

RESTRUCTURING FOR COLLABORATION:
A CASE STUDY

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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

RESTRUCTURING FOR COLLABORATION:

A CASE STUDY

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DEDICATION

There are a number of people who have inspired and supported my journey in completing my doctorate. First and foremost I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely wife Michelle who has taken on multiple roles during the many hours necessary to complete my study. You have done a remarkable job taking great care of our children. You made tremendous self-sacrifices so that I could pursue a dream. I know words will never be able to express my sincere gratitude, but know that I love you and admire you. You are truly wonderfully and beautifully made. I also want to dedicate this to my amazing kids Mora, Bryce, Bennett, and Maren. I have missed you terribly and regret missing out on so many activities during my doctoral studies. I am fortunate to be your dad. I love all of you!

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RESTRUCTURING FOR COLLABORATION:
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ABSTRACT

Isolation can deprive teachers of meaningful learning opportunities and feedback (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Lieberman, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Schmoker, 2006). One Midwestern school district implemented a new schedule for elementary schools with an intended purpose of providing consistent collaboration time for teachers. My qualitative case study aimed to explore and interpret how instructional practices are influenced when teachers of one elementary school uses the district's new collaboration schedule. My study was guided by a professional learning communities conceptual framework. PLCs are driven by six concepts that I used as a framework: (a) Shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue.

Three research questions guided my study to lead to the significance of refining future policy regarding the master schedule as a structure to provide collaborative opportunities for staff that will ultimately improve student learning. My case study included a purposeful sample of classroom teachers. I collected data through individual

interviews, a focus group meeting, PLC meeting observations, and data collection.

Through my data analysis I was able to identify themes relevant to my study.

My study found themes related to the six PLC frameworks occurring as teachers used the districts ABCD schedule. Teachers operated from a collective belief in collaboration and have strong professional relationships built on trust. Participants consistently described the leadership structure free of hierarchical leadership, while at the same time described the building administration as supportive. Teachers deprivatize their practices as they continue to collaborate during the ABCD time using consistent protocols and tools. Teachers expressed satisfaction in the reliable nature of the ABCD schedule and feel they have learned from their time together. Teachers focus on student learning as they differentiate instruction and use data to make instructional decisions. The ABCD schedule allows PLC members to engage in reflective dialogue regarding their students and instructional practices.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Effective professional learning opportunities are important to retain quality teachers and improve performance among teachers staying in the profession (Borko, 2004; Claycomb, 2002; Cochran-Smith & Little, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Harris & Jones, 2001; Horn & Little, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1998). A problem of practice in schools is how the utilization of collaborative professional activities leads to student learning. This study seeks to interpret how teachers collaborate when they are part of a professional learning community. Studies validate the impact learning communities have on the communal development of organizations, yet cultivating community development is only a small victory as schools struggle to meet state and federal performance standards (Supovitz & Christman, 2003). During the 2012 school year, slightly over 55% of Missouri students met the state's proficiency goals in communication arts and math (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE], 2012). The prior year just over 54% met the goals. Crippling teachers in their efforts to improve students' test scores is an increase in the number of students living in poverty, inadequate state funding, and unsuccessful professional development practices. Teachers are being placed on the front lines to teach in challenging environments while trying to increase student achievement and narrow the achievement gaps. State and federal tax dollars continue to funnel into schools through various programs with the intentions for real school reform, yet a gap exist between how schools attempt to enhance teacher learning and what the research says is effective practice.

