five questions aligned to each of the two power standards. Bonnie said she would update the notes template and submit it to the principal and that she would create the next agenda and email it to the team. Olga was already standing up at this point, eager to leave. Harper and Kayla were cleaning up the trash from the snacks they brought and suggesting that each team member take with them. Susan gathered her materials and left the room.

For the rest of the day, Olga remained in her classroom, not concerned about the tasks she had been assigned by her team. In reality, she planned to teach every lesson as it was scripted in the adopted math resource, even if her team decided something else. She believed students needed to be taught all of the standards and did not feel she owed it to her team to comply with their decisions. Susan spent the rest of the day teaching her students, although she was preoccupied with ideas for her test questions. She was unaware that she had potentially offended Kayla; even if she had been aware, it would not have changed how she approached the situation. Susan knew she was right, and nothing else mattered to her. Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie spent the remainder of the day sending text messages to each other. Kayla was upset at the way Susan handled the confrontation and felt that she was not listened to. Bonnie was upset that Olga had, yet again, not participated in the meeting at all. Hating confrontation, Harper tried to keep the peace by making a joke of the situation.

While this weekly collaborative meeting was productive, the team did not work well together. Only one of the five team members, Susan, left the meeting feeling as if it was a complete success. To better support this team, the building leader needed to provide a better structure for the collaborative conversations to ensure all voices were heard and that all team members were expected to actively participate. This could be done through an administrator sitting in on team meetings to ensure the conversation was balanced and that no one member dominated the discussions. An administrator presence would have changed the tone of this meeting and potentially increased the likelihood that team members would have left the meeting believing in the decisions that the team made.

How Will We Know When Students Have Learned It?

Once the power standards were identified, the collaborative team needed to develop pretests and posttests. The team also needed to identify what progress monitoring they would use to check student understanding as the unit was taught. At the end of the previous meeting, each team member was asked to bring to the next meeting three to five potential assessment questions for each of the identified power standards. A few days before the next meeting, Bonnie sent an email to each team member reminding them which power standards they chose and that they agreed to each bring potential assessment questions. Bonnie also shared that the team needed to co-plan their lessons for the unit if they had time.

As usual, Bonnie arrived back to her classroom and cleared a space for her team to meet. She made sure she had the materials prepared and was ready to take notes. Harper and Kayla were next to arrive, this time with home-baked treats to share. Susan arrived and proudly displayed her assessment questions. She made small talk about her day with Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie while they waited for Olga to arrive. Just as in the week prior, Olga arrived a few minutes late with her notepad.

Bonnie started the meeting again by asking for celebrations. Harper immediately shared that she was getting a new puppy, which prompted Kayla to ask for pictures. Susan did not allow the conversation to go on for long and said a quick congratulations. She then asked that the team begin discussing their assessment questions. Bonnie refocused the group, asking everyone to first determine how many questions they felt were needed to determine student mastery for the two power standards. Bonnie had barely finished speaking when Susan stated she believed there should be five to seven questions per standard. Again, she brought research articles to support her theory. Bonnie was eager to read the articles and stated that while she was not sure how

many questions should be included to determine mastery, she believed the research. Harper stated she did not have an opinion, and Olga was not making eye contact with any other team members. Kayla believed that having ten questions would be appropriate for determining student mastery; however, after remembering how Susan had attacked her ideas the previous week, she decided to keep her thoughts to herself. Without any disagreement from the team, Bonnie added to the notes that each of the two power standards would be assessed by five to seven questions.

Bonnie moved to the next agenda item and asked that each of her team members share the potential assessment questions. Each of the team members, except Olga, had completed the task. While the team could have addressed this with Olga, they knew it would not change her behavior. Instead, Bonnie asked Olga to please create a few as the team discussed items that were brought up. The team laid out the questions in the middle of the table, and Bonnie asked them to place a star next to the ones they liked. Once each member had done so, they then counted how many questions received stars. Susan took charge of the meeting, stating that she believed ten questions total was sufficient for assessing both power standards on the pretest. In order to make better use of their time, Susan suggested that they divide the work for the remainder of the meeting. Susan volunteered to work with Olga to create the posttest and suggested that Bonnie, Harper, and Kayla work together to create the pretest. Susan's reasoning behind this was intentional. She cared a great deal about the questions that were on the posttest and knew that Olga would not care if she did all of the work. Meanwhile, Harper, Susan, and Bonnie preferred to work together. The team remained in the same room, but Kayla and Olga moved to another table to complete their portion of the work.

Once reseated, Kayla shared her assessment questions with Olga. Not able to hide, Olga offered to type Kayla's ideas and create the test as they worked. This created a dynamic in which

Kayla was in complete control and Olga served as her secretary. At the other table, Bonnie again took charge and asked Harper and Susan which questions were their absolute favorites for each power standard. These questions were automatically added to the pretest without discussion. Susan shared that she believed there should be at least one multistep word problem for each power standard so that teachers could identify if the students could apply their knowledge of the skill. Harper and Bonnie agreed, and they spent the remainder of their time creating the word problems. With five minutes left in their collaborative meeting, the entire team reconvened. Bonnie shared the pretest with Kayla and Olga, who then shared the posttest with Bonnie, Harper, and Susan. The team quickly chose a date to give the pretest and agreed to have it scored with data entered into their shared data spreadsheet before their next meeting.

Tension was avoided during this collaborative team meeting because the team split into two sub-teams to create their assessments. While this allowed for team members to leave the meeting with no ill feelings, it did not allow for productive collaboration. By creating the pretest and posttest separately, there was no check to make sure that the assessments matched in style and depth of questioning. For example, the pretest contained multistep word problems as a check for application-level mastery. However, the posttest did not contain questions to this depth of understanding. To prevent this problem from occurring, the building principal needed to be present at the collaborative meeting. Without an administrator present, this collaborative team had figured out a way to avoid collaboration with those who did not possess the same dispositions as they did.

What Will We Do for Students Who Already Know It?

Once a pretest has been given, teams must use their enrichment plan for students who already understand the material. Typically, there are just a few students in each classroom who

have mastered the content before the lessons begin. Teams must work together to determine the best way to keep those students engaged in learning, even though the content has already been mastered. The first step in doing this is for teams to identify mastery criteria on the pretest. Teams must then determine which students have mastered which parts of the standard and develop enrichment plans for these students.

