

**BUILDING LEADERSHIP SKILLS THROUGH A LEADERSHIP NETWORK:  
EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING ESSENTIAL  
COMPONENTS  
OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

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7/2/10

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which specific components of a PLC model were implemented in two schools by each school's leadership team as a result of participating in the Leadership Network. The project examined the areas of successful implementation and the barriers to progress.

**Procedure:**

Administrators and teacher-leaders from two schools participated in four sessions of the Leadership Network focused on the development and refinement of Professional Learning Community strategies (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Each school team worked with a non-school based facilitator to create an action plan between sessions. Facilitators visited the school site between training sessions to assist with the implementation of the strategies defined in the previously written action plan.

**Findings:**

The leadership teams from two schools increased their understanding of professional learning community elements. The research showed implementation of these elements as a continuum that ranged from superficial implementation of the PLC elements to deeper or more systemic implementation. Research participants benefited from and valued the training, guidance, and support provided through Leadership Network.

Conclusions:

For schools to effectively and efficiently become professional learning communities ongoing training and support is essential. The Leadership Network was the catalyst for prompting serious conversations about the fundamental purpose of schools and caused participants to reflect on their own core values and beliefs about learning. As a result, changes in practice were implemented.

Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

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It is my hope that this project will serve as an example for my children to see the value of continuous learning, the importance of establishing goals, and the satisfaction of achieving them. Thank you for your words of encouragement and patience throughout this process.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Context for the Study**

When I was first introduced to professional learning communities three years ago, the concept resonated with me. It rekindled powerful memories from my first 15 years of teaching in a small rural K-8 school in northern California. In the fall of 1981, I began as a sixth grade teacher in a community whose culture accepted people who lived an alternative lifestyle, including folks whose personal bubble needed to be least 40 acres, those with a rugged-individualist spark, as well as those who chose to live a more traditional lifestyle. The diversity found in the community was not exceptionally ethnic, racial, or religious, though an American Indian rancheria was certainly an integral part of the community. Here the diversity could be seen in its members' commitment to living and breathing their strong personal philosophies.

The culture of the community permeated the school. In 1981, the district was in its first year of existence, having deunified from a community 20 miles to the south. A sense of ownership, individualism, and passion to create something good was powerful in ways I cannot describe. The district's newness promoted experimentation, reflection, change, and discourse about every aspect of it. The beginning of my teaching career, which coincided with the beginning of the school district, gave me a unique experience of engaging in collaboration and problem-solving and the opportunity to be part of team that created a district's mission, vision, and personality. As I look back at those early years in my career, the process by which we operated was very similar to the attributes that characterize a professional learning community: possessing a common vision and

working collaboratively while remaining focused on student learning and results. Over the course of time, the district's teachers and administration developed a clear identity and they have always remained close to their core values of creativity, collaboration, hard work, and a commitment to students.

From my nearly twenty years of teaching, two experiences have directly influenced my guiding role in the development of a county-wide Leadership Network, whose focus was on the development of professional learning communities in schools. First was my participation in learning how to implement effective group-work activities through the use of the Complex Instruction model. Second was my ten years of team teaching with a colleague in a multi-graded structure serving students in sixth through eighth grades.

I was introduced to Complex Instruction as part of a three-week summer institute offered through the North Bay International Studies program at Sonoma State University in collaboration with Stanford University. During this time, I was teaching at a middle school in rural northern California. Following the training, our teaching team collectively embraced this particular model. We received training and coaching from the developers and researchers at the Center for Complex Instruction at Stanford University and embarked on a four-year journey of studying, experimenting, sharing results, making modifications, and perfecting our skills while improving student learning. The model was based on the research of Elizabeth Cohen and Rachel Lotan, who developed a form of cooperative learning by translating expectations states theory from its research base in the sociology of small-group process to strategies that promote academically successful groupwork (Rathbone, 2008). Complex Instruction utilizes classroom norms and group

roles, like many forms of cooperative learning, but it differs in its premise regarding why students participate or do not participate. Complex Instruction asserts that children who do not participate in a group do not do so because other children in the group see them as having nothing to offer to the group. Their attempts to contribute are often ignored and, simply stated, they have low academic status within the group. Complex Instruction uses two status treatments, multiple ability tasks and the assigning of competence, to equalize academic status within working groups to obtain the participation of all children (Cohen, 1994). The use of this model was the teaching team's first experience of implementing a common strategy. It created a focus for our work and engaged us in conversation, where we used a common language to co-create meaning. The work was extremely collaborative and intellectually stimulating. The teaching team grew as a community of professional educators and developed a strong sense of pride, which in turn cultivated confidence in the collective ability to make a difference for all students. Results of this effort were demonstrated by increased student engagement as documented through the use of formal observation tools, video recordings, and informal teacher observations. Student academic performance increased, particularly among students who had low academic status. Student achievement was measured through the use of common formative assessments. An unexpected outcome of the process was a shift in the academic culture among students and teachers with regard to instructional pacing. Complex Instruction, by design, limits the time students have to complete a task. As a result, an increased sense of urgency for learning was established. Teachers observed this phenomenon in all content areas, resulting in less time being required for previously established units of instruction.

A second experience that has had a profound impact on me as an educator was the ten years I spent team teaching with another colleague in a multi-grade class serving students in sixth through eighth grades. Teaming allowed us to reconfigure our 55-60 students in many different ways throughout the day based on the content and desired outcomes. We enjoyed a significant amount of instructional autonomy. Our students typically remained with us for three years, which provided us flexibility with the grade level curriculum, allowing us, for example, to focus on world history with the entire group. My colleague and I had both participated in the Complex Instruction initiative discussed previously. Our instructional program was project-based and allowed students to learn in the community as well as in the classroom. Parents became strong advocates for the program and valuable partnerships were formed, bringing additional resources and experiences to the students. During the first two years of our team-taught program, my colleague and I devoted a minimum of 50-60 hours a week to its development. We were excited, verging on obsessed, by the endless possibilities and opportunities for guiding our students in their learning. We truly believed teaching could not have been better.

Both of these experiences had as their foundation many of the same elements as a professional learning community including a clear mission, shared vision, common goals that focused on student learning, a culture of collaboration (talking about what mattered to the teachers), parent partnerships, and a process of continuous improvement based on student results and reflection. Though relationships are not explicitly stated as elements of a PLC as listed by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004), they are implied as vital characteristics of a successful PLC. Waters and Cameron (2007) emphasize the importance of relationships in creating a successful PLC in their work, *The Balanced*

*Leadership Framework: Connecting Vision with Action*, by identifying 21 specific leadership responsibilities, including relationships. The effectiveness of a PLC lies in the degree to which the model is implemented and the relationships among the members of the learning community. Having a set of clearly defined norms helped teachers in each of these environments to be successful contributors to the team. Nearly 30 years ago, in one of my first meetings with the principal, he wrinkled his forehead like a washboard, leaned forward, and told me, “Always remember, it’s 90% feelings and 10% content, don’t ever forget it.” He clearly understood the power and importance of relationships.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this research project was to assess the effectiveness of a local Leadership Network focused on the development and refinement of professional learning communities in eleven schools across two counties. The degree of effective implementation at each school was assessed by the change in the reported focus as a result of operationalizing the PLC elements as they related to the training provided through the Leadership Network in the following seven areas.

1. *School culture* is the degree to which the ethos of teaching reflects a movement from independence to interdependence; the establishment of short-term goals allowing for short-term wins, and an environment where there is a language of commitment rather than one of complaint. In a PLC, collaboration is a key component of the school’s culture.

2. *Fundamental purpose* includes the school’s mission, vision, and goals. It is the level to which the school emphasizes what students learn as opposed to what is

taught. Collaborative instructional teams develop a shared knowledge and understanding regarding the essential curriculum.

3. *Use of assessments* in a PLC provides relevant information to the teacher and students. Teachers use assessments to inform instruction and to identify students who need additional support and assessments allow monitoring of each student's proficiency. In a PLC, assessments are also used to inform and motivate students.

4. *Response when students don't learn* in a school that operates as a PLC includes a systemic system of support for students who need additional time. Effective use of assessments allows for intervention to occur early, rather than having to provide remediation as a result of failure over an extended period of time.

5. *Collaboration* in a school implementing the professional learning community model focuses explicitly on issues that most impact student achievement. Collaborative teams of teachers help each other improve. In a PLC, the work shifts an environment of isolation to one of collaboration.

6. *Student results* are examined regularly in a PLC. Goals are established that require evidence of student learning. Teams of teachers work collaboratively analyzing common formative assessment results in order to better meet the needs of the students.

7. *Professional development* is directly connected to improving student learning in a PLC. There is a sustained commitment to limited, focused initiatives within the school. Teachers are actively engaged in their own learning as opposed to learning by listening.

The purpose of the model was to form School Based leadership teams, composed of teacher leaders and the school's principal, with the help of an outside facilitator to create and promote a PLC in the schools.

This work is important because the teachers and principals who are committed to improving learning for all students benefit from a process whereby student needs can be analyzed, and as a result effective instructional strategies can be implemented that will ensure learning (Schmoker, 1999). The project concentrates on two aspects of the work. The first is to assess the effectiveness of the training provided to Leadership Network participants in creating a foundational understanding of a professional learning community (PLC), and the second is to examine the extent to which they have implemented key elements at their sites.

All PLCs possess some common attributes including a shared vision or goal, collaboration, examination of student data, problem solving, and a commitment to continuous improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). These efforts have become synonymous with school improvement over the past decade. Each leadership team's experience and understanding of the professional learning community (PLC) model varies. Specifically, the project examines the impact of the Leadership Network on two schools: one that has practiced using the PLC model for two years prior to this year's work, and another that is exploring PLC concepts for the first time. Both school leadership teams were provided the same PLC content throughout the year, though their specific plans for implementation differed.

## **Significance of the Project**

Public education in the United States continues to be under great scrutiny from the local level to the national level. It seems that the only point where we find consensus is that there is no silver-bullet solution. Changing demographics and economics and high-stakes accountability will hopefully culminate in the collective realization that we, as educators, need to look inward for the solutions. Professional learning communities provides us with a strategy and structure for capitalizing on the expertise we have in our schools. I would speculate that every school has experienced, well-prepared professional teachers with the capacity to provide great instruction to every student, in every school, every day. There is so much to be learned from these practitioners.

Historically, teachers have worked in isolation, to the point that it has become the norm and embedded in the culture of schools. We are now faced with schools dominated by teachers who work as if they are private contractors who share a common parking lot. When examining the role of the teacher over time in the United States, we see a long history of individual teachers committing their lives to the teaching of children, but spending comparatively little time engaged in professional conversations with their peers. The system is built around isolation; therefore, I am not perplexed by the fact that teachers are cautious to share information about their students' achievement, effective instructional practices, and strategies they found to be ineffective. Implementing high-stakes accountability in a culture founded on isolation is counter-intuitive to establishing an educational environment of openness and trust, where it is expected that meaningful conversations will be focused on student results tied to substantive improvement.

The value of collaboration has been studied extensively in business, medical, and educational communities. Having members working in isolation as private contractors reduces the effectiveness of the organization and reduces its productivity; in education, productivity could be translated as our impact on students (Fullan, 2008).

When changing a culture, you must first examine what perpetuates it and sometimes you may be faced with some uncomfortable realities. Anthony Muhammad (2009) in the book, *Transforming School Culture*, describes “a small group of teachers in the profession who are ‘burned-out’ – so overwhelmed by the profession that they suffer from depression and merely survive day to day” (p. 29) as “survivors.” Fortunately the numbers are few, but there is a general consensus within their schools that education is not the best profession for them. The structure of schools has created a niche for people who find the reality of collaboration challenging on both professional and personal levels. Instructional leaders are faced with the question of what to do about it.

Reforming a culture that complacent with isolation and fearful of high-stakes accountability and sanctions will take time, along with the careful work of teachers and administrators who possess the knowledge to implement technical change including effective instructional strategies, and the wisdom to provide guidance in changing a culture. Throughout this endeavor, teacher-leaders and administrators need to actively lead the resisters into the promised land of delivering the very best instruction to every student, in every school, every day.

The potential benefits of this project are innumerable. Overwhelming evidence suggest that PLCs provide a powerful strategy for school improvement. Teachers and administrators in the Leadership Network have potentially benefited by participating in

school teams. These teams have been provided instruction and coaching in the essential elements of a PLC focusing on collaboration, learning, and results. One of the most intoxicating aspects of a PLC is recognizing and accessing the power intrinsic to the collective efficacy of a staff.

My goal was that each team would have the capacity to recognize and tap this resource and to replicate and apply their skills to all aspects of student learning and support. Ultimately, school teams will understand that a PLC is not something done on Wednesday afternoons; it is the way they conduct the business of educating children.

Researchers and practitioners alike have written about the power of PLCs. Mike Schmoker (2005) has cited “a broad, even remarkable concurrence” among educational researchers and organizational theorists who have concluded that developing the capacity of educators to function as members of professional learning communities is the “best known means by which we might achieve truly historic, wide scale improvements in teaching and learning” (p. 432).

This study’s significance lies in the tight fit between instructional leadership and a school staff’s collective efficacy of implementing purposeful instructional practices. Finally, this study is intended to refine the skills of the leadership team delivering the training, through a training of trainers model that is intended to provide meaningful professional development that promotes sustainable PLC practices and a culture of continual improvement in our schools.

## **Support for the Project**

The PLC concept originated in the private sector, where communities of practice were found to create highly effective workplaces (Fullan, 2008). Much of the research has been done by a few leading authorities on the PLC model and focuses on developing a collaborative culture with a focus on student learning and results. Collaborative cultures are committed to working together to achieve a collective purpose.

A collaborative culture is cultivated through the development of high-performing teams. In the field of education, these teams must believe that learning is the fundamental purpose of our schools and therefore be willing to examine all practices in light of their impact on learning. Finally, School Based teams must assess their effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and schools must seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement (DuFour et al., 2006). Though each PLC is unique to the school or group it serves, they all possess common characteristics as described by Rick DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998). Professional communities have six major characteristics: 1) they establish a clear vision and mission; 2) they engage in collective inquiry; 3) they work collaboratively; 4) they engage in action orientation and experimentation; 5) they strive for continuous improvement; 6) they stay focused on measureable results (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, pp. 25-29).

Over the past year, Leadership Network participants have engaged in an effort to shift the focus from teaching to learning. Teams have worked extensively to answer the following four guiding questions:

1. What do we want our students to learn?

2. How will we know when they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when they do not learn?
4. How can we extend, enrich and maximize the learning for those students who have demonstrated proficiency? (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 91).

PLCs are typically initiated and supported by a school's principal and most often a team of teacher leaders. The credibility of the process lies with the teacher leaders who understand and communicate the value of collaboration amongst their colleagues. A meta-analysis conducted by Waters and Cameron (2007) reviewed effective leadership characteristics and identified 21 strategies for principals that were shown to have a positive effect. One cluster of skills concentrated on effective methods of leading systemic change in schools. One facet of this project is to assess the Leadership Network's effectiveness at supporting teacher leaders and principals as they either initiated the PLC concept in their schools, or led efforts to refine various components of an existing PLC, for example, creating a method for correlating the rigor of formative assessments with summative assessments. All participating schools set goals for improvement after each session, regardless of their depth of understanding or level of implementation.

In some school settings, teachers working collaboratively and collectively focusing on student learning require both cultural and technical changes. It is critical to understand that not all members in an organization process change at the same rate. Simply stated, the higher your position is in an organization, the quicker you are at adopting change as part of the culture. This is best described by Bridges and Bridges (2000) as the marathon effect and has been related to educational leadership by Waters

and Cameron (2007) through their description of leading systemic transitions in educational organizations. Leaders must be keenly aware of the influence of personal transitions during organizational transitions. Everyone wants to know how the change is going to affect him or her. DuFour and Eaker (1998) clearly state the task:

If schools are to be transformed into learning communities, educators must be prepared first of all to acknowledge that the traditional guiding model of education is no longer relevant in a post-industrial, knowledge-based society. Second, they must embrace ideas and assumptions that are radically different than those that have guided schools in the past. (p. 34).

The charge given to School Based leadership teams is to lead a transition by working from within and demonstrating for other teachers the value of a PLC.

An analysis of research conducted over a 35-year period demonstrates that schools that are highly effective produce results that almost entirely overcome the effects of student backgrounds (Marzano, 2003). The use of PLCs to improve student achievement and guide transitions within a school is possible when leadership teams are provided the skills and tools to make it happen. This project is intended to support local instructional leaders, both teachers and administrators, in this effort.

### **Methodology**

Two schools were chosen for this research project. Each school had a leadership team comprised of teacher-leaders and the site administrator. These two teams participated along with ten other schools in the 2009-2010 Leadership Network. The purpose of the Leadership Network was to coach school- or district-level leadership teams in the steps of becoming an effective professional learning community. School participation in the network was determined through a recruitment effort with principals

and superintendents, and was in part a response to a request from several superintendents within the county.

The leadership teams met four times during the year, beginning in late October and concluding in March. Each session had a half-day of content and half-day of team planning time. Each team had a facilitator, who worked with the team during each session creating an action plan of items to be completed before the next meeting. Facilitators visited their assigned schools at least once between each of the network meetings to facilitate the process and work with staff to implement the components of the school's action plan.

Once the schools were selected, each of them was visited and interviews were conducted with the administrators and members of the leadership team at each site. The intention of the researcher during those interviews was to discuss and examine the impact of the Leadership Network providing leadership teams with an increased understanding of professional learning communities and the ability to plan and lead systemic transitions within their schools.

A survey made up of specific, open-ended questions was used to interview the two leadership teams. In an attempt at being consistent, the same questions were asked at each school site visited. The identity of the people interviewed was not documented; neither were the names of the schools. The schools are referred to School 1 and School 2 during the discussion of the findings.

No personal information was recorded in any form. All the data collected were anonymous, and the information was collated to give an overall picture rather than focusing on responses from individuals.

After collecting the information from the interviews, the data were analyzed with the intention of looking at the interrelationship between the two facets previously mentioned: understanding the elements and structure of a PLC and the degree of implementation of ideas and concepts related to instructional practice at the school sites. The study is relevant because it will better inform the planning, implementation, and delivery of meaningful content in the Leadership Network. The research will answer the question of how participation in the Network during the 2009-10 school-year has helped School Based leadership teams implement PLC components that will, over time, lead to systemic instructional improvements.

Responses from participant interviews are categorized by the characteristics of an effective PLC described by DuFour and Eaker (1998). The results are used as a means of examining the effectiveness of the training provided. Additionally, since the teams participating in this project would be continuing in the Leadership Network the following year, the findings are expected to be used to determine the best next-steps to support the leadership teams as they continue to develop a deeper understanding of the PLC process, and how best to support educational leaders in implementing the attributes of a PLC, even within a resistant culture.

As the work continues, it is essential that the School Based leadership teams continue to monitor PLC implementation and the relationship between structural change and cultural change. “Structural change that is not supported by cultural change will eventually be overwhelmed by the culture, for it is in the culture that any organization finds meaning and stability” (Schlechty, 2001, p 52).

**Definition of Terms**

**professional learning communities** – As a conceptual model for transforming schools to meet their challenges, a PLC is made up of team members who embrace the notion that the fundamental purpose of school is learning, not teaching. The members collaborate toward continued improvement in meeting learner needs through a shared curricular vision.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

Engaging teachers in rich conversations around the topic of improving learning for all students is critical to the process of increasing the quality of education provided to students and ongoing professional growth for teachers. The building of a professional learning community not only promotes learning, but also provides a school the opportunity to create institutional knowledge among its members, allowing for new teachers to be assimilated into the school's culture more quickly than if operating in isolation. This project examines the effectiveness of a local Leadership Network, whose purpose is to increase a School Based leadership team's ability to create a successful professional learning community environment. This review of literature will examine current research on effective leadership strategies for building a culture of continual instructional improvement and the use of data as a lens to focus the improvement efforts. Professional learning communities are intended to create a school culture that can sustain changes in instructional practices driven by the needs of the students. Though ideas, concepts, and strategies may be garnered from numerous outside resources, the change is initiated by those who work most closely with the students: the teachers. The overall research plan includes the collection of data focusing on the relationship between leadership practices found in a professional learning community and the degree of implementation of those attributes at a school. The data collected is examined through the lenses of the two theories discussed in the literature review, that of a professional learning community, and the complexity of implementation as it relates to change in

school culture. These theories of practice include a wide range of information collected from instructional leaders including teacher-leaders, principals, and superintendents. An analysis of the data investigates the relationship between the elements of a PLC and the ability to manage the implementation of these components, and how they potentially influence the instructional core, whereby the primary goal is improve student learning for all.

Over the past 15 years, numerous studies have been conducted on the importance of leadership while using student data to drive decisions leading to changes in school culture. The research examined for this study focused on two theories of action, namely, professional and purposeful learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Waters & Cameron, 2007) and the marathon effect (Bridges & Bridges, 2000).

The first theme to be reviewed is influenced by the work of Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998) along with additional work by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek (2004), pioneers in defining the elements of a professional learning community (PLC). It serves as the foundation for the review of literature and the underpinning for the research conducted by the Mid-Continent Research Education Laboratory (McREL), who have completed an extensive meta-analysis determining specific strategies that support leaders who are continually engaged in improving the quality of instruction leading to academic improvement, leading change with varying orders of magnitude and developing a professional learning community both within the school and in the larger community (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Focusing on methods of inquiry as a means of improving student achievement often requires many schools and districts to change and operate in a new way. Leading a

school's teachers through these transitions requires a thorough understanding of the change process, particularly the elements where past practices will need to be replaced by new behaviors (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). Using a consistent approach to problem solving that will lead to a theory of actionable practice is crucial to maintaining a coherent focus on student achievement.

Research in this field is ongoing and cyclical in nature; questions are posed, strategies are implemented, data are collected and analyzed; as a result, new questions emerge. Throughout this process there is a tight relationship between the participants and the researcher. This research has been, and will continue to be, a process of socialization (Henning & Trent, 2007). The formulation of an interactive relationship between each teacher and his or her colleagues is critical to the effectiveness of sustaining a student achievement improvement effort.

### **Professional Learning Community**

Many schools have established professional learning communities as a method for focusing on improving instruction and student achievement. The regional Leadership Network was created as a method of supporting schools by providing instructional leaders with the knowledge, strategies, and tools necessary to continue their work. The structure and processes utilized in professional learning communities varies depending on the need. However, there are some common attributes that include having a shared vision or goals, collaboration, examination of student data, problem solving, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

DuFour and Eaker's extensive compilation of research, leadership skills, and thoroughly articulated best practices has provided the educational community with

strategies and tools for implementing this model in schools and districts (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Their work has become synonymous with school improvement over that past decade. The research on the effectiveness of professional learning communities has been expanded as result of the work done by the Mid-Continent Research Educational Leadership Institute. The research team at McREL found that, in addition to the positive effect collaboration has on learning, the more the members of a school community are able to coalesce around a shared purpose or goal, the more sustainable and effective a school's change efforts will be. Their work showed that by having an agreed-upon process for operationalizing a systems organizational structure, complex and synchronous patterns of behavior can be produced, resulting in meaningful outcomes. In an effort to simplify the concept, researchers used as examples flocks of birds or schools of fish, within which the common focus creates a more vigorous outcome than could be accomplished by any one individual. They emphasized the notion of "purposeful community" as having more robust characteristics than the traditional professional learning community that more accurately distinguished highly effective school communities from less effective communities.

Waters and Cameron (2007) describe a purposeful community as one with the collective efficacy and capability to develop and use assets to accomplish goals that matter to all community members through agreed-upon processes. Their description was based on the work of Albert Bandura (1997), wherein he states that within any organization, perceived collective efficacy represents the beliefs of group members to produce and achieve at certain levels, resulting in improved organizational performance.

Participating network leadership teams are provided time to allow the group to

form a collective understanding of their work. Teachers have also been provided time for self-reflection including opportunities for examining their core beliefs about student learning. For a school's leadership team to be effective, it is critical that the members of the team have had the time to listen to, understand, and question the perspectives and philosophies of other team members if the goal is to move forward with a common purpose.

A recent study showed that collective efficacy beliefs are an important aspect of an organization's operative culture and can be used to move initiatives forward. However, the research also showed how efficacy judgments and beliefs about individual or group capability are not necessarily accurate assessments of those capabilities. People often either over- or underestimate their actual abilities. These estimations can have consequences on the course of action and the intended outcomes. Therefore, leaders must be cognizant of the reliability of a group's collective efficacy with regard to the task chosen to pursue (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Leaders who work in isolation, without an opportunity to collaborate with other leader-stakeholders, are limited by their own experience and perceptions, whereas leaders who work as part of a leadership team have the opportunity to gain new insights into the group's skill.

Furthermore, examining the power of collective efficacy is not limited to effective leadership, but can be a significant factor with respect to student learning. Successful performance tends to raise efficacy beliefs, leading to the belief that performance will be proficient in the future. The perceptions of collective efficacy, such as perceived reading ability, have been shown to be a positive predictor of differences among schools and teachers (Goddard et al., 2004). Bandura (1997) found that collective efficacy beliefs

have stronger effects on student achievement than student race or socioeconomic status. This concept correlates directly with the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998) in their discussion stressing the importance of establishing a common mission, vision, and goal.

Possessing collective efficacy is not enough on its own; identifying the best strategies to support learning is essential, but can be more challenging than expected. First, you have to examine the symptoms of the problem to determine the root causes, the point at which you can take action. One strategy used by organizational planners that has been found to be effective in supporting this process has been the use of the “5-Why’s,” originally developed by the Toyota Production System, whereby “why” is asked at about each symptom until reaching the point where a concrete, measurable action can be articulated (Childress & Marietta, 2008). Strategies are broad set of coherent actions the people in a school will take to meet the objective of improving student learning (Childress, 2004).