As usual, Bonnie started the meeting asking for celebrations. Susan shared that she was excited to share her student data with the team, and she was pleasantly surprised with how well her students had done on the pretest. Olga scoffed and rolled her eyes, thinking how fitting it was that Susan adored the pretest that she created. Harper changed the subject and shared that she had a great weekend and got to spend time at the lake with her husband. Kayla jumped in at this point and talked about how she would love to join them sometime, and she and Harper then began planning their trip. Bonnie shared that she would love to go as well, and eagerly looked at Susan and Olga, waiting for them to say they wanted to attend. She was met with blank stares and decided to wrap up this portion of the meeting.

Bonnie asked each team member to pull up their shared data sheet that contained students' math scores. Olga had her students' scores entered, but she had not brought her device to this meeting. While Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie began to find the spreadsheet, Susan started the conversation by asking if anyone had read the research articles that she had sent them via email. Bonnie had read the articles and found them interesting, but she knew that Harper, Kayla, and Olga would not have read them. Susan quickly moved on to share that she had also collaborated via email with the gifted facilitator in the building to create some enrichment projects for students who scored high on the pretest. Bonnie thanked her, but then reminded the team that they first needed to identify what the success criteria would be. Again, Susan quickly

shared her ideas for a percentage system that would create three groups, students who already

mastered the power standards (greater than 85%), students who had some understanding

(between 40% and 85%), and students who had little or no prior understanding (less than 40%).

Harper and Kayla were hoping to have a team discussion to develop the success criteria, but

neither had the energy to fight with Susan about it. Bonnie had been excited to compare student

work samples during this discussion, but she did not want Susan to think she did not appreciate

the work she had done outside of their meeting. Instead of sharing, she made a note to herself to

work with Harper and Kayla on this task later. Olga was excited that this work had been done

ahead of time and was glad she would not have to listen to the team's discussion or arguments.

Susan, not hearing any objections, set out to format the spreadsheet with colors so that students

at each of the three levels could be determined.

The next task was to look specifically at the students who scored in the top category,

achieving at least an 85% on the power standards. Before Susan could share the work that she

had already done, Bonnie asked Kayla what she thought. Both Bonnie and Kayla led with

courage, and they were tired of not being able to share their thoughts and ideas. Kayla shared

that she was excited to see those students who had scored above an 85% complete some

alternative activities; however, she felt that they should not be excused from the tier one

instructional component. Harper joined the conversation stating that she agreed with Kayla and

that she wanted all students to stay together in the classroom for the instructional component.

Susan, a little annoyed that the team was spending time on this conversation, agreed and stated

that teachers needed to keep their tier one direct instruction to no more than fifteen minutes. Olga

had no intentions of changing how she taught, so she nodded her head. She did not understand

why anyone would veer from traditional hour-long math lessons in which all students participated in repeated practice.

By this time, there was about fifteen minutes remaining for this meeting. Susan's anxiety level began to rise, as she was worried she would not have time to share the projects she had created with the gifted facilitator. Instead of looking at them as a team, she passed one out to each person and asked them to share their thoughts. While her team members were trying to look over the projects, Susan continued to talk, stating how she believed that each teacher should offer students choice in which project they completed instead of forcing them to all work on the same project. Before others had a chance to respond, she quickly stated that since they were about out of time, that is what should be done. She said that she would provide each teacher with copies of each project. Bonnie, Harper, and Kayla quietly exchanged looks of irritation but did not say anything. Secretly, they would meet later to dig through each of the projects and determine what adjustments needed to be made. Olga passed her paper back to Susan, not interested in keeping a copy -- or allowing her students to complete the enrichment projects.

By the third meeting in the collaborative planning cycle, the team had started to splinter off. Instead of functioning as a team of five, Susan and Olga were working as solo teachers, while Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie worked as a collaborative team. While Susan and Olga each worked independently, there were differences in their work. Susan upheld decisions made by the team and was a driving force for the work they were doing. Olga, however, was not going to change her current practice and was not interested in participating in the work of the collaborative team. Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie were content getting through each collaborative meeting and then holding additional meetings at another time to collaboratively complete their work. It is important that school administrators keep an eye on teams who do not collaborate

well. If an administrator had been present during the first or second meeting, the third meeting might have been drastically different. If the administrator had attended this third meeting, but not the first two, it would have been necessary to structure the conversation so that each team member was an active participant. At times, it might not be possible for an administrator to attend each grade-level's collaborative meetings. In lieu of an administrator being at the meeting, this particular team needed to complete a notes template that also dictated who shared at different parts of the meeting. The team also needed increased accountability measures put in place so that each team member would have to implement what the team decided. Once the team splintered into three separate groups, it was hard for them to have a desire to value each other as professional colleagues.

What Will We Do for Students Who Did Not Learn It?

The final question for the teams to discuss before beginning the upcoming math unit addressed what would be done for students who did not learn the content as it was presented during whole group tier one instruction. This included the development of formative assessments to use during the daily lessons. Formative assessments were used as a 'spot check' to monitor student understanding of the concepts each day. This data allowed teachers to reteach in the moment or adjust the pace of their instruction.

Prior to their meeting, Bonnie sent the agenda to her team members asking that they each look over the upcoming lessons in the unit so that they were familiar with the material. After the meeting the week before, she, Harper, and Kayla had met every day after school to continue their analysis of the enrichment projects. They had decided to continue meeting as a small group in between collaborative team meetings, as those were the most productive. During small group meetings, Kayla and Bonnie were able to discuss the data and research and how they would

implement new ideas. Harper was free to share how she noticed her students were more engaged in learning and her two group members appreciated her insights. All three of them dreaded meeting with Susan and Olga.

As everyone arrived for their weekly collaborative meeting, Bonnie completely skipped over sharing celebrations. Since she met with Kayla and Harper daily, they shared celebrations during these separate meetings. Instead, Bonnie pulled out her agenda and asked that each of her team members open their math teacher's guide to the upcoming unit. Just as in prior weeks, Susan immediately began discussing her formative assessment ideas, which were recorded on sticky notes for each lesson. She began to share each idea individually, then decided a better plan would be to make copies for each team member. She told the team she would return quickly and left the meeting.

Bonnie, not wanting to waste time, kept the meeting running by asking the others to look at the first lesson. Kayla, leading with courage, continued the conversation by stating that she was really hoping the team could use more interactive assessment methods for the formative assessments, such as exit slips or cooperative learning structures. Harper agreed, sharing that she really worried that some students were not always able to demonstrate their understanding on a written test. Olga added to the conversation, agreeing that anything that would lessen the amount that needed to be formally graded had her vote. Bonnie, Harper, and Kayla sat in a stunned silence that Olga had shared anything with the group. Before the moment had passed, Harper thanked Olga for sharing her feelings with the team and participating in the discussion.