For the work of professional learning communities to move forward, instructional leaders must create and maintain an organization that supports, rather than constrains, innovation and strategy implementation. Though implementation appears to be very straightforward, Childress and Marietta's (2008) study emphasized the importance of having an implementation plan that includes choosing the right people for the job, clarifying the responsibilities, and being keenly aware of skill gaps that may impede implementation. The use of feedback loops to promote communication and to navigate bumps in the road was found to be particularly effective (Childress & Marietta, 2008). In the case of Leadership Network participants, this is particularly important, because as a

team of instructional leaders they must serve as a conduit of communication within the school to support implementation of the PLC.

Assessing progress of implementation by monitoring the timeline, the effectiveness of the strategy, and the validity of the theory of action will provide ongoing information that can be used to identify new problems and modify actions so as not to miss the original target (Childress & Marietta, 2008). Throughout the process, leaders must be aware that shifting priorities and realigning resources to support the goal may result in resources being shifted away from previously supported agendas (Childress, Elmore, Grossman, & King, 2007). The realignment of resources may result in a significant change by some staff. This is a complex task with tremendous responsibility. Principals who have built a strong collaborative culture among their leadership team have the pleasure of sharing the work, ideas, challenges, and successes.

### **Leadership Responsibilities**

Understanding the impact of the leadership responsibilities (Appendix A: The 21 Leadership Responsibilities and Practices Organized by Areas of Influence) on a school is critical for effective leadership. Highly successful leaders know when to answer the question and when to ask it (Waters & Cameron, 2007). They possess the ability to determine which aspects of a strategy are flexible for differentiation and which aspects are non-negotiable and they purposefully use informal sources of power through the use of committees, job rotations (e.g., department chair), and other assignments (Childress et al., 2007). The most effective leadership is collaborative in nature and is both problem solving and developmental (Bridges & Bridges, 2000).

### **Use of Data as a Means of Continuous Improvement**

Principals are given the task of improving student achievement in their respective schools. An improvement process requires the ability of the staff to collaborate and the instructional leader to create a culture of using quality data when developing theories of action (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2004). Basing decisions on evidence rather than on rank or beliefs may cause a leader to examine his or her own beliefs and accept varying perspectives (Henning & Trent, 2007).

The research supporting the use data-driven leadership emphasizes that the principal and teacher leaders should use a variety of training strategies to increase the use of data in the culture of the school. The development of a data collection calendar, stressing the importance of accurate data and using data to make daily instructional decisions, is well worth the principal's time. Superintendents should support the establishment of performance benchmarks to measure student achievement and support an effective professional development program for teachers (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2004).

As discussed in the research by Waters and Cameron (2007), the importance of justifying a need for change is essential. Accurate data provides the evidence necessary to examine instructional practices. The task of the school leadership team is to ensure that all teachers can see the relationship between the data entered into the data management system and how that information is used to support the school's instructional program and business operations (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2004). The use of meaningful data is essential in a PLC in order to focus strategically on results-based learning.

Extensive research conducted by William, Kirst, and Haertel (2005) included a survey of 257 California elementary schools with more than 5,500 teachers to determine “concrete and actionable practices” that increase student achievement. The survey results were analyzed, and then clustered into seven domains. Four of these domains were found to be present in highly effective schools and most often occurred together: prioritizing student achievement; implementing a coherent, standards-based instructional program; using assessment data and ensuring availability of instructional resources. The study’s second phase included a survey of 20 superintendents who were asked what three strategies they considered to be the most effective at improving student achievement. The results of the teacher survey and the superintendent interviews ranked the use of data and assessment as the most effective practice for achieving academic progress (Williams et al., 2005). These findings correlate directly with the essential components of a PLC and were integrated into the Leadership Network.

A review of the literature examining effective leadership practices encourages principals and instructional leaders to establish standards, guidelines, and policies that encourage respect for accurate data. Only quality data enable teachers and principals to have confidence in the information allowing for effective decision making. In an effective data system, edit-checks are conducted in order to anticipate errors before they occur, ensuring that the information provided to teachers is accurate and meaningful (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2004).

As teachers begin to look at data they can have misconceptions about the data: that its purpose is to place blame on individuals for the lack of student achievement. In some school cultures, looking at data is a change in tradition. As a result, teachers may

fear data. To overcome fear, it is critical to focus always on the destination by looking ahead rather than on where you are. As part of the PLC process, setting collaborative goals will support this practice and minimize the negative factors. However, regardless of whether there is fear and resistance to data, teachers need to know how to use analytical tools (Henning & Trent, 2006). As part of the Leadership Network, teachers and principals have been provided strategies for looking at their students' data and guided in how to share the data in ways that will foster buy-in from all teachers. An emphasis has been placed on the depersonalization of the data and its purpose described as being necessary to move forward based on students' needs. The use of technology to enhance classroom instruction can be both an effective and efficient method of linking research, data, and technology with the classroom (Brabec, Fisher, & Pitler, 2004). Shared ownership of student data allows for shared solutions with goal of maximizing student learning.

### **The Leader's Role: Protecting the Instructional Core**

The critical question embedded in bringing coherence to educational reform is to ask the instructional leaders what they believe is the most powerful way to drive increased learning for all students. The organization's current data must be at the instructional core of the work. The interaction between the student, teacher, and the curriculum compose the instructional core that must be supported and protected to achieve the expected outcomes (Childress et al., 2007). Establishing a culture of quality data is an essential part of teaching, learning and leading the school enterprise (National Forum on Educational Statistics, 2004).

Effective communication between leaders and stakeholders must be seen as a priority, particularly when shifting the focus from teaching to learning, from a culture of isolation to one of collaboration, and from inputs to results. Stakeholders are people who have legitimate interest in the system, who may be either internal or external in relationship to the system, and who can influence the effectiveness of a strategy. In most schools this would consist of the school's parents, site council, and members of various advisory committees. Communication among all stakeholders is paramount when implementing a strategy that will result in a change (Childress et al., 2007).

It is the role of the instructional leader to pay attention to the constraints of the environment, though they generally have very little control over environmental factors that include contracts, financial, regulations, and political forces (Childress et al., 2007). However, this allows the teachers to focus nearly all of their efforts on the students, rather than becoming diverted. Thoroughly understanding these factors and how they influence the organization, as well as being able to explain them to the stakeholders, allows a leader to focus the organization's work on the right target, and not become distracted by issues that will not improve learning among students.

### **The Leader: Student Achievement**

The research describes two major forms of leadership: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Instructional leadership focuses on student learning, creating a learning environment free of disruptions and with high expectations for students and teachers. It is significant to note that these areas of focus are also found in an effective professional learning community. Transformational leadership refers to leaders who inspire staff to new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose (Hattie, 2009).

An analysis of the meta-analyses (Connell, 1996; Henchey, 2001; Teddlie & Springfield, 1993) conducted by John Hattie showed that those school leaders who focus on students' achievement and instructional strategies are the most effective.

Evidence showing a positive relationship between effective leadership and student achievement was demonstrated in the Planning, Implementing and Monitoring (PIM) study conducted by Doug Reeves (2006), with data provided by Nevada's Clark County School District, one of the nation's largest school districts with over 280,000 students.

The findings emphasized what many instructional leaders already understood: improving the quality of planning, monitoring, and implementation is strongly associated with improving student achievement. The rubric used in this study included many of the elements of a PLC including the use of assessments (standardized, district created, and school based), a focus on results, establishing S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, accomplishable, relevant, timely) goals, professional development driven by student needs, and the importance of engaging stakeholders.

A look at a recent meta-analysis provides additional evidence linking leadership to student achievement. A meta-analysis of current research conducted by Waters and Cameron (2007) found a statistically significant correlation of .25, translating to one standard deviation increase, between school-level leadership and student achievement as shown by a 10 percentile point difference in student achievement on a norm reference test. These results point to the effect of leadership on student learning. However, not all strong leaders have a positive impact on student achievement. Strong leadership can be compromised if a principal focuses on practices that are not linked to improving the desired learning outcomes (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

A recent meta-analysis comprised a review of over 5,000 studies with 69 of the studies meeting the criteria for quality of design, rigor, and relevance that were systematically analyzed by the research team of Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005). Further analysis was conducted by a second team from the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning Institute (McREL). They identified 21 leadership responsibilities with statistically significant correlations to student achievement (Appendix A: Leadership Responsibilities). It was determined through a factor analysis of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified through the meta-analysis that sufficient inter-correlations among the 21 responsibilities did not exist. Therefore, each of the 21 leadership responsibilities identified is distinct enough to stand on its own without being combined with any other factor (Waters & Cameron, 2007). Researchers found an empirical relationship between the leadership responsibilities and some of the components found in an effective professional learning community. The implementation of these often results in a significant cultural change within a school.

In today's climate, effectively managing difficult organizational transitions is essential for a successful leader (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). Leaders must recognize that change is an opportunity for failure. Bridges and Bridges (2000) explain that approaching change without addressing the psychological aspects of change will result in failed change initiatives. For this study, I did not focus on all 21 leadership responsibilities, but rather considered those leadership attributes that were found to have either a positive or negative influence on changing instructional practices that are either explicitly stated or embedded in the elements of an effective professional learning community.

Table 1

*Responsibilities Correlated with Leading Change*

<b>Positively Correlated</b>	<b>Negatively Correlated</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change agent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideals and beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and evaluate</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual stimulation</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimize</li> </ul>	

(DuFour et al., 2004; Waters & Cameron, 2007)

During implementation, the research implies that teachers may feel less cohesion and more fragmentation in the school, that the principal is less willing to listen to concerns, that they have less influence on the daily operations of the school, and that the patterns for decision making are no longer predictable. Michael Fullan (2001) refers to this as the “implementation dip,” which is literally a dip in performance when one encounters an innovation that requires new knowledge and skills. The teachers are experiencing two kinds of problems—the social-psychological fear of change, and the lack of technical know-how or skills to implement. Leaders must remember that implementation requires change, the phases of change are a complex and non-linear process, and the magnitude of change varies among the participants involved in the change (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

Some principals and teachers must learn the difference between competing in a change marathon and developing the capacity and commitment to solve complex problems. A PLC is based on the premise that all teachers and administrators are focused on continuous improvement, not just a few select zealots. These pacesetters are often

intolerant and have no patience for those experiencing the “implementation dip” (Fullan, 2001). Leaders should expect and celebrate what Michael Fullan describes as the “implementation dip.” It is part of the process.

Some of the negative effects of the changing culture can be mitigated by collaboratively establishing a mission with a timeline and benchmarks that are measureable and will promote progress and achievement. In DuFour’s work on PLCs, he referred to this as goal setting. Another factor, which is often overlooked, is the importance of communication beyond the management or leadership team (Childress et al., 2007). A leader must clearly communicate with all stakeholders the need for change in an organization including the teachers who are not participating in the Leadership Network training sessions. The job of communicating to all of the stakeholders requires the principal to rely on an effective leadership team to share information and create a demand within the school. Schools that are satisfied with the status quo do not see a need for change. Need for change comes from two possibilities. First, the emergence of a shared vision that challenges the current reality and second, a current reality that is so unpleasant that individuals or groups are willing to risk and accept a change (Waters & Cameron, 2007). DuFour and Eaker (1998) describe the formation of a common mission and vision as the first step in forming a Professional Learning Community.

Providing coaching support through transitions can be a very effective method of assisting a leadership team, principal, or superintendent leading a transition. The coach serves as an advisor and works collaboratively with the leader to assess the leader’s place in the three parts of the transition process. The coach’s role is unique; the time is limited and the coach must produce quick and clear results. The relationship is specifically

focused on the development of new skills that are essential to meeting the needs to attain the goal (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). The Leadership Network uses a coaching model by having a facilitator work with each School Based leadership team to assist in the implementation of new skills to build the internal capacity of the leadership team. The facilitator or coach's responsibility is to meet the needs of the individual leadership team, and help them in their journey from where they are to where they want to go. In some instances this may be as simple as helping establish norms and agreed-upon timelines for completing the work. With other leadership teams it may include teaching members how to effectively and efficiently facilitate a meeting where the task is to analyze student learning and determine what needs to be done to meet the needs of the students. Regardless of the charge, the facilitator coach's role is to assist leadership teams by providing support, expertise, and an outside perspective.

Current research emphasizes that before implementing a solution to a problem, the problem needs to be identified and the need for change must be apparent and defined. An understanding of need for change must be created (Waters & Cameron, 2007). In addition, leaders must engage people in specific behaviors that will "reshape" beliefs and change instructional practices (Childress et al., 2007). The goal of changing practice is high-quality teaching and learning every day in every classroom (Childress & Marietta, 2008). Starting the problem-solving process by clearly identifying the problem and rigorously analyzing it will result in a strong theory of action. DuFour (2004) suggests looking at a problem "through a window and in a mirror"; first study it, and then see what you can do about it. The mission of the Leadership Network is strongly supported by DuFour's research findings. From the opposite perspective, beginning with a poorly

developed theory of action will result in failure. If your outcome is not clearly understood by the stakeholders and the steps for reaching the goal are undefined, it is highly unlikely that leaders will be lucky enough to reach the destination.