Around this time, Susan entered the room, apologizing for taking so long. With a smile on her face, she passed out a stack of copies to each of her team members with a smile on her face. As they each looked over the notes, Bonnie courageously mentioned to Susan that while

she was gone, the other members were discussing the possibility of using cooperative learning or exit slips as a means of formative assessment. Susan became flustered and irritated that this conversation had occurred without her. Instead of listening to her colleagues, Susan instead began detailing the reasons she did not agree, which included students sharing answers and unreliable data points. Instead of attempting again to persuade Susan, the others on the team sat silently, completely defeated.

The meeting ended with Susan still talking at her team members about why her formative assessment questions were a better choice than cooperative learning or exit slips. Bonnie stated that the math unit would begin the following week and asked the team to be prepared to share successes and opportunities for growth. Bonnie knew that any formative data the teachers shared would not be comparable, because each member would be assessing differently. Instead of fostering a conversation around their disagreements and determining how to embed each team member's ideas into their unit, Susan had wasted their time. When she thought back to how her team had arrived at this point, Bonnie honestly was not sure where things had gone so off track.

By the fourth planning meeting, this team was no longer working as a collaborative unit. Instead of valuing what each member added and forcing each other to be active members, Susan had taken charge. Not leading with the heart, she placed little value on what her team members felt or wanted. Instead, she was all business and believed her way was not only the right way, but that it was the only way. During this final planning meeting, an administrator who sat in on the meeting could have quickly identified the tension among the team. In upcoming meetings, these tensions would have exploded as frustrations continued to compound. The biggest support that this collaborative team needed was a structure to demand that each member have an equal voice.

Without equal voice, certain combinations of dispositions dominated the meeting and drove the team apart.

Even though the five participants were not on the same team at Bookworm Elementary School, it is important to examine how they might have navigated their professional responsibilities had they been. The four tasks described above would be typical tasks asked of any professional learning community team, and while each participant is unique, their dispositions are not. Through the cross-comparison analysis, it was evident that certain tensions could not be avoided. With an administrator presence in each of these meetings, many of the tensions could have potentially been avoided.

Chapter Summary

Each of the photomontages in this chapter each represented one of the participants and her dispositions that were identified during the course of this study. By examining the dispositions through an arts-based approach, it became easier to understand the intricacies that each disposition entailed. Two participants could have the same disposition, but they could affect how they navigate their professional responsibilities surrounding professional learning communities in completely different ways. The photomontages also allow us to see how the different combinations of the dispositions created vastly different interpretations of the dispositions. The arts-based analysis allowed for a deeper understanding of how each of the four dispositions created a unique space for each of the participants.

After examining the photomontages for each participant, a cross-comparison analysis was completed to examine how the five participants might have interacted had they been on a collaborative team together. I mapped how the team dynamics would potentially have shifted throughout the team's navigation through the four guiding professional learning community

questions. As detailed above, the combinations of dispositions, without intervention from an administrator, would not have allowed for a true professional learning community to exist.

Chapter 6 - Conclusions and Implications of the Study

Schools are continuously being challenged to raise the bar for academic achievement. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) found that "the most promising strategy for helping all students learn at high levels is to develop a staff's capacity to function as a professional learning community" (p. 2). Their research suggests that the focus of professional development in schools should be on implementing a professional learning community model. Through collaborative learning conversations focused on data analysis, educators can create a dramatic increase in student learning.

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine the personal experiences of five elementary school teachers in the Midwest during their school's implementation of a professional learning community model. While all five participants were from the same elementary school, they were randomly selected from a volunteer pool.

Grounded in symbolic interpretivism, this qualitative interview study elicited the experiences of the five participants while addressing the following research questions:

1. How did the participants describe their experiences when a professional learning community was implemented in their school?

2. In what ways did the participants attribute the ways in which the professional learning community implementation influenced their professional learning experiences?

In this chapter, I address the research questions, the purpose of the study, contributions to the literature, implications, conclusions, and areas for future study.

Research Questions Unpacked

In qualitative research, answers to the research questions often intersect with one another. As such, I answer the two questions in this study collectively. The decision to intertwine the

answers should be viewed as a result of conducting rich and interconnected research pertaining to the experiences of elementary teachers as they implemented a professional learning community model. Reporting simple responses that participants shared would diminish the powerful experiences they had.

Through the data analysis process, I identified four personality profiles. The attributes of these personalities can be seen to have direct influences over how participants experienced a professional learning community and interpreted their professional learning experiences. As noted in Chapter 4, the responses of the participants were thematically organized into four archetypes, namely (a) leading with heart, (b) leading with brains, (c) leading with courage, and (d) leading with leadership. People could either lead with any of these archetypes or they could be reluctant to do so. Additionally, while the archetypes were described in terms of leading and following, there are also instances where these boundaries were blurred. Consequently, one could lead with their heart, but not have a collaborative team to work with. Moreover, one could lead with courage but become fatigued with the workload. For purposes of this study I kept participants in distinct categories, but in real life it would be reasonable to expect educators to move within the categories.

Participants in this study were randomly selected from a volunteer pool. In order to volunteer, participants had to have been working at the research site during the implementation of the professional learning community model. Due to the few stipulations surrounding participation in this study, participants varied in their age, number of years in education, and teaching positions. Drawing from different backgrounds, each participant experienced the implementation process differently. Therefore, their unique perspectives had to be analyzed separately in order to fully answer the research questions for this study.

Harper described a wide range of experiences throughout her implementation of a professional learning community. Based on the thematic organization, Harper led with her heart and leadership, and did not lead with courage or her brain. She appreciated the dedicated time to collaborate with others at Bookworm Elementary School, but as a special education teacher, she was frustrated with the difficulty she had finding a team with which to collaborate. Even so, Harper's disposition to do what was asked of her pushed her to try and make the professional learning community model fit her role as a non-classroom teacher. She attempted to find teams to collaborate with, but she could not routinely attend these meetings due to scheduling conflicts. With the absence of a solid collaborative team, Harper struggled to implement the professional learning community model as it was intended to be implemented. With barriers she could not overcome, Harper did not believe that implementing a professional learning community had a dramatic impact on her professional responsibilities.

Like Harper, Bonnie also felt an internal struggle throughout the implementation of professional learning communities. Recall from the thematic organization that Bonnie led all four personality dispositions: heart, brains, courage, and leadership. She desperately wanted a team with which to collaborate, but as a special education teacher, she was left without such a team. Bonnie's internal motivation to implement the professional learning community model as designed gave her the enthusiasm to force the model to work within the structure of her role. Bonnie created her schedule so that she could attend collaborative meetings with grade-level teams, and if she did miss a meeting, she made sure to meet with the team at a later time. Even though Bonnie described her experiences while implementing a professional learning community as challenging, she found advocating relentlessly for her students to be intellectually stimulating.

Thus, the professional learning community implementation had a profound impact on her professional responsibilities.

Kayla had similar dispositions to Harper and Bonnie, but as a classroom teacher she had a stronger structure to support her through the implementation of a professional learning community. Recall that Kayla led with heart, courage, and leadership but not her brain. While Kayla was overwhelmed attending professional learning sessions, she trusted her collaborative team to work through the process with her. She was eager to implement a professional learning community, as long as she did not have to do it by herself. Kayla believed that she had a trustworthy collaborative team, which allowed her to feel safe during the implementation of a professional learning community. Working with her team, Kayla recounted the powerful impact that professional learning communities had on her professional experiences. Specifically, she told of focused data protocols and collaborative problem solving geared around strategic lesson planning. For Kayla, the implementation of a professional learning community model had a drastic impact on her professional responsibilities.

Susan had different experiences than Bonnie and Harper when implementing a professional learning community. Based on the thematic organization, Susan led with her brain, courage, and leadership but not her heart. During the initial professional development, Susan was ecstatic about implementing the new structures. She took it upon herself to continue her learning on her own time, and she was invigorated with the data analysis protocols. However, while Susan was excited to have a strong structure for data analysis and accountability in place, she did not appreciate being forced to collaborate with a team. Susan was open to sharing her work and lesson plans with colleagues in an effort to help them, but she was not interested in spending valuable time holding discussions or debates about what should be done next. Susan also did not

trust her colleagues to complete the work to the same caliber that she would complete it. Even though Susan found the implementation process to be motivating, it could only take her so far professionally. Susan chose which components she wanted to implement, such as data analysis protocols, and which she did not believe had value, such as collaborative problem solving. Even with picking and choosing which components to implement, Susan believed that professional learning communities had a profound impact on her professional responsibilities by increasing her ability to analyze student data.

Olga was dramatically different than the other four participants in this study as she did not lead with any of the four personality dispositions. She was not engaged in any aspect of the implementation of a professional learning community. During the implementation process, Olga did not find value in the required components and therefore did not find value in the professional learning that took place. Due to her lack of participation in the work to establish the professional learning community, Olga was not prepared to implement its different components. She saw collaboration and collaborative problem solving as a waste of her time; and therefore, she was reluctant to be an active participant in required collaborative meetings. With such refusal, the implementation of a professional learning community had minimal impact on her professional responsibilities.

The five participants in this study each had varied dispositions that combined to shape their personalities. The specific combination of dispositions that the individual participants possessed had a direct impact on how they described their experiences when implementing a professional learning community, as well as how they felt the professional learning community influenced their professional responsibilities. The fact that each participant responded to these questions differently suggests, that it is not the implementation process of professional learning

communities that matters when looking at the impact on professional responsibilities. Instead, the impact that professional learning communities have on educators' professional responsibilities is determined by the combination of their dispositions.

A cross-comparison analysis between the participants demonstrated that the different combinations of personality dispositions could lead to a dysfunctional team. As team members worked together to answer the four guiding professional learning community questions, their respective personalities began to emerge. Tensions built higher and higher each week, until eventually three participants with complimentary leadership dispositions created their own collaborative team and left their two team members behind. The cross-comparison analysis between participants allowed readers to understand the profound impact that the different personality dispositions had on the successful implementation of a professional learning community. Thus, it can be implied that the success of the professional learning community implementation depends more on the personality dispositions within each collaborative team than the process used to implement the initiative itself.

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine the personal experiences that five Midwest elementary school teachers had while their school implemented a professional learning community. As participants navigated the implementation of a professional learning community, all five discussed the impact that their relationships with their colleagues had on their views of collaboration. Those who perceived their team members in a positive light described components of effective collaboration, while those who did not appreciate their colleagues described tendencies in line with coblabberation. The unique combination of dispositions that made up each participant's personality informed the way that they interacted

with their collaborative team, which directly influenced the implementation of a professional learning community.

Contributions to the Literature

Chapter two provided a brief overview of the development of both schools and professional learning communities. Schools in America have been influenced by a variety of factors since their establishment in 1635 (Barnard & Burner, 1975; Fritzberg, 2012; Gelbrich, 1999; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Joyce, 2004; Klein, 2015; Meyer, et al., 1979; Morgan & Robinson, 1976; Net Industries, 2016; Sass, 2015). In their beginning, schools were most heavily influenced by religious, sociological, and cultural beliefs. Over time, the establishment of educational organizations brought upon countless research studies that focused on discovering how students learn (Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Sass, 2015; United States Department of Education, 2016a). These studies turned into books about best practice in education. While academic achievement rates declined, the pressure for students to achieve at higher levels increased (Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Fritzberg, 2012; Sass, 2015). This pressure from the government sparked mandated efforts for educational reform.

Rooted in the business sector, professional learning communities are relatively new to education. While a great deal of research had been conducted on how students learn, prominent work around professional learning communities did not begin in schools and districts in the United States until the 1990s (Merriam, 2008; SEDL, 1997). Since then, research has found that professional learning communities are one of the most effective school reform efforts (DuFour, et al., 2008). However, research had focused mainly on the effects that effective professional learning communities have on student achievement -- not the process in which they were implemented. In this study the process was investigated to understand the anatomy of the

implementation of professional learning communities embedded with tensions, conflicts, and possibilities (Carpenter, 2015; DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Fullan, 2013, East, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Stevens, 2007).

The literature review on professional learning communities indicates that there have been limited empirical studies on their implementation process. The few studies that have focused on the implementation process have explored how implementing a professional learning community model correlates with research on the effects of first-order change in the workplace (Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Peppers, 2014; Stevens, 2007). Little research has examined the effect that educators' personalities have on the successful implementation of a professional learning community model.

Chapter 2 also provided an in-depth analysis of the history of professional learning communities (Chan-Remka, 2007; DuFour, et al., 2008; DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Fullan, 2007; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Joyce, 2004; Richmond & Manokore, 2010; SEDL, 1997; Senge, 1990). In that review, I highlighted the key findings that have already been identified from studies of implementation processes. The most prominent findings included ensuring proper training, devoting time to establish common beliefs, fostering teacher accountability and leadership, and a supporting leadership style (Carpenter, 2015; Chan-Remka, 2007; Doolittle, Sudeck, and Rattigan, 2008; East, 2015; Kincaid, 2014; Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, and Hathorn, 2008; Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Stevens, 2007). However, these studies were not focused on how teachers' perceptions altered the success of the professional learning community implementation. Richmond and Manokore (2010) stated that "the question is not whether professional learning communities are important, but rather how to build, support, and maintain such communities in complex and challenging settings" (p. 569). This study adds to the literature by offering insights

into how schools and districts might build, support, and maintain professional learning

communities. In the following sections I elaborate on the contribution of this study to the

existing conversation regarding professional learning communities.