The review of the research clearly establishes the need and importance of examining both theories of action described: the establishment of a PLC and the complexities of implementation and change. The review of literature revealed limited information on current methods and models of integrating the two theories of action, specifically, creating and establishing a PLC, while at the same time attending to the limiting factors affecting implementation that must be considered when leading and promoting instructional changes that will shift a school's culture.

The purpose for this project is to examine the effectiveness of the Leadership Network at teaching the elements of a professional learning community. The next step in the process would be to fully assess the degree of implementation over time at each school site. However, the timeline for full implementation extends beyond the scope of this research project. An outcome from this study is to provide a coherent methodology for supporting educational leaders, including principals and teacher-leaders in the establishment of a PLC as a means of creating a culture of continuous improvement at their schools.

### **A Look Beyond Education**

The work of implementing an effective PLC requires the school's principal and leadership team is to ensure that all teachers remain true to the identified mission, values, and goals. The school's leader has the responsibility to keep the school's fundamental purpose ever present. Teachers must choose instructional practices strategically, based

upon data collected from assessments. Upon implementation, instruction must be targeted and differentiated to meet the diverse needs of the students. Sustainability of a PLC is the responsibility of the entire school and is supported through professional collaboration that builds the capacity of the organization and a shared institutional knowledge. As a result, the impact of new initiatives, transitions in leadership, and changes in staffing can be minimized, allowing the focus to remain on the needs of the students. Some of these same characteristics are found in organizations far removed from education, including the unlikely arena of terrorist networks.

Terrorist networks can provide useful examples of effective leadership that incorporate the themes explored in this literature review. By examining the structure and effectiveness of terrorist organizations, Margaret Wheatly (2007) found they met the criteria generally used to judge effective leadership. Members of these organizations work with like-mindedness, in essence collective efficacy. They are passionate about their work. These networks have the ability to communicate a powerful vision, to motivate people to work hard, to achieve results, to be innovative, and to implement change. They are successful at creating resilient organizations that are able to survive crises and change. While building capacity, they remain focused on their mission and continual progress is made through a succession of leaders. Nevertheless, understanding the quintessential elements of leadership is pivotal to the effectiveness of any organization, be it a school, business, or terrorist network. Leadership can be used for morally good or bad ends. Just like power, leadership is “influence potential.” A leader must combine morals, ethics, and caring with strong leadership tendencies.

## **Conclusion**

Each facet examined in this review, including the elements of a professional learning community, the roles, responsibilities and challenges of instructional leaders, and the importance of choosing the “right” data to guide instruction, must merge and integrate to create and establish a PLC that promotes a culture of continuous improvement in which all students learn.

Extensive research has been done surrounding effective leadership practices in schools. A majority of the literature reviewed consisted of meta-analysis research conducted by experts in the field. Each of the various themes explored provided valuable, research-based practices for promoting high-quality education for all students. Only the research done by the Mid-continent Research Education and Learning (McREL) bridged strategies for improvement with the phases of change during implementation. Providing local educational leaders with a coherent model for developing highly effective schools, taking into consideration the themes previously discussed, is the focus of the forthcoming research project.

This project attempts to determine to what degree specific components of a PLC model were implemented in two schools by each school’s leadership team as a result of participating in the Leadership Network. The project examines the areas of successful implementation of the seven identified themes and methods to support progress. In addition, the project assesses viable next steps for Leadership Network participants.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This project was designed to assess the effectiveness of a local Leadership Network at providing leadership teams with the necessary skills to implement elements of a PLC and to investigate the extent to which any skills were applied back at participant sites. This was accomplished by examining two schools that participated in the Leadership Network with a focus on the development and refinement of professional learning communities, including strategies for implementing the PLC model to improve learning. Participants were site-based leadership teams, comprised of teacher-leaders and the principal. The two teams were chosen to participate in the study because of their varying levels of experience with the PLC model. Both of these teams participated in a year-long professional development program that addressed the common attributes of a PLC including having a shared vision or goal, collaboration, examination of student results, problem solving, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Both of the schools were located in rural communities with a significant number of socio-economically disadvantaged students. The student demographics in these schools have changed as the number of students identified as English Language Learners has increased over the past five years.

School A in the study was an elementary school wherein the process of becoming a PLC had begun two years prior to its participation in the Leadership Network. School B in the study was unfamiliar with the PLC model and had not participated in any training on this topic.

The six teacher participants in School A were all Caucasian, middle-class females ranging in age from 35 to 60+. The principal at School A was a Hispanic female. The teachers on School A's leadership team had an average of 19 years of teaching experience and averaged 13 years of service at the school. The principal had 21 years of teaching experience and 3 years of administrative experience, and had been at this school site for the past eight years.

Participants in School B were all Caucasian and middle class. Two males served on the team, a teacher and the principal. The remaining four participating teachers were females. The age of the participants ranged from 28 to 60+. Participating teachers at School B averaged 17 years of teaching experience and 12 years of service at this site. The principal had been in the district for 21 years: 16 years as a teacher and the most recent 5 years as the administrator. The teams from both schools eagerly accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

Extensive research has been conducted on PLCs and the use of data to inform instruction. Additional research focused on strategies for leading and implementing systemic change in a school environment.

If contemporary educators are to make significant progress in meeting this new challenge, they must first recognize that the institutions in which they work were not designed to accomplish the task of learning for all. They must then acknowledge the need to make fundamental changes in both the practices of their schools and the assumptions that drive those practices. (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 2)

This study will provide the Leadership Network organizational team with feedback to plan effective support for School Based leadership teams as they continue their work in the Leadership Network to implement PLCs. The purpose of the study was

to determine to what degree specific components of a PLC model were implemented in two schools by each school's leadership team as a result of participating in the Leadership Network.

### **Background**

Initial planning for the Leadership Network began during the spring of 2009. The structure of the network was developed at the Leadership Center at the Sonoma County Office of Education and has been in place for nearly five years.

Funding for the project was a collaborative effort between the Stewart Foundation, Regional School and District Support System (RSDSS), and participating school districts. These funds covered the cost of substitutes, content materials, four days of training, and an individual facilitator for each leadership team. Facilitators assisted during the morning sessions with content presentations and led their school teams through various group activities. During the afternoons, facilitators worked with their school leadership teams to create an action plan detailing the next steps to be taken toward fully implementing a PLC at the site. Between each of the four sessions, the facilitator visited the site at least once to work with staff and support implementation.

### **Data Sources and Instrumentation**

Following the fourth session of the Leadership Network, two schools were contacted to participate in this study. Though this was the first year either school had participated in this style of training, one of the schools was in its third year of working as a PLC, while the other school lacked any previous knowledge or experience with the concept. Both schools possessed similar demographics with a high percentage of students living in poverty and both faced an ongoing challenge to effectively address the needs of

students identified as English Language Learners. Both schools had stable leadership with administrators having been in place for more than three years. Staffing changes were minimal at these schools and were generally a result of retirement. I selected these schools because of their many similarities, but also because of their differing levels of experience with a PLC. Additionally, I was familiar with the schools and had the ability to access the staff and conduct the study.

After scheduling a meeting time with each principal, I shared the process for collecting the data, which included open-ended survey questions asked in an interview setting. Questions were designed to correlate with the information provided during the four PLC training sessions as it related to the school site and the indicators stated in the research as attributes of an effective PLC (DuFour et al., 2004). Areas to be examined included the capacity of the team to implement, evidence of success toward implementation, evidence of barriers to implementation, and the team's perceived ability to impact systemic change.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After scheduling time to visit each school, I interviewed each administrator individually. The school leadership team from School A was interviewed in two smaller groups because of scheduling conflicts. All members of the teacher team from School B were interviewed simultaneously.

Teachers were interviewed during the school day, but not while teaching. I facilitated the meetings and the following information was collected:

- Participant background information, including how they were selected as members of the school's leadership team

- Agendas for the PLC meetings and action plans generated during the trainings
- Notes and audio recordings from the interviews

In addition, anecdotal reflections made during Leadership Network sessions were also considered.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collection included notes, transcriptions, and researcher reflections. All data was categorized by theme (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the coding was completed, an attempt was made to align the themes to the original questions posed. This study used the phenomenological research method as a means of determining the degree of implementation of the PLC content elucidated in the Leadership Network.

Prior to collecting data from participants, the IRB process was completed and approval for the study was granted by the Institutional Review Board at Sonoma State University. Participants were provided an overview of the project along with a document guaranteeing confidentiality, ensuring that identifying information would only be disclosed with permission. Each participant signed the required consent prior to participation.

Qualitative data were collected through interviews conducted of 12 participants, six from each of the two schools. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Researcher notes were also generated during the interviews and used during the analysis. Study participants were asked to respond to a brief questionnaire seeking general demographic information including total years of teaching experience, years of service at their current sites, and how they were selected to participate in their school's leadership team.

The following template was used to analyze the trends and patterns of the data.

Table 2

*Template for Analysis of the Audio Recordings, Notes and Questionnaires*

	Theme:	Theme:	Theme:	Theme:
School A Teachers				
School A Administrator				
School B Teachers				
School B Administrator				

The participant questionnaire and interview guide are included in Appendix B.

These artifacts provide administrators with a resource and a deeper understanding of the process used during the study.

### **Summary**

The selected research methods attempted to answer the question of the study: To what degree were specific components of a PLC model implemented in two schools by each school's leadership team as a result of participating in the Regional Leadership Network? The findings from this study will be used to assess the effectiveness of training provided through the Leadership Network in an effort to improve the quality of professional development for the next cohort of participating schools.

Data were collected through participant interviews that addressed each of the seven PLC areas described below. Participants were asked respond to three prompts for each item. First, they were asked to describe how each element was currently demonstrated in their school. Second, they were asked if more work were to be done,

how would it look the following year, and third, they were asked what influence the Leadership Network had on the implementation of each of the elements.

The degree of effective implementation at each school was assessed by the change in the reported focus as a result of operationalizing the PLC elements as it related to the training provided through the Leadership Network. Effectiveness was measured by the degree of implementation of the following seven categories, which were derived from a review of the literature, specifically the work of Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998).

1. Interdependent school culture: School culture is the degree to which the ethos of teaching reflects a movement from independence to interdependence, the establishment of short-term goals allowing for short-term wins, and an environment where there is a language of commitment rather than one of complaint. In a PLC, collaboration is a key component of the school's culture.

2. Student learning as the fundamental purpose: Fundamental purpose examines the school's mission, vision, and goals. It is the level to which the school emphasizes what students learn as opposed to what is taught. Collaborative instructional teams develop a shared knowledge and understanding regarding the essential curriculum.

3. Use of assessments to inform instruction: Use of assessments in a PLC provides relevant information to the teacher and students. Teachers use assessments to inform instruction and to identify students who need additional support; assessments allow monitoring of each student's proficiency. In a PLC, assessments are also used to inform and motivate students.

4. Systematic response when students don't learn: Response when students don't learn in a school that operates as a PLC includes a systemic system of support for students who need additional time. An effective use of assessments allows for intervention to occur early, rather than relying on remediation as a result of failure over an extended period of time.

5. Collaborative culture around student achievement: Collaboration in a school implementing the professional learning community model focuses explicitly on issues that most impact student achievement. Collaborative teams of teachers help each other improve. In a PLC, the work shifts an environment of isolation to one of collaboration.

6. Regular examination of results: Student results are examined regularly in a PLC. Goals are established that require evidence of student learning. Teams of teachers work collaboratively analyzing common formative assessment results in order to better meet the needs of the students.

7. Professional development connected to student learning: Professional development is directly connected to improving student learning in a PLC. There is a sustained commitment to limited, focused initiatives within the school. Teachers are actively engaged in their learning as opposed to learning by listening.

The findings, including areas of effectiveness along with the identified barriers, will guide the Network's organizational team in planning for the next cohort of participants.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Analysis**

Analysis of the data focuses on answering the central questions of this study: To what degree were specific components of a PLC model implemented in two schools by each school's leadership team as a result of participating in the regional Leadership Network?

The data sets include demographic information on participants, PLC action plans created during Leadership Network meetings, participant questionnaires, and the researcher's transcriptions of teacher and administrator interviews.

#### **Findings by Categories**

Findings were organized by the seven categories of effective PLCs identified during the review of relevant literature. The findings were organized by each of the seven identified themes. Site-level responses between the teachers and the principal did not vary significantly in content or perspective. Therefore, the two categories have been collapsed resulting in the findings being reported simply from School A and School B.