Building a Professional Learning Community

Most of the research surrounding the implementation of professional learning

communities has specifically targeted building the professional learning community (Carpenter,

2015; Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; East, 2015). In this section, I juxtapose issues from

past studies to the findings of this study -- specifically, perceptions about training, time

management, and establishing protocols and team norms in order to establish a solid foundation

for the professional learning community to build upon.

When beginning any implementation process, there will be training provided to those

who are expected to implement the new initiative. Various studies have focused on the training

or professional development schools have provided to staff during the implementation of a

professional learning community model (Carpenter, 2015; East, 2015). East found that

administrators reported that teachers received an abundance of training and professional

development on professional learning communities; however, teachers did not report receiving

enough training to successfully implement the initiative into daily practice. Training and

professional development surrounding professional learning communities was discussed by all

five of the participants in this study, as well. Even though all five participants had received

professional development, each had a drastically different interpretation of the same experience.

The idea that the five different people could experience the exact same event or events but

interpret them completely differently is the basis for symbolic interpretivism, the methodological

framework for this study. In turn, this means that it is not the event that shapes behavior, but

rather the individuals' interpretation of that event (Oliver, 2011). Findings of this study suggest that the reason that each individual participant interpreted the same professional development differently was due to their underlying dispositions. For example, participants who did not lead with their brains were not open to learning new things, and those who did not lead with courage would not take risks or try anything new. The effects of the professional development that was provided had nothing to do with the quality of the sessions, but instead was dependent upon the combination of dispositions that each participant possessed.

Furthermore, finding the time to effectively support a new implementation can be difficult (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; East, 2015; Kincaid, 2014; Stevens, 2007). Kincaid found the main barrier to full implementation of professional learning communities to be a lack of time for teams to collaborate and establish a strong professional learning community foundation. This foundation, as outlined by Rick and Rebecca DuFour (2008), begins with the establishment of a shared vision, values, goals, and meeting norms. Beyond the time needed to establish the foundational components, time is also needed to physically meet and collaborate with each other. During the interviews for this study, time was mentioned by all five participants. However, it was spoken about differently by each participant. For example, Olga, who did not lead with any of the four dispositions, could not understand why she had to spend her time in collaborative meetings. Meanwhile participants who lead with their hearts such as Harper and Kayla, special education teachers, repeatedly shared that they did not have enough time to meet with each of the teams with whom they were supposed to be meeting with. Meanwhile, Susan and Bonnie, who led with their brains, recounted the many times that their teams were in the middle of deep conversations about student learning and their time to meet would expire. Again, the findings of this study add to the research that has been completed on the implementation

process, but they suggest that it is not a general lack of time that needs to be addressed. Instead, the lack of time must be interpreted based on the dispositions of each teacher in order to gain an understanding of how additional support can be provided. For that one needs to understand the anatomy of the formation of professional learning communities and how dispositions rub up against each other creating conflict or harmonize with each other for identifying possibilities. For instance, providing Olga with more time to collaborate would not have accomplished anything. Instead, Olga needed more time devoted to understanding the purpose and benefit of professional learning communities. However, Susan and Bonnie would use any additional time provided to the fullest extent.

The ability of a team to effectively collaborate relied more than just on professional development and time to meet. One of the major components in establishing a solid professional learning community is a team's development of shared norms and protocols (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; East, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2010). Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, and Hathorn (2008) found that an "explicit reliance on collaborative norms and explicitly using processes such as dialogue protocols, [and] distributing leadership responsibilities" (p. 1270) helped support teachers in their effort to become a professional learning community. This was evident in Chapter 5, as the five participants in this study attempted to navigate collaborative meetings together. With each participant having a different combination of dispositions, the team did not have established collaborative norms to ground their work together. This created the catastrophic implementation of a professional learning community. Olga, who did not lead with any of the four dispositions, intentionally alienated herself from her collaborative team after two meetings. Contrastingly, Susan wanted to work with her collaborative team, but her dispositions prevented her from participating with her team.

Harper, Kayla, and Bonnie created their own team, separate from Susan and Olga. If the team had established norms and held each other accountable, then Olga would have been more accountable for her active participation during the meetings. Furthermore, the profound need for a dialogue protocol was evident in Chapter 5. If one had been used, Susan would not have been able to dominate the work of the team and would have ended up sharing responsibilities with her teammates.

When building a professional learning community, leaders must be cautious when planning implementation. Instead of solely addressing components such as training, a lack of time, and the establishment of norms and protocols as whole staff issues, leaders must examine the individual dispositions of staff members. Using past research as a guide, coupled with the findings of this study, leaders can effectively address three identified barriers to building the foundation for a professional learning community.

Supporting a Professional Learning Community

Providing appropriate support for a professional learning community is not something that occurs without a great deal of time and effort. It also cannot be left up to individuals or teams, but instead must be driven by the leader in the district or building. Through focused efforts, members of a professional learning community can be effectively supported in their work.

The work of an established professional learning community is intricate and in-depth (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Supporting this work over time is not done without strategic effort by leaders to encourage educators in their collaborative efforts (Chan-Remka, 2007; Kincaid, 2014; Stevens, 2007). Chan-Remka found that a lack of supportive leadership had profound negative effects on a professional learning community. The negative effects reported in

that study include teachers' lack of value regarding the work completed by their teams. If the work becomes devoid of value to those completing it, over time, team members will no longer work diligently to complete it (Chan-Remka, 2007). However, findings of my study show that while supportive leadership is important, those who lead with leadership from within the professional learning community team hold more power than those in administrative positions. As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, those who lead with leadership are relentless in their pursuit of quality work produced by their collaborative team. Someone who is leading from within holds more potential than does an outside leader.

Another key component to supporting the work of professional learning communities is keeping each collaborative team moving forward together (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Stevens, 2007). Stevens found leadership to be a necessary component for the successful implementation of a professional learning community – specifically, a leader who leads from behind the teachers, providing all necessary supports and ensuring that no team or member falls behind. This leadership works well for building and district leaders, but it is also powerful when it comes from within the collaborative team itself. As detailed in this study, participants who led with leadership were able to keep their teams moving forward through challenges of the implementation process. Recall Bonnie, who led with leadership, and her desire to herd her team together, or Harper, who would pull her team members along with her no matter what. Leading with leadership was a force within the team to leave no member behind, even when it slowed the entire team down. This leadership from within was more powerful than the leadership at the building or district level for supporting professional learning communities.

While it is evident that leadership plays a profound role in the ability to support a professional learning community, this study adds to the research by showcasing the power of

leadership from within the collaborative team. While teacher leadership has been researched extensively, this study specifically addresses leadership as a personality disposition that is necessary for the success of a professional learning community implementation.

Maintaining a Professional Learning Community

Once a professional learning community has been established and supported, it then must be maintained over time (Richmond & Manokore, 2010; Peppers, 2014; Sevents, 2007). Specifically, the ability of a collaborative team to uphold established team meeting norms and distribute shared leadership amongst themselves is vital to the continued success of the professional learning community implementation (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Much research has been completed detailing the importance of team norms and shared leadership, but this study adds a new aspect to the literature.

While the establishment of meeting norms was noted as a way to build an effective professional learning community, it is also a vital component in maintaining them (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; East, 2015; Kincaid, 2014). Collaborative teams meet regularly and must guide their own work (East, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2010). Without an administrator in the room, teachers must hold each other accountable through the establishment of norms and conversation protocols to ensure productive use of their time (East, 2015; Richmond & Manokore, 2010). While the work to establish norms typically occurs during the first collaborative meeting, it is up to each team to revisit their norms at each meeting and continue to hold each other responsible for adhering to them. If not, a communication barrier can hinder effective collaborations, as teams would have nothing to ground their work (Kincaid, 2014). This study provided additional insight into the findings of past research. Those who lead with courage are willing to take challenges and risks, which includes confronting team members who are not

following the established team norms or conversation protocols. Those who lead with leadership ensure that the norms are always displayed prominently and reviewed during collaborative meetings. If a team does not have a member who leads with leadership and courage among them, then the norms could go unenforced.

Furthermore, the work of a collaborative team is never-ending (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008). Consequently, an integral component of the professional learning community model is shared leadership and responsibilities among the team members (Chan-Remka, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Kincaid, 2014). Kincaid found that a lack of shared leadership was a barrier to professional learning community implementation, for when the work is not shared, it falls on just a few to accomplish. For example, in Chapter 5 the work of the collaborative team fell mostly on Bonnie, Harper, and Kayla who led with leadership. Susan led with leadership to an extreme, and therefore tried to take on the work for the entire team, and in doing so, she alienated her other team members who wanted to help. This resulted from Susan's lack of leadership with her heart and strong leadership in the other three dispositions, as she did not care if she offended her team members. Olga was much the same, except with her lack of leadership in any disposition she was content to allow her team members to do the work for her. Findings of this study suggest that creating shared leadership on a collaborative team is not something that can be expected with any combination of dispositions. Certain leadership dispositions will naturally allow this to occur, while others will need to have additional structures put in place to foster shared leadership.

If a professional learning community cannot be maintained, then the efforts to implement the initiative are wasted. While the establishment of team norms is important, these norms are useless if the collaborative team does not hold each other accountable for following them.

Moreover, shared leadership is crucial to sharing the work of the team while creating a balance of responsibilities. Findings of this study add to the literature by providing insight into which dispositions will ensure that the norms are followed, and that leadership is shared amongst the members. Without these dispositions on the team, collaborative meetings can have a dramatically different outcome.

Beyond the personality of each individual person, this study established that more research is needed to examine how the combination of these personality types creates different effects on the implementation process. Specifically, more research is needed to address how combinations of dispositions create different needs to build, support, and maintain a professional learning community. Participants in this study did not have supports based on their dispositions, nor was their team provided with supports to address areas in which they struggled. Their experiences are proof that the dispositions of the individual teachers, and combinations of the dispositions of the team, will require individual supports in order to build, support, and maintain an effective professional learning community. The findings of this study indicate that participants were not able to effectively implement the professional learning community model due to the struggles that arose from the combinations of their dispositions.

Implications

This study sought to identify what the experiences of five elementary educators were while implementing a professional learning community, as well as how the implementation changed their professional learning experiences. The research surrounding the success of professional learning communities suggests that if they are implemented according to the DuFour model, student achievement will increase (DuFour et al., 2006; Hord, 2004). However, for some schools, that is not the case. Findings from this study suggest that the missing piece is

not the implementation process that is used, but rather the anatomy of interaction of different personality types of educators, that create a specific type of culture within a professional learning community. The analysis of data revealed four different personality types. These personality types influenced how each participant navigated their professional learning experiences throughout the implementation of a professional learning community. This section delineates the implications of the findings of this study on educational leadership programs; superintendents, district administrators, and principals; teachers, teacher leaders, and school staff; and educational policy.

The findings of this study present implications for educational leadership programs in terms of how they train educational leaders relating to professional learning communities and what supports collaborative teams will need during and after the implementation process. Educational leaders need to not only understand the foundations of a professional learning community, but also how best to implement the initiative. Educational leaders need to be aware of the findings from this study so that they can identify and support the different personality types within their staff. They also need to understand how the different personality types affect the implementation process of professional learning communities. Understanding the anatomy of the interaction driven by the different personality type identified in this study is critical for educational leaders to create interventions, shift school culture, and create experiences for training and development. Knowing how to support different types of personalities to cultivate a desired set of interactions within a professional learning community would help educational leaders create teams that harmonize, instead of creating teams with people who remain perpetually in conflict and eventually stop investing in professional development efforts.

Furthermore, the findings of this study have implications for district and building administrators in relation to how they plan the implementation of professional learning communities. Before beginning the implementation process, leaders should examine current staff and attempt to identify their personality types. This will help administrators understand how members on the team will view the implementation process, as well as what supports each member and team will need. Administrators are tasked with placing teachers at each grade-level to build collaborative teams; therefore, placing certain combinations of these personalities together could prove to create more or less effective teams. Findings from this study also have implications for the expansion of leadership capacity within the building. For example, those who lead with leadership amongst their colleagues should be given the freedom and flexibility to lead their collaborative teams. Expanding leadership capacity through the collaborative teams will help the implementation of professional learning communities grow from the inside of the collaborative teams themselves.