Effectiveness of this study was measured by the degree of implementation of the following seven categories:

1. School culture
2. Fundamental purpose
3. Use of assessments
4. Response when students don't learn
5. Collaborative work

6. Student results

7. Professional development

### **Participants in the Study**

An overview of the PLC Leadership Network was provided to district superintendents in August 2009 to determine interest in participation. Eleven school teams registered and participated in four training sessions. Between each structured session, the school's outside facilitator worked with their leadership team to implement the action plan that was created during the previous session. After the last session, two principals were contacted and asked to participate in the study. The two schools were chosen specifically because of their varying levels of experience with the PLC model. In order to determine the effectiveness of the training, a comparative study of schools with a range of experience was essential. Both schools' leadership teams agreed to participate.

School A in the study was an elementary school wherein the process of becoming a PLC had begun two years prior to their participation in the Leadership Network. School B in the study included a team of teachers and administrators serving students in grades K-12. They were unfamiliar with the PLC model and had not participated in any training on this topic.

The six teacher participants in School A were all Caucasian, middle class females ranging in age from 35 to 60+. The principal at School A was Hispanic and female. The teachers on School A's leadership team had an average of 19 years of teaching experience and averaged 13 years of service at the school. The principal had 21 years of teaching experience and 3 years of administrative experience, and had been at this school site for the past 8 years.

Participants in School B were all Caucasian and middle class. Two males served on the team, a teacher and the principal. The remaining four participating teachers were females. The age of the participants ranged from 28 to 60+. Participating teachers at School B averaged 17 years of teaching experience and 12 years of service at this site. The principal had been in the district for 21 years; 16 years as a teacher and the most recent 5 years as the administrator.

In summary, all participants at School A had more than 12 years of teaching experience. The staff's teaching experience at School B varied from 2 to 35 years, with two participants having less than 10 years experience. School teams were selected by each principal. In School A, the principal specifically chose two people to participate in the training and then offered the opportunity to participate to the entire staff. In School B, the principal chose all of the participants. The teams from both schools consisted of a cross-section of the school, including grade levels, content areas, and perspectives. According to the principals, all members chosen for the team had ability to communicate with their colleagues the PLC content presented through the Leadership Network.

### **Description of the Study**

The Leadership Network training consisted of four sessions, conducted in October, November, January, and March. Each session focused on the following three "Big Ideas" found within the contextual elements of a PLC:

1. Focus on developing a collaborative culture, committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose;
2. Focus on student learning as the fundamental purpose of our schools; and

3. Focus on results, assessing our effectiveness on evidence rather than intentions.

The intended outcomes for the first day included the norm-setting process, developing a shared understanding of a professional learning community, and an opportunity for each team to assess their school's current status relative to the three big ideas. The second session focused on "unpacking content standards" and creating common formative assessments. The third session provided participants a model for conducting a cycle of inquiry and an opportunity to practice its implementation. The fourth and final session examined the pyramid of intervention and enrichment.

During the afternoon of each session, school teams were given time with their facilitator to create a site-specific action plan to be implemented in advance of the succeeding session. The action plans required teams to address each of the three big ideas, explicitly stating the task to be accomplished, the date by which it would be completed, who was responsible, and what evidence would be collected to demonstrate that the action had been implemented. Participants were given an evaluation form at the end of each day.

From the first training day in October to the last session in March, 5 months had passed. Leadership teams had worked independently at their school sites and four times with the help of their facilitator. The action plans, meeting agendas, participant evaluations, and notes from the trainings were analyzed, providing evidence of the scope of work that took place over the 5-month period.

## Results

In analyzing the findings, the researcher examined transcriptions from audio recordings and disaggregated the responses according to the seven previously identified themes. After reviewing the transcription analysis from the 12 participants interviewed, examining the teacher questionnaires, and reviewing researcher notes, the information was disaggregated into the seven categories defined in the research. These seven themes are explained in the section below and examples are provided to illustrate the specific phenomenon depicted.

**Theme: Interdependent school culture.** The first theme examined the shift in school culture from independence to interdependence, from a language of complaint to a language of commitment, and from a focus on long-term planning to planning for short-term wins.

School A showed a high degree of implementation with regard to establishing a culture of interdependence focused on short-term wins. As one of the participants said, “We’ve committed to having PLC time every week. A majority of the staff is really committed to the PLC process, take it seriously and understand the value of it.” The use of specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (S.M.A.R.T.) goals was discussed every few weeks to review student progress and plan instruction. The staff firmly believed that PLCs would improve teaching and make it easier in the long run. Several of the teachers and principal emphasized their belief that the PLC work is always going to be evolving and adapting to students’ needs. “It’s never going to be done. If you’re waiting for the finish line, there isn’t one.”

Looking ahead to the next school year, School A teachers discussed the importance of every teacher taking ownership of the process as demonstrated by having all data ready in a timely manner and setting shorter, smaller S.M.A.R.T. goals.

The principal stated that the school's participation in the Leadership Network "helped keep the PLC effort alive. It influenced our school's culture by making us much more united in our PLC efforts." Though School A participants had experienced the PLC model for three years prior to joining the Leadership Network, teachers voiced their appreciation for the training, stating that it helped them understand the PLC process more thoroughly, and increased implementation throughout the school.

School B demonstrated a low degree of implementation, but a high level of awareness. Teachers described their school's culture of learning as "eclectic," "desperate," and independent. The principal characterized the culture as being "more of a kingdom mentality." Teachers spoke routinely about students not learning as a result of ineffectual parents. One teacher stated, "Parents can make it impossible to do anything." One teacher emphasized the importance of establishing relationships with parents. The school's culture relative to the PLC model was very disconnected. However, the interview participants were very aware of the differences between their school's culture and the one defined in the PLC model.

As a strategy for improving the culture of learning in the school, the principal stated, "We need to build a culture of high expectations to reduce student apathy." The principal acknowledged struggling with instructional leadership, and the PLC Leadership Network had provided a structured way to focus on improving student learning. School B participants reflected that through the course of the year, they had begun to develop a

common instructional language. “We have a common understanding of student learning goals and essential standards. At the beginning of the year the language and vocabulary of a PLC was unfamiliar to all of us.” The interview with participants of School B required significantly more refocusing and redirecting of the conversation back to the topic than was necessary with School A.

**Theme: Student learning as a fundamental purpose.** The next PLC theme examined the beliefs of teachers and administrators relative to their school’s fundamental purpose: a focused continuum moving from teaching to learning, from content coverage to demonstrations of proficiency. “The fundamental purpose of a school is learning, not teaching (DuFour et al., 2004). A school with a fully implemented PLC would engage collaborative teams of teachers and administrators in building shared knowledge regarding an essential curriculum.

School A teachers expressed they were working to blend two separate philosophies of teaching in their school: a broad holistic approach to learning and one that focuses on the acquisition of skills. “The shift from teaching to learning is still happening.” The staff explained that they were examining how different people teach, but also how different students learn in order to help with shifting the focus from teaching to learning. The importance of taking responsibility for student learning was most clearly stated by one of the participants. “People not wanting to take responsibility for learning, this is huge. Until you can get over and accept that you’re the one who needs to make changes, take responsibility, things aren’t going to change or improve.” The school’s leadership team reported a shift in the staff’s focus on learning over the past two years, and they expected the trend to continue as new teachers joined the instructional team next

school year. They were attempting to bring the two philosophies together through a collaborative process of identifying essential standards. This work was begun during the school year and was scheduled to be completed during the summer. The principal had worked to promote communication of the school-wide PLC effort by creating a bulletin board where each team posts their S.M.A.R.T. goals, assessment results, and a chart showing the alignment of essential standards between grade levels. The posted artifacts had supported the advancement of a school-wide common fundamental purpose.

School A described the Leadership Network as helping them articulate their fundamental purpose and elucidate why they are doing the work. One teacher stated, and the others agreed, “The Leadership Network helped us clearly define what we expect students to learn and tell us if they have learned it. Focus standards are driving our work. We feel like we have a guaranteed curriculum.” The staff described the Leadership Network as an opportunity to bring to the forefront the need for communication and unification of the PLC effort in the school, and to see it as a process of continuous improvement. This focus engaged the grade-level collaborative teams in building a shared knowledge of the curriculum, leading them closer to having a common fundamental purpose.

The teachers and principal of School B described the culture of learning as inconsistent among teachers and students. As one teacher specifically said, “There’s pockets of this school where there’s sincere dedication to learning and there’s pockets of this school where there’s sincere dedication to teaching, not so much learning. There are pockets of this school not dedicated to anything.” The participants expressed concern over the lack of instructional accountability within the school. They saw the absence of

instructional leadership and accountability as limiting factors in the formation of a common fundamental purpose. Teachers acknowledged having a structured and consistent program for managing behavior that works effectively, but not so with instruction.

The leadership team of School B described themselves as in transition, shifting their thinking and educational philosophy from teacher individualism to becoming intentional with student learning by identifying common standards. Participants shared that they would be working before school to select essential standards at each grade level and in core content areas in grades 9-12.

As the leadership team discussed how they would communicate their common fundamental purpose focused on student learning, one teacher described her experience of making her expectations clear to her students.

The following vignette illustrates the effectiveness of explicitly stating expectations:

The teacher described an assignment whereby students were to write an essay on a specific topic. She had given the same assignment the previous year, explaining the topic, the required elements needed in the essay, and the due date. Slightly over half of the students turned the assignment in on time. However this year, the same assignment was given and she said, "Each of you *will* turn this assignment in and you *will* get the concepts." She stated that 100% of her students turned in the assignment. She attributes the shift to explicitly stating her expectations. The teacher stated, "This was an epiphany for me." Another teacher shared a similar experience that emphasized the benefits of high expectations.

Setting expectations and communicating to students the expected learning outcomes had proven valuable. The next step as described by the principal was to bring coherence and continuity to the teaching by explicitly stating what students are expected to learn in each content area. The fundamental purpose of the school needs to be a part of the institutional knowledge and cannot be diverted simply as a result of changes in personnel. The principal emphasized the importance of developing a system of accountability that would ensure that essential standards were taught and that student proficiency would become the focus. It was shared that this intensified look at instruction was also stated in the recent WASC findings and was to be included in the action plan.

The School B leadership team described their participation in the Leadership Network as a “catalyst” to begin focusing on student learning and how to meet students’ needs. As a result of participation in the network, conversations had begun to shift at both the high school and the elementary school from teaching toward learning. Leadership team participants emphasized that their sense of urgency and desire for a paradigm shift in the school’s fundamental purpose was strong, and they were hopeful that it would spread among the staff next year as the PLC professional development continued.

**Theme: Use of assessments to inform instruction.** The third theme examined the use of assessments, moving from infrequent summative assessments to common formative assessments developed by collaborative teams. The goal is to shift the purpose of assessments from rewards and punishment to informing and guiding instruction, and from focusing on average scores to monitoring individual student’s proficiency. These are critical components of a professional learning community. Having a clear vision and purpose is an essential step in becoming a professional learning community, but it is the

willingness to look critically at results that make the vision attainable. “Vision is as vision does. If we want better results, we need to start with data” (Schmoker, 2001, p. 21).

School A’s leadership team described their use of common formative and benchmark assessments as the foundation on which they build the instructional program. Teachers reported that the use of an assessment calendar that corresponds with the instructional pacing guides has proven to be very valuable in promoting collaborative discussions and has supported the monitoring of each student’s proficiency level relative to essential skills. The team recognized they had become increasingly sophisticated at developing assessments. Coincidentally, they also became aware that some of their earlier assessments did not in fact assess the targeted skills. Teachers expressed that creating assessments had become easier and more precise over time.

The following quote from the school’s principal reflects the degree of implementation with regard to the use of assessments in the school. “The use of assessments has caused us to use our curriculum a lot better than we used to. Math was the beginning; when we adopted the new program, everyone was on-board and we had consistent use. The assessment process here is pretty much in place.”

The leadership team stated that the next step in refining their use of assessments was making certain that there was a tight fit between the formative assessment data and instruction. Teachers expressed a need to increase their expertise with the student data management system, particularly for monitoring student progress in kindergarten and first grades. Teachers expressed enthusiasm and anticipation about working on this during the next school year. The following teacher quote reflects the attitude of the entire

leadership team. “I keep thinking about next year, how I am going to teach this better, be more effective in my teaching, so proactive, so these kids have it, so I don’t have to think as much about re-teaching and remediation.” Next year the staff planned to align all of the assessments between grade levels so they could look for school-wide trends.

When the team was asked if their participation in the Leadership Network had influenced the use of assessments in the school, they expressed that they were using formative assessments much more systematically than they had in the past. Participants shared that the network had helped everyone develop a common understanding of formative and summative assessments, how they differ, and their specific purposes. Teachers did not report an increase in the frequency of assessments; rather, they began more carefully analyzing existing data to glean additional information.

Through the interview process and a review of the school's action plans, it became evident that the leadership team from School A possessed a thorough understanding of the assessment process, its place in a professional learning community, and the next steps for refining this practice. This school demonstrated a very high degree of implementation of this PLC element.