In addition, the findings of this study have implications for teachers, teacher leaders, and other certified support staff who are the sole implementers of professional learning communities. If teachers and teacher leaders understood each other's personality traits in detail, they could better navigate collaborative conversations. Instead of blindly setting norms, each team could instead create norms based on the specific areas on which their team would most likely disagree. Team members could also gain a better understanding of what strengths they possess and allow those strengths to flourish. Teacher leaders could help their collaborative team navigate their various dispositions and better create structures to support each individual team member. Teachers could also use the findings from this study to create effective teams of students for collaborative work within the classroom. In teaching students how to leverage both the strengths

that lie in their leadership styles, as well as how to use specific supports to balance their non-leadership dispositions, teachers can empower students with effective collaboration skills.

Finally, the findings of this study contain implications and conclusions for educational policy. Educational policy dictates a variety of requirements for student achievement. With the research presented stating the positive educational influence that professional learning communities can have, correct implementation of this initiative is key (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, 2008; Hord, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003). This study shows that successful implementation may not have to do with the process of how professional learning communities are implemented, but more with the personalities of the staff that make up each collaborative team. The relationships between team members and the different supports that these four personality types need to successfully implement a professional learning community model could be the determining factor of the team's success. The success of the team would then have direct implications for the academic success of students. Consequently, more funding is needed so that building leaders and teacher leaders can take part in professional development geared at understanding how to more effectively implement professional learning communities.

Future Studies

While the areas of future study could be numerous, I emphasize four possible research topics that can be identified from this study. These topics include (a) a replicated study in a different school to determine if the identified personality profiles remain consistent; (b) a study of the participants' experiences working with the identified personality profiles; (c) a similar study from the viewpoint of the building administrator; and (d) a study of how student data were impacted by different combinations of dispositions on a collaborative team.

First, a replicated study could be done in a different region of the country to determine if similar personality profiles are found to be consistent with this study. While the personalities identified in this study were broad, it would be beneficial to determine if they exist outside of the site for this study. The findings of such a study could lead to creating a survey instrument that can be used nationally, with more generalizable implication for findings, which could in turn inform how building principals implement professional learning communities.

Second, a study could be conducted focusing more on how participants describe their experiences working with their collaborative team members specifically relating to the dispositions identified in this study. Do certain combinations of these personality profiles influence the implementation of professional learning communities? Do the combinations always have the same influences?

Third, a similar study to this one could be conducted from the viewpoint of the building principals engaging multiple schools. Instead of focusing on the experiences of certified staff, what were the experiences of the building principals throughout the implementation process? How do the building principals view the interactions between staff before, during, and after the implementation of a professional learning community?

Finally, a study could be done to compare student achievement data from various teams made up of different personality profile combinations. This future study could seek to find the combination of personalities that creates the biggest influence on student learning. How do the different personalities interact with each other, and what is the impact of those interactions on student learning?

Conclusion

Findings from this study suggest that the successful implementation of professional learning communities has more to do with the teachers' dispositions and how they relate to each other rather than the specific process that is used. Participants in this study who did not lead with their hearts found it impossible to find value in working with a collaborative team. Much in the same way, participants who did not lead with their brains were not at all interested in analyzing and discussing student data. Additionally, an analysis of the ways in which the participants' dispositions informed their interactions with other members of their collaborative team uncovered pairings of dispositions that bread tension with each other. Regardless of mandates or additional professional development opportunities covering professional learning communities, participant personality dispositions did not change. With the focus of schools nationwide on building, supporting, and maintaining professional learning communities, administrators who build collaborative teams based on the personality dispositions of teachers are more likely successfully implement professional learning communities.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to explore the experiences that five Midwest elementary teachers had while implementing a professional learning community in their school, as well as to examine what effects this implementation had on their professional responsibilities. Through deep analysis of participants' responses, the research questions for this study were answered, contributions to the literature were discussed, and implications for future studies were noted.

In order to fully answer the research questions, I addressed each question through the lens of the individual participants and through a cross-comparison of them. This intertwined approach

was necessary in order to represent the influence that each disposition had on the overall professional learning community implementation. The four personality dispositions (leading or not leading with heart, leading or not leading with courage, leading or not leading with brains, and leading or not leading with leadership) were also used to address contributions to the literature. More specifically, from this study contributions to literature surrounding building a professional learning community, supporting a professional learning community, and maintaining a professional learning community can be made.

Furthermore, findings from this study have implications on educational leadership programs; superintendents, district administrators, and principals; teachers, teacher leaders, and school staff; and educational policy. For each of these groups, understanding the direct effect that an educators' personality has on their ability to successfully implement the components of a professional learning community should guide future work in this area. Starting with educational leadership programs and then extending into the schools, leaders and teacher leaders need to understand the impact that teacher dispositions and their combinations can have on the overall effectiveness of the collaborative team. When building teams, attention must be given to the identified dispositions in order to encourage the successful implementation of a professional learning community. Moreover, educational policy makers should provide additional funding for educators to continue to deepen their understanding of the role that educators' personalities have on effective professional learning community implementation. Within the implications from this study lie multiple areas for future study, including replicated studies in different schools, studies exploring participants' experiences working with the identified personality profiles, similar studies from the viewpoint of the administrator, and studies detailing how student achievement is impacted by teams with certain dispositions.

The DuFour model of professional learning communities is regarded by educators as the "most promising strategy for helping all students learn at high levels" (DuFour, et.al., 2006, p.2). With continuous pressure on educators to increase student achievement, attention should be given to the ways in which the successful implementation of professional learning communities can be created. Findings of this study suggest that teacher personalities are a bigger determining factor on the effectiveness of the professional learning community than the implementation process that is used.

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Appendix A - Data Inventory

Table 3.1: **Data Inventory**

Appendix B - Timeline

Table 6.1: **Timeline**

Date	Project Item	Participant's Role
May 15, 2017 – June 2,	identify participants	

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| June 5, 2017 – June 7, 2017 | nterview participants |
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Date	Activity
7 – June 24, 2017	check o preliminary codes ournaling
June 25, 2017 – June 30, 2017	eer one review of codes ournaling
July 10, 2017 – July 12, 2017	rovide object

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Sept. 30, 2017 – Nov 24, 2017	Determine if themes emerge Journaling	None
December 2, 2018	Member check with participants on codes/categories/theme Determine the best way to report findings	Provide feedback to researcher

Appendix C - Broad Interview Guide

There will be one open-ended, semi-structured interview conducted in a conversational nature during the course of the study. The interviews will be 30 to 60 minutes in length. Broadly speaking, the questions will be used for guiding questions during the interview. It is the intent of the researcher to explore the responses in-depth for at least eight open-ended questions. However, depending on how the participant elaborates each question, the interviewer will have to remain flexible. Due to the semi-structured, open-ended, conversational nature of the interviews, probes will be used based on participants' response to further explore their answers in-depth after asking a broad open-ended guiding question. Some probes can be pre-determined, and they are listed below. Other probes will emerge as a result of what the participant shares. However, all probes and questions will be broadly informed by the following questions.