The leadership team in School B demonstrated a low degree of implementation of a school-wide system of assessments to guide instruction. Only the California Standards Tests (CSTs) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) are given consistently within the schools. After participating in the Leadership Network, the teachers at the elementary school agreed to bring the results of an English language arts summative assessment to a structured data meeting and examine the results. This meeting was the first time teachers had shared student performance data with their colleagues.

Initially, teachers were apprehensive and guarded, but as the discussion evolved and tensions decreased, people began to reflect on their students' progress and asked clarifying questions of their peers. During this first meeting, it appeared that making teachers comfortable with sharing data was more important than analyzing the actual results. At the end of the meeting, teachers agreed to give the embedded end-of-the-year assessment for the same content area. Two days before the end of the year, several of the teachers announced that they had not given the assessment because the results of previous assessment were so dismal. This ability to opt out clearly demonstrated that a culture of using assessments to monitor progress and guide instruction was in its infancy. However, as with other aspects of PLC implementation, the leadership team's awareness of the assessment process and willingness to proceed with implementation will be the vehicle that drives this element forward.

The occasional use of benchmark assessments in mathematics was the only evidence of teacher-generated assessments. One of the high school participants expressed, "It used to be the norm to give mid-terms and finals, now it's probably 50% at best, they are just too much work." Some participants of the leadership team explained that the high school teachers needed to understand the difference between assessing for learning and assessing for grades. Participants clearly voiced the concept that using assessment data to plan and guide instruction would be a paradigm shift for most of the high school teachers, and would require diligence in the upcoming year.

School B's leadership team embraced the concept of establishing a district-wide assessment system using vertical benchmarks and creating grade-level formative assessments. The team expressed concern over the excuses teachers made for their

students' performance including dysfunctional families, poverty, and substance abuse. Some members of the leadership team thought these justifications were used by a few to avoid taking responsibility for student learning.

Conversations had begun around the topic of assessment throughout the school, but there was a definite lack of buy-in. The Leadership Network provided valuable content, leading to an initial understanding of a coherent assessment system. As a result of increased awareness, the team planned to use the training provided through the Leadership Network to help with the implementation during the upcoming year. One teacher stated, "We've never had people really thinking of assessments as something to share." Another participant shared, "Until the Leadership Network, we never thought to look vertically at what elements are strong throughout our school or with one group of students, and use that information to plan an emphasis for a specific grade level or group of students."

The establishment of a comprehensive assessment program in School B will require leadership, time and focus. It was evident from the conversations that the participants enjoyed the intellectual discourse on the topic of student assessment.

**Theme: Systematic response when students don't learn.** This theme looked at a shift from individual teachers determining appropriate responses to a systemic response that ensures support for every student. It focused on a transformation in thinking from remediation to intervention during the school day. Responding to students when they do not learn is challenging on a couple of levels. First, to determine a student's specific needs and the appropriate support for addressing them requires a system for intervention. Secondly, there is a logistical challenge in providing a systemic response system that

ensures support for all students during the instructional day. An effective system of response is closely aligned with assessment system discussed in the previous theme.

School A had been working for 3 years to develop a school-wide system of response for students who needed extra instructional time, specifically in English language arts. Now, after 3 years, they were beginning to explore strategies for addressing intervention in mathematics. The school had an intervention program based on the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Students were grouped based on common formative assessment data. Extra time for students was provided 45 minutes a day, four days a week. The leadership team stated that this model of intervention had become more refined over the past 3 years and student progress was closely monitored.

Though the intervention program at the school was implemented effectively, resulting in a high degree of success, the teachers voiced a desire to receive additional training so they would be better able to differentiate instruction. The participants also expressed a need to improve the alignment between the intervention program and the student achievement data reviewed during PLC meetings. Teachers and paraprofessionals, who provide the intervention support services, were unable to attend PLC meetings because it was during the intervention and enrichment time that PLC meetings were held. The team stated that this was unfortunate, but the schedule did allow for PLC meetings to be held during the instructional day. There did not appear to be a simple to solution to this conundrum.

The following vignette illustrates the PLC teams' commitment to responding when students do not learn:

After examining a set of student data, one grade-level PLC team decided to agree on a specific set of strategies to use during the next intervention cycle. All teachers on the team implemented those strategies, assessed the students, and returned with the results 5 weeks later. Teachers reported that nearly all of the targeted students had made significant progress; however, the team remained perplexed about several students who did not respond or responded only minimally to the intervention.

As several of the teachers stated during the interview, PLCs are a process of continuous improvement, and as we create better assessments, we will understand exactly what it is we need to teach, thereby reducing the number of students who need intervention.

The leadership team stated that their participation in the Leadership Network provided the time to focus on evaluating the intervention program. One teacher stated, “We need to use our most highly qualified teachers to teach the hardest-to-teach students.” The principal stated, “The Leadership Network brought up the whole question about what we do with intervention. It made us look at it more, and where we are missing it. It brought up the need to align the intervention program and the PLC more closely.” School A was planning to refine their intervention program and expand services to provide support in mathematics. They emphasized a need to make better use of their paraprofessionals in helping provide intervention to students.

The leadership team from School B described their system of response when students don’t learn by saying, “We don’t have a unified, consistent school-wide response when students don’t learn. Each teacher does whatever they think will help. There’s a unified response when students don’t behave, but not when they don’t learn.” Another

participant said, “I don’t think we actually know what to do when a student doesn’t learn. We know what to do at the high school level if they fail the course, they retake it, but that’s different.” School B had not begun the process of establishing a systemic response ensuring support for all students. Evidence of a school-wide intervention program did not exist.

Currently the staff was involved in planning an extensive after-school intervention program to be implemented in the fall of next year. The leadership team expressed their optimism for this opportunity, but shared concern that some of the students identified with the greatest needs would not attend, and some of the staff would not use the additional contracted time to provide academic support. Several additional suggestions were given by the teachers including an expressed need to work more closely with parents, forming a partnership, as well as the desire to learn new strategies for differentiating instruction to allow students more access to the core curriculum.

The following situation exemplifies the need for strategic and systemic interventions:

“In our school, if a student fails algebra 1 in eighth grade, they retake it as a freshman. If they fail it as a freshman, they’ll need to retake it as a sophomore. If they fail it for a third time, they will be unable to complete the three years of math required for graduation. We definitely need to know sooner and have additional strategies to support them. If we were to have benchmark and summative assessments, maybe we could figure out specifically what elements of the course the student didn’t learn and address those.”

The leadership team from School B stated that the concept of intervening was familiar for teachers at the elementary school, but was a real shift at the high school level.

Breaking the learning down to specific skills a student possessed and those they need to acquire was not familiar or a skill that the high school teachers currently possessed. This concept was emphasized at the Leadership Network and was something the high school staff would need considerable guidance with throughout next year. As the School B leadership team concluded, “Providing intervention is going to be a process to implement and give out in bite-sized pieces.”

**Theme: Collaborative work around student achievement.** The fifth theme by which the interview responses were analyzed focused on the development of a collaborative culture in the school, moving from a culture of isolation where individuals attempted to discover ways to improve results, to collaborative teams helping each other improve. This shift from a culture of isolation—not needing the help of others, which has historically been recognized as a professional strength and noted as such in teacher evaluations—is significant. Collaboration is a systemic process in which teams work together interdependently to analyze and impact professional practice. The outcome of this work is to improve our individual and collective results. The key to effective collaboration is illustrated by Reeves (2009), who states, “To be effective, professional collaboration requires time, practice and accountability. Schools that claim, for example, to be professional learning communities but fail to provide time for collaboration are engaging in self-delusion” (p. 46). Without an organizational commitment to collaboration, a professional learning community will be unable to implement the other elements of the PLC model.

School A had an organizational structure that allowed teachers to meet in collaborative teams once a week during the day to focus on student achievement. As one

teacher stated with regard to collaboration, “You can’t opt out of this collaboration, this is what we do; we do it every week. We’ve survived being independent, it’s a big shift in thinking and it’s still evolving.” Teachers stressed that the process of effective collaboration continued to advance. One teacher had a particularly difficult class and the scores were not very good. The grade-level team helped the teacher understand that not every class performs at the same level, and offered support and strategies to bring up the level of performance. It was made clear by several members of the leadership team that PLC collaboration allows you to share and tap the strengths of others.

When looking ahead to next year, School A’s leadership team discussed restructuring the intervention teams to maximize collaboration and services to students. The team acknowledged they had worked out a lot of “kinks” over the past 2 years, but there was more to be done, specifically to address the needs of the ELL students. The team members expressed a positive feeling toward “forced collaboration” because of the opportunity to hear other people’s viewpoints and problem-solve using multiple perspectives.

The Leadership Network had a significant influence on promoting a culture of collaboration in School A by bringing some teachers into the “PLC fold” who had previously been on the fringes. The team reported that the outside facilitator was instrumental at engaging a teacher who had never spoken up or been controversial in any way. At the Leadership Network, she participated and shared her opinions. “She was encouraged in a safe environment.” The facilitator was also recognized at being instrumental in making the team feel a part of the larger PLC initiative, an educational focus that was happening in schools across the nation. As the team looked forward to

next year in the Leadership Network, they asked for guidance in establishing, institutionalizing, and enforcing team norms.

As a result of new teachers coming to the school, PLC team configurations would be changing next year. The team saw this as an opportunity to refine the norms and some of the existing PLC meeting protocols to maximize the professional learning community's impact on student achievement.

School B's master schedule for the past year limited collaboration time. The work of the Leadership Network focused on all grades, K-12. Since the district was very small and all schools were located on the same site, teachers were often assigned to teach various classes spanning grades 7-12. During the previous year, students in grades K-8 attended a traditional 5-day school week, while students in grades 9-12 had a 4-day school week. High school teachers had extended days, four days of the week, and once a month worked a portion of Friday. As a result of this disconnected schedule, the teachers found they had virtually no time to collaborate, talk, or begin to develop into a PLC. This limitation was in stark contrast to the collaborative time teachers had experienced in the past to meet and work together. As one teacher said, "We would never have missed our time together if we hadn't had this last year. As a result we value the opportunity to get together with each other, talk about what's working and not working, and discuss school-wide learning projects." The School B leadership team spoke with anticipation about next year when there would be an hour a week to meet, and two additional days a month when the staff would have two hours to conduct collaborative PLC meetings.

Looking ahead to next year, the team expressed a need for guidance and support in making use of the collaborative time. "We could use help keeping us focused. We

must have goals to make our collaboration meaningful and productive.” Another teacher reminded the group that they would need to start the year by establishing norms and discussing how to work together and remain focused on the work.

The leadership team was asked how their participation in the Leadership Network influenced collaboration at their school. The following teacher’s response exemplifies the team’s feelings, “Well, the PLC thing was . . . I had an epiphany, it was transformational, and it was like hey! It was frustrating to see that we weren’t structurally set up to do anything at all, even remotely resembling any of this and that’s why next year is going to be *so* good, because next year we have carved out the time to do this.” School B demonstrated a low degree of implementation, but a very high degree of willingness and motivation to change their entire master schedule. Their commitment to collaboration and the PLC process was remarkably high.

**Theme: Regular examination of student results.** The sixth element examined the movement from a teacher’s focus on individual inputs to a focus on the results, and the use of student results to create specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (S.M.A.R.T.) goals. This PLC element emphasizes the role of collaborative teams acquiring information from common assessments as opposed to gathering data individually for the purpose of assigning grades.

School A began setting S.M.A.R.T goals that year, and as a result of participating in the Leadership Network developed a better understanding “of how to use them intelligently next year.” To improve communication between grade levels, goals from each team were posted in the staff room. This helped all teams understand the skills being taught by their colleagues.

During the next year, School A's leadership team decided to use S.M.A.R.T. goals to help refine the pyramid of intervention and guide English language development instruction throughout the school. The staff acknowledged that they needed to look more carefully at the formative assessment results before creating S.M.A.R.T. goals and perceived it as a process of continuous improvement. As one participant stated, "The Leadership Network gave us the opportunity to come back and say, before we had the S.M.A.R.T. goal, a certain percentage of our students didn't get it, but it was time to move on. Now we say, 'Wait a minute, we have to talk about what we're going to do to make the goal.'" The team reported a benefit from having the outside facilitator coordinate the data meetings. Specifically, with the use of an outside facilitator, individual personalities did not impede the process and everyone could focus on the business of making sure kids would succeed.

School B's team described their teachers' focus on learning as "individual and independent," but headed toward common assessments and the use of S.M.A.R.T. goals next year. Currently, learning goals were kept private and assessments were not intentional.

When asked about next year, the team responded with enthusiasm around the idea of establishing essential standards so they could move on to creating S.M.A.R.T. goals. As one team member said, "Next year, let's just choose our essential standards and get on with it and start using them. I think it will help us get to the results, I'm anxious to get some results!"

The overall value of the Leadership Network for several of the participants was the narrow focus of PLCs on student learning and the use of specific steps to increase

student achievement. School B was poised to make changes in the upcoming year. The leadership team had acquired a deeper understanding of the PLC model and had embraced its implementation as a means of ensuring student learning.

**Theme: Professional development connected to student learning.** The final theme analyzed looked at professional development in the two schools participating in the study. This theme examined the shift in professional development from learning by listening to learning by doing, and from short-term exposure to multiple concepts to a sustained commitment to limited, focused initiatives. Professional development at both schools centered on the development of a professional learning community. Though the two schools were in considerably different places with regard to their degrees of implementation, the goal was the same: to grow as a PLC. The leadership teams from both schools expressed a desire and expectation to continue their participation in the Leadership Network. Administration and teachers spoke about having very limited funding for professional development, and setting priorities as being essential. The universal recommendation from both leadership teams was to continue the work of implementing the elements of a professional learning community as a powerful means of improving learning for all students.

Analysis of the interview responses from the 12 participants demonstrated overwhelming support for professional learning communities. Both schools A and B expressed optimism with regard to the progress they had made. Both teams were looking forward to participating in the Leadership Network during the next school year.

## Chapter V

### Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

#### Conclusions

All participants in the study stated that their understanding of the PLC model had increased as a result of participating in the Leadership Network. Following are a several examples elicited from the interviews and identified in the findings.

Participants from School A stated that as a result of their participation in the Leadership Network, they were now able to identify and articulate their fundamental purpose and understand the use of focus standards and the importance of having a guaranteed curriculum. They emphasized the value of having developed an understanding of the difference between common and formative assessments. School B participants described the PLC content provided through the training as a “catalyst” to begin the shift in focus from teaching to learning, and the understanding of a comprehensive assessment system that includes both formative and summative types of assessment.

Degrees of implementation varied significantly. Previous to School A’s participation in the Leadership Network, they had explored and implemented some elements of a PLC, most notably the scheduling of time for collaboration and the use of assessments. Since School B had no previous experience with PLCs prior to their participation in the Network, all content and initial implementation was a result of this effort. Therefore, it appears that both schools gained from their participation in the project, but their degree of implementation was significantly linked to their practices and understanding coming into the network.

In reviewing transcripts of audio recordings, the researcher noted a consistent and significant difference between the two schools on every theme. The researcher has begun to envision these themes as a continuum that represents superficial implementation of PLC elements to deeper or more systemic implementation. In this section I attempt to explain these differences and offer conclusions and recommendations for the Leadership Network and for other schools undertaking PLC work.

The researcher found a continuum of results in each of the seven categories. For example, the use of collaborative time in School A was built into the instructional day. School B collaborative time for PLC work was scheduled for after school. Intervention and support in School A was scheduled within the instructional day; School B offered additional instructional support after school. Restructuring of time could impact the ability to collaborate, as well as provide support and intervention to students in School B. School A's master schedule did not allow intervention teachers to participate in PLC meetings because they were working with students during the time classroom teachers conducted PLC meetings. Intervention teachers could provide valuable insights to improving student achievement if included as part of PLC team meetings.

The research reflected a significant difference in the level of responsibility and ownership the teachers had for student learning. School A consistently demonstrated that student achievement was the teachers' responsibility and provided no excuses for lack of student performance. The researcher noted throughout the transcriptions that participants from School B frequently rationalized the lack of student engagement and learning as a product of external factors beyond their control. The responsibility for learning in School B was shared between students and teachers. As participants from School B begin

implementing elements of PLC, namely formative assessments and measuring student growth, it is hypothesized that they will develop a sense of empowered ownership resulting in the institutionalizing of a common fundamental purpose focused on learning.

As indicated in the findings, both schools stated their need to establish S.M.A.R.T. goals that would allow them to measure progress incrementally. Because School A has identified essential standards and developed an assessment system, refining the goal setting process will be relatively simple. At the other end of the continuum, School B has not identified essential standards or developed a system of assessment; therefore the drafting of S.M.A.R.T. goals is premature. However, study participants from School B are looking forward to seeing results.

Devoting time during PLC meetings to develop more narrowly focused S.M.A.R.T. goals could impact the ability to more closely monitor student progress in School A, resulting in earlier responses for intervention. Students in School B could benefit from teachers and administrators devoting time during scheduled professional development days to identifying essential standards, developing an assessment system, and establishing the use of S.M.A.R.T. goals. This focused work would be ongoing, and need to be an embedded component of PLC meetings throughout the year.

A recurring facet of the PLC process that emerged in both schools was the need and desire to establish, implement, and monitor the use of norms. There was greater similarity between the two schools in the understanding and the degree of implementation of this element than there was for other elements investigated. Study participants from both schools identified a need to reestablish norms.

Devoting time at the beginning of the year and engaging the services of an outside facilitator could assist in the norm-setting process and establish a monitoring protocol. An outside facilitator would allow the school administrator to be a team member and a part of the norm-setting process. Having a well defined set of norms could result in a feeling of greater safety among PLC participants and improve collaboration.

There was strong evidence supporting the Leadership Network's role in providing structure and focus for the PLC work. All participants discussed the benefits of meeting to create action plans in the afternoons following the content sessions of the mornings. Participants reported after the January training, which focused on the assessment process, that their understanding of the various assessment types, ranging from the most formative (e.g., checking for understanding), to the most summative (e.g., CSTs at the end of the year), increased significantly. As a result of the structure provided by the Leadership Network, each team drafted site-specific action plans to either refine the existing assessment process, as was the case for School A, or schedule their first common assessment and data meeting, as was the case for School B. The degree to which an assessment system was used varied radically between the two schools. They were at different places on the continuum of understanding and implementation. Nevertheless, each school's leadership team was able to focus on enhancing the use of assessments in their school.

As stated previously, the researcher found a consistent and significant difference between the two schools on every theme. Based on the evidence from both schools, the researcher has determined on the continuum of implementation that School B was in the

initial stages of implementation while School A was in a relatively advanced stage of PLC implementation.

Over the past year, School B participants were introduced to the PLC model; they learned primarily by listening and talking, not by doing. The researcher believes that the beginning stages of PLC implementation in School B will only advance through guidance, leadership, and strategic support during the implementation process.

The Leadership Network supported School A in a significantly different manner than it supported School B. School A possessed many aspects of a PLC prior to their initial year in the Leadership Network including a focus on collaboration, recognition of the need for a guaranteed curriculum, the use of assessments to guide instruction, and recognition of the importance of providing academic intervention to students during the school day. The school's principal and the district superintendent were deeply committed and involved in the PLC process and demonstrated leadership that supported implementation. The researcher asserts that the Leadership Network supported School A by deepening the leadership team's working knowledge of PLC elements. For example, by sequencing the stages of implementation beginning with the identifying of essential standards at each grade level, learning to write common formative assessments, and then analyzing the results, PLC teams were able to write more specific S.M.A.R.T. goals.

School B study participants spent the year in the Leadership Network increasing awareness and developing an understanding of PLC elements. Interview results with the School B leadership team reflected a desire to fully implement the elements of a PLC. Though implementation this year was superficial, the teachers and principal began questioning their school's culture of learning, fundamental purpose, goals, and

instructional practices. Continuing participation in the Leadership Network next year could guide and support this effort and assist the school's leaders in deepening implementation.

School A's leadership team also spent the year questioning some of their current practices. Results from the interviews highlighted the focus on the school's use of common formative assessments and the refinement of S.M.A.R.T. goals. School A study participants also emphasized the impact the Leadership Network had on bringing teachers who were previously on the fringes of the PLC movement into becoming active collaborative team members. The team explicitly stated, numerous times, the value of having an outside facilitator from the network to guide their work, ask critical questions, and assist in improving the quality of their PLC.

Table 3

*Differences in Implementation Practices of the Two Schools*

<b>Finding</b>	<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>
Culture	<p>United and refined their school culture</p> <p>Deepened their focus on student learning</p> <p>Articulated their schools culture to the school community</p>	<p>Questioned their school culture</p> <p>Developed an awareness to begin focusing on student learning</p> <p>Identified a need to define their school culture</p>
Fringe teachers	Identified strategies for the inclusion of the few “fringe teachers.”	<p>Expressed a desire to include all teachers in the PLC process, but recognized it would be a paradigm shift for many</p> <p>Began to identify teachers who would be pivotal in moving the initiative forward</p>
Level of initial understanding of PLC	<p>Two previous years of PLC experience</p> <p>Intermediate to advanced level of PLC understanding including steps toward deeper implementation</p>	<p>No previous experience with PLC model</p> <p>Beginning level of PLC understanding</p> <p>Does not possess the expertise to lead the implementation process</p>
Leadership Network’s support	Filled in gaps in understanding of PLC content, and helped refine the assessment process	<p>Provided content information</p> <p>Moved from learning about common assessments to initial implementation</p>
Participation of school principal	Supported the leadership team and took responsibility for implementation of the action plans generated	Participated as a team member, but lacked the necessary knowledge of the PLC model to support implementation of the action plans
Use of outside facilitator	Used facilitator strategically as a third party to expedite implementation	Relied on facilitator to provide content expertise, facilitate meetings, guide and support the work
Development of a systemic instructional core	<p>Began to look vertically through the grades for areas of proficiency and for improvement</p> <p>Developed a collaborative process of inquiry to critically assess instructional effectiveness</p>	<p>Introduced to the concept of looking at the instructional program vertically</p> <p>Cultivated an awareness for bringing coherence, and a collaborative process of inquiry to the instructional core</p>

### **Implications for the Leadership Network**

Study participants' action plans and interview responses provided evidence supporting the work of the Leadership Network. The two schools studied during the research project began their participation in the network from significantly different levels of understanding and experience with the professional learning community model. As evidenced in the findings, the leadership teams from both schools were able to engage in the learning regardless of their level of PLC expertise.

Two key factors emerged as subthemes from the findings that directly impacted the effectiveness of the Leadership Network's model of supporting PLC implementation in schools. These two factors were the required participation of the school's principal, and the use of an outside facilitator for each school.

The leadership teams from both schools stated the significance of having their school's principal be an active member of the leadership team. Teachers remarked that having the principal engaged validated their efforts and demonstrated to the whole school the importance of the work. Additionally, the commitment made by the principals demonstrated that implementation of the PLC model in their schools was a high priority.

The researcher determined that the leadership role of the principal remains pivotal for the effective implementation of the identified PLC elements. The principal in School A remained focused on the action plans the leadership team created and increased the degree of implementation between each of the four training sessions. The principal's understanding of PLCs and enthusiastic belief that implementation of the PLC model improves student learning was contagious among the staff. After reviewing the findings and anecdotal information collected from the school's facilitator, it became evident that

School A's principal emphasized the following leadership responsibilities identified by Waters and Cameron (2007) as effective in creating a professional learning community including:

1. creates a culture that fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation;
2. communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling;
3. establishes strong lines of communication with teachers;
4. is visible and has quality contact and interactions with teachers;
5. seeks teacher input in the design and implementation of important decisions;
6. recognizes the importance of relationships and demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff;
7. possesses situational awareness and is cognizant of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school, and uses this information to address current and potential problems; and
8. provides affirmations by recognizing and celebrating school accomplishments and acknowledges failures.

The principal from School B emphasized some of the responsibilities stated above, but specific conclusions from the findings were difficult to ascertain, possibly due to the principal's limited understanding of PLCs. The researcher believes, based on the findings, that the ability for a principal to emphasize the eight responsibilities identified by Waters and Cameron (2007) had a significant impact on the degree of PLC implementation.

An analysis of the data collected from the principals reflected a strong commitment to PLCs. Principals' feedback identified the time spent with the leadership team focusing on the implementation and refinement of PLC elements as meaningful, productive, and consistent with their own core values. The principal and teachers of School A expanded the positive influence of the administration to include the superintendent who served as a facilitator for one of the schools in their district. The leadership team from School A consistently acknowledged that the PLC effort had been a district priority for 3 years. However, it was the specific elements of leadership identified in the research that supported the high degree of implementation.

The second subtheme identified by the participants was the role of the facilitator. This person was a member of the Leadership Network planning team and was assigned to the school. The use of an outside facilitator was valued by both principals, and was essential for the team's success and progress toward PLC development. The researcher also identified a similar theme among teacher participants. Both teams explicitly identified the role of the facilitator as providing an outside objective voice that was not influenced by existing interpersonal team dynamics and said that the facilitators brought with them a level of expertise to the group that was extremely valuable.

The way the two schools used their facilitators was decidedly different. School A used the facilitator as a third party, the outside expert, and someone who could ask the difficult questions. The facilitator was instrumental in increasing the degree of implementation, specifically with regard to identifying the guaranteed curriculum and the assessment process. School B relied on the outside facilitator to direct their next steps. They looked for assurance that they were "doing the PLC thing correctly." School B used

the facilitator as a teacher and guide. Therefore, it is essential for a facilitator to understand the level and type of support the school needs and is expecting. The facilitated support must be individualized and aligned to where the school is on the continuum of implementation.