1. Tell me about a time when you first learned about professional learning communities.
2. Tell me about the process for professional learning community implementation used at your school.
3. In what ways do you feel becoming a professional learning community influences your work?
4. Tell me about your experiences in a grade-level collaboration before a professional learning community model was implemented.
    a. How did this collaboration impact your work?
5. Walk me through a grade-level collaboration now.
    a. How does this collaboration impact your work?
6. If I sat at your grade-level collaborations, what words or phrases would I hear?
7. If I sat through a professional development session or leadership team meeting, what words or phrases would I hear?
8. Is there anything else you would like me to know that I did not ask you?

Appendix D - Object Elicited Interview Guide

There will be two object-elicited interviews per participant conducted in a conversational nature during the course of the study. The interviews will be 20-30 minutes in length. Broadly speaking, the questions will be used for guiding questions during the interview. It is the intent of the researcher to explore the responses in-depth for at least four open-ended questions. However, depending on how the participant elaborates each question, the interviewer will have to remain flexible. Due to the open-ended, conversational nature of the interviews, probes will be used based on participants' response to further explore their answers in-depth after asking a broad open-ended guiding question. Some probes can be pre-determined, and they are listed below. Other probes will emerge as a result of what the participant shares. However, all probes and questions will be broadly informed by the following questions.

1. Please describe the item you have brought.
2. Why did you choose to bring this item?
3. How does this item relate to your experiences with professional learning communities?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share about this item?

Appendix E - Bookworm Elementary School Collaboration

Template

PLC Agenda

Please fill out the following form for every PLC meeting.

Your email address (**calvehea@usd437.net**) will be recorded when you submit this form. Not you?
Switch account

* Required

Meeting Date *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Grade Level *

○ Kindergarten

○ First

○ Second

○ Third

○ Fourth

○ Fifth

○ Sixth

Growth Mindset Book Study

Be sure to note topic on calendar/communication

Topic for Growth Mindset Book Study

Your answer

Reflection and Plan for Growth Mindset

Your answer

Data & Instruction Review

Guiding Questions

What is it we expect all students to learn?   How will we know when they've learned it?
How will we respond when they don't learn?   How will we respond when they already know it?

Reading Instruction Data Analyzed

Your answer

Reading Interventions Based on Data

Your answer

Student Concerns-Reading/Academic

Your answer

Math Instruction Data Analyzed

Your answer

Math Interventions Based on Data

Your answer

Student Concerns-Math/Academic

Your answer

Behavior/PBIS Concerns

Your answer

Other Topics Discussed

Your answer

Housekeeping Items

☐ Track Minor Behaviors (Remember to turn in at end of month)

☐ Fill out Second Step Implementation Log

☐ Office Discipline Referrals (be sure to note in behavior)

☐ Ticket Totals

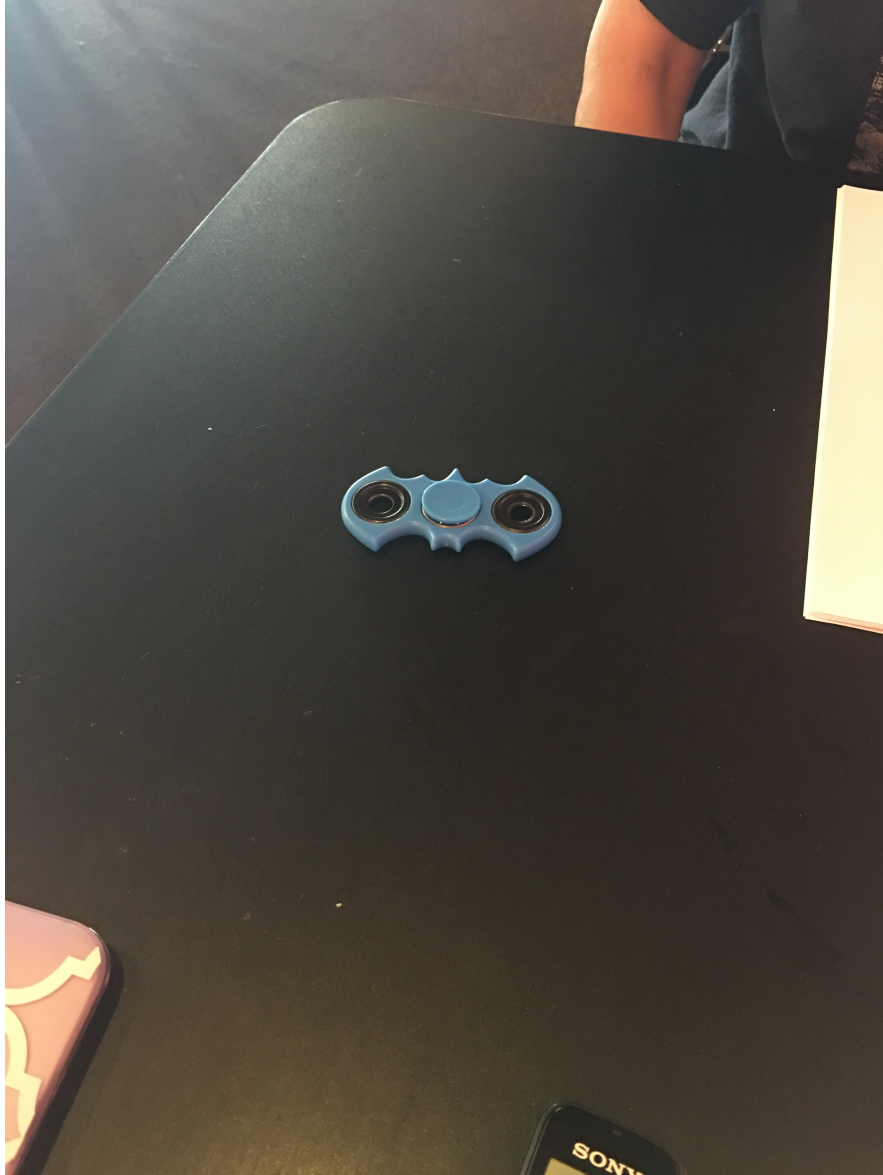A copy of your responses will be emailed to calvehea@usd437.net.

SUBMIT

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix F - Olga's Object

Appendix G - Kayla's Object

Appendix H - Cross-Comparison

Table 5.1: Cross-Comparison

	Susan	Olga	Harper	Kayla	Bonni
Leads with the heart? The Tin Man			r	e	
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