Leadership teams also discussed how PLCs are in the process of changing the culture of the school. Both leadership teams expressed apprehension with regard to strategies for engaging reluctant teachers. There is a substantial body of research that provides strategies for transforming a school culture and overcoming staff division. Key components of this research could be included into the Leadership Network training for schools participating in their second year.

The research by Anthony Muhammad (2009) focuses on the personalities of the people who determine the culture of a school and emphasizes the importance of understanding the people with whom you work and whom you have the responsibility to lead. Muhammad's research identifies four key personality types that are present in nearly every school: believers, tweeners, survivors, and fundamentalists. Believers are those educators whose core values and beliefs make up a healthy school culture. They believe all students can learn and that this is the fundamental purpose of schools. Tweeners are those teachers who are typically new to the profession who are unsure how they fit in and are learning the norms and becoming familiar with the school's culture. Survivors are those educators who are barely hanging on and survive day-to-day, and should consider leaving the profession. Fundamentalists are educators whose goal is to maintain the status quo and resist change, often in an organized manner.

Understanding how to work with these personality types could impact the rate at which PLC implementation occurs by providing principals and members of the leadership team with strategies to be proactive in the process of redefining the school's culture.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the researcher's data, it is recommended that additional time for professional development be devoted to the principals who will be participating in the Leadership Network for either their first or second year. Principals reported a need to deepen their understanding of institutional and personal change as it would apply to moving a school's culture toward a PLC. The research believes that by providing additional training for principals, some of the challenges of implementation could be reduced. The following review of relevant literature could be used to form the foundation for this additional support.

A review of the research on transitioning a school toward a professional learning community that focuses their collective efforts on high levels of academic learning for all students often requires a shift in thinking and a transition in the school's culture of learning. The need or demand for this level of change can be minimized by closely monitoring and evaluating the quality, fidelity, consistency, and implementation of an ongoing improvement process. It is easier to make slight adjustments in course as you go, rather than to point the school in an entirely new direction and expect people to be excited about the new journey.

When systemic transitions are needed, principals and teacher leaders must have a deep understanding of the content of the change, to sustain the change initiative.

Effective leaders can communicate clearly the aspects of complex change so others are able to understand (Bridges & Bridges, 2000). Research states that the two key factors that support principals are knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and the ability to inspire and lead through challenging innovations (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

The research by Bridges and Bridges (2000) clarifies for leaders the difference between change and transition. They state that change is external and transition is internal. Leaders must be cognizant of the fact that transitions take time; change is relatively fast. Transitioning too quickly can result in the failure of an important initiative.

Many people are familiar with the stages of grief that individuals go through after a loss. The stages of change are similar. Researchers describe the three phases of change: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. Transitions, either personal or professional, are essential to moving forward, and attending to the phases of the process is crucial for success. The ending zone is a time of saying goodbye, often to individual practices that were successful. People often display resistance; they don't like to say goodbye. Probably one of the clearest examples of this throughout schools in California was when the current content standards were adopted and instruction had to become aligned to those standards. Some past practices and projects had to be abandoned in an effort to address the mandate. Over time, some educators came to the conclusion that the content standards had benefit and that their dislike for the requirement was more a function of the high-stakes accountability system than a response to the use of content standards.

The neutral zone lies between two "somewheres" and is likely to be perceived as disorganized and chaotic. Stakeholders, including teachers, may feel that their input is no

longer valued or considered. Communication is essential during the neutral zone or the change initiative may fail.

During the third phase, new beginnings, people make a commitment to the new way of doing things and see themselves with a new identity (Bridges & Bridges, 2000).

Over the course of the year, participating principals and teachers in the Leadership Network had the opportunity to move through the phases of the change process. In the beginning there was resistance to looking at student performance and to confronting the reality that some students were not learning, but through the structure of the Leadership Network participants were able to plan and implement elements of an effective PLC and instructional improvements that resulted in increased opportunities for student learning.

Leaders find it challenging to manage personal transitions, though they must be attended to throughout the change process. The skill of the principal is to know when to push, and when to step back. During this time, it is essential that leaders be reflective and be able to recognize that the changes they are implementing may be a significant transition for them as well.

Based on the findings from the study, the researcher proposes the following specific recommendations to promote the successful implementation of a PLC:

- Provide specific and ongoing leadership training for the principal, beginning prior to the first meeting with teachers.
- Use an outside facilitator to assist with the implementation of PLC elements, provide guidance and expertise to the leadership team, serve as the third party to maintain the focus, and offer support for the principal.

- Provide more structured time with a facilitator to schools beginning the PLC implementation process than to those that can sustain implementation with less frequent support.

- Provide ongoing training for outside facilitators.

- Engage superintendents in the process by providing relevant training so they are able to support the principals and the efforts at the school sites.

- Provide the equivalent of the Leadership Network described in the study so teachers and principals have the opportunity to feel a part of a bigger initiative, learn from their colleagues, and share strategies for effective implementation.

- Ensure that PLC content is organized in a manner that supports incremental and sequential PLC development.

- Model the elements of a PLC during training and provide teachers and principals the opportunity to discuss and practice the components.

- Provide time for the creation of specific action plans to guide the next steps of implementation.

In conclusion, continued support for principals and teacher-leaders in developing effective PLCs is essential. Research participants expressed during their interviews the value of being a part of a common movement, and the value of interacting with people from different schools to share successes and challenges while learning more about PLCs.

### **Future Study**

Further study could be conducted to determine if the PLC efforts at these schools led to improved student results. Collecting student achievement data from common

formative and benchmark assessments as well as the results from the CST standardized tests over time could provide useful information in determining the effectiveness of the school's PLC. Further research could be conducted to determine if the implementation time of the PLC model could be reduced, and as a result impact student learning sooner.

### **Educational Leadership Implications**

The research project provided invaluable information for supporting the development and implementation of professional learning communities in schools with varying PLC experience. The impact of the Leadership Network on the participating schools in this study was far beyond the researcher's expectations. Leadership team members from both schools reflected honestly on their schools' ability to implement the elements of a PLC. They were insightful and proud to be instructional leaders. The researcher was overwhelmed by the participants' commitment to students, the profession, and the process of continuous improvement. Every participant in the study exemplified this attitude through his or her dedication to student learning, as opposed to talking about teaching.

The study advanced the researcher's understanding of the PLC model, change theory, and strategies for providing effective professional development. The outcomes from the study were professionally rewarding and have encouraged the researcher to expand efforts to include additional schools in the Leadership Network in the future. This research has described and analyzed the parameters of PLCs, but it does not convey an important final point:

The PLC model is designed to touch the heart. Psychologists tell us that we share certain fundamental needs—the need to feel successful in our work, the need to feel a sense of belonging, and the need to live a life of

significance by making a difference. The PLC speaks to each of these needs. (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 3)

## **Appendices**

### **Overview of Appendices**

The following appendix is comprised of a description of the 21 leadership attributes identified by Tim Waters and Greg Cameron (2007). These attributes formed a framework for examining the responsibilities of educational leaders as they implemented elements of a professional learning community. Included in the second appendix is the demographic questionnaire distributed to each participant, and the interview guide that was followed during each of the interview sessions. The interview guide was divided into the seven themes identified in the relevant research (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). These themes were used as a framework for analyzing participant responses and organizing the findings.

## Appendix A

### Leadership Responsibilities

#### The 21 Leadership Responsibilities and Practices Organized by Areas of Influence (Waters & Cameron, 2007)

##### Responsibilities used to focus schools on research-based practices:

- **Resources:** provides teachers with the materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs
- **Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment:** is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
- **Focus:** establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention
- **Outreach:** is an advocate and spokesperson for the school with all stakeholders
- **Order:** establishes a set of standard operating procedures
- **Discipline:** protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from the teaching time or focus
- **Contingent rewards:** recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments

##### Responsibilities positively correlated to second-order change:

- **Ideal/beliefs:** communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
- **Optimize:** inspires and leads new and challenging innovations
- **Flexibility:** adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent
- **Knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment:** is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
- **Intellectual stimulation:** ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
- **Change agent:** is willing to and actively challenges the status quo
- **Monitor and evaluate:** monitor the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning

##### Responsibilities associated with creating demand:

- **Intellectual Stimulation:** ensures teachers and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture
- **Change agent:** is willing to and actively challenges the status quo

- **Ideal/beliefs:** communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling

Responsibilities associated with implementing change:

- **Knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment:** is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
- **Optimize:** inspires and leads new and challenging innovations

Responsibilities associated with managing personal transitions:

- **Flexibility:** adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent

Responsibilities that should be shared by teacher-leaders in an effort to mitigate the negative impact of second-order change:

- **Culture:** fosters shared beliefs and sense of community cooperation
- **Order:** establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines
- **Communication:** establishes strong line of communication with teachers, staff, and among students
- **Input:** involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decision and policies

Responsibilities to create a purposeful learning community:

- **Culture:** fosters shared beliefs and sense of community cooperation
- **Ideal/beliefs:** communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling
- **Communication:** establishes strong line of communication with teachers, staff, and among students
- **Visibility:** has quality contact and interactions with teacher and students
- **Input:** involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies
- **Relationships:** demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff
- **Situational awareness:** is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems
- **Affirmation:** recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures

### Comparison of First-order Change with Second-order Change

<b>First-order Change: When a change is perceived as:</b>	<b>Second-order Change: When a change is perceived as:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extension of the past</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A break with the past</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within existing paradigms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outside of existing paradigms</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent with prevailing values and norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicted with prevailing values and norms</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented with existing knowledge and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requiring new knowledge and skills to implement</li> </ul>

### Responsibilities Correlated with Second-order Change

<b>Positively correlated</b>	<b>Negatively correlated</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change Agent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideals and Beliefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor and Evaluate</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual Stimulation</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimize</li> </ul>	

## Appendix B

### Demographic Questionnaire and Interview Guide

Leadership Network Participation  
End-of-Year Feedback: 2009-2010

#### Participant Demographic Information

- 1) Name of your school: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Current assignment: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Years in this assignment: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Years you have worked at this site: \_\_\_\_\_; Years in the district: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Total years of teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_; or administrative experience: \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Years of experience of being part of a structured PLC: \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Describe how you were selected to be a part of the Leadership Team?

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- 8) Since all the teachers at your site could not participate in the Leadership Network, describe any topics or questions that arose as a result of the limited access to the training.

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## **Interview Guide: Leadership Network's Impact on PLC Implementation**

**Thesis Title:** Building Leadership Skills through a Leadership Network: Effective Strategies for Implementing Essential Components of a Professional Learning Community

**Thesis Question:** To what degree were specific components of a PLC model implemented in two schools by each school's leadership team as a result of participating in the Mendocino-Lake Leadership Network?

### **Guiding Questions**

#### **Theme: Shift in School Culture**

•Big Idea: Collaborative Culture

•PLC Element: Collaborative Culture

- 1) Describe your schools culture of learning.
- 2) What are the next steps for developing a culture of learning?
- 3) Explain how participation in the Leadership Network has influenced the culture of learning at your school.

#### **Theme: Shift in Fundamental Purpose**

•Big Idea: Focus on Learning

•PLC Element: Mission, Vision, Goals

- 4) Describe the fundamental purpose of your school.
- 5) How is the school's fundamental purpose communicated?
- 6) Explain how participation in the Leadership Network has affected the fundamental purpose of the school.

#### **Theme: Shift in Use of Assessments**

•Big Idea: Focus on Results

•PLC Element: Goals

- 7) Describe your current use of assessments in your school?
- 8) What do you see or plan to do as next steps?
- 9) Did the Leadership Network impact the use of assessments? Please explain why or why not.

#### **Theme: Shift in the Response When Students Don't Learn**

•Big Idea: Focus on Learning

•Mission, Vision, Goals • Collaboration

- 10) Describe what you do when students don't learn?
- 11) What are your next steps for addressing the needs of student who don't learn?

- 12) How has the leadership Network had an influence on the way you respond to students who don't learn?

**Theme: Shift in Work**

•Big Idea: Collaborative Culture

•PLC Element: Collaborative Culture

- 13) Describe how teachers collaborate and conduct their work.  
 14) What do the teachers see as next steps with regard to building collaborative teams?  
 15) Explain how the Leadership Network has influenced collaboration in the school.

**Theme: Shift in Focus**

•Big Idea: Focus on Results

•PLC Element: Focus on Results

- 16) Describe how teachers focus on student learning.  
 17) What do you see as the next steps for increase the focus on student learning?  
 18) Describe how the school's participation in the Leadership Network impacted its focus on student learning.

**Theme: Shift in Professional Development**

•Big Idea: Collaborative culture, focus on learning, focus on results

•PLC Element: Continuous Improvement

- 19) Describe your school and district's emphasis for professional development.  
 20) Where are you headed next with professional development?  
 21) Did your participation in the Leadership Network influence professional development in your school or district?

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