A growing number of schools are moving to become professional learning communities (PLC) as a way to enhance teacher and student learning. Although few educators publicly recognize isolation as good practice for school improvement, many are stuck giving excuses why they are not able to work together (DuFour, 2004). Schools may need to move away from the comfortable structures misguided by how they have distributed time. Time constraints can restrict meaningful opportunities for teacher collaboration unless schools identify structural processes and cultural norms promoting collegial interactions. Schools, according to Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990), need to develop “settings that foster the active exchange of professional skills establishing an atmosphere that implies interpersonal support for problems with current and future tasks” (p. 245). Teachers need sufficient chunks of time to join together to conduct research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Educators will exhaust energies leading to collaboration instead of using those energies to utilize collaboration as a way to improve instruction if teachers do not have the appropriate allocation of support and resources. Policy support is needed to rethink schedules, staffing patterns, and group arrangements to develop blocks of time for teachers to work and learn together (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Problem Statement

Public schools are faced with the challenge of recruiting quality teachers, equipping them with the necessary skills to be successful in the classroom, and providing continued support to retain their services leading to higher student achievement (Barth, 1990). Teacher dissatisfaction, high attrition rates, and higher absenteeism are related to the absence of opportunities for professional growth (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990).

Teachers are a critical component for providing all children the opportunity to learn at high levels and develop into healthy and productive citizens. Unfortunately, all students may not have access to a highly qualified teacher and their academic success may suffer. Quality teaching has a positive impact on student learning as some suggest the achievement gap can be completely closed with 5 years of effective teaching (Kain & Hanushek, 2004; Marzano, 2003). For this reason, teacher education and professional development must be improved. Teacher education has been inadequate in producing learning experiences powerful enough to transform teacher classroom practices (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Nine high-yield instructional strategies identified to help students achieve at high levels have been shared and presented as promising practices (Marzano, 2009). Unfortunately the high-yield strategies have been overstated and highly misunderstood since no specific set of strategies provides a silver bullet for guaranteed instructional improvement (Marzano, 2009). This claim is supported by suggesting teachers should rely on their knowledge of students, their teaching content, and their situations to identify the most appropriate instructional strategies (Marzano, 2009). Deprivatization of practice, collaboration, and reflective dialogue are PLC attributes which can (a) provide opportunities for staff to discuss instructional practices, (b) share knowledge about teaching content and students, and (c) observe one another. For school reform efforts to truly impact learning, schools may need to provide appropriate support for meaningful collaboration and close the gap between what is known to be good practice and what is actually taking place.

Professional learning often occurs independent and ‘irrespective’ of the intended context of use and fails to encourage future use (Scribner, 1999). Teacher isolation is a

deterrent to professional growth and meaningful feedback (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Lieberman, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Schmoker, 2006). Researchers do not only capture this problem, but teachers report dissatisfaction in the professional development offered to them (Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Schools have become more about a culture of compliance than striving to be a culture of professional learning (Lieberman & Mace, 2008).

Professional community is a necessary ingredient to teacher development and learning which may lead to instructional practices. A community and learners are both requirements for a community of learners to exist (Barth, 1990). Insufficient attention has been given to teacher learning with regard to their responsibility for creating learning experiences and how they learn new ways of teaching (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Teachers need opportunities to have discussions regarding materials and strategies as a way to impact instructional methodologies (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Implementing effective instructional practices is not simply taking one of nine evidence-based instructional practices labeled as “high-yield” and incorporating it into a lesson plan. Instead, Marzano (2009) believes teams of teachers should observe classes using the school or district’s language of instruction for their observation. Feedback and collaboration are important tools to promote teacher learning and are intended to exist in a PLC (Imants, 2002).

Schools should become ‘centers of inquiry’ for both adults and children (Schmoker, 2006). A PLC is intended to provide an environment and culture conducive to collaboration; however the survival of a PLC is challenged when there is a lack of available time for teachers to meet leaving teachers to work in isolation (Ingersoll, 2003;

Lieberman & Mace, 2008). Teachers working by themselves can have a number of negative outcomes. Isolation protects inferior teachers from being challenged and prohibits opportunities for struggling teachers to receive support and positive peer modeling (Schmoker, 2006). A lack of collaboration is an explanation for why ‘high-yield’ strategies were unlikely to occur in the 1,500 classrooms visited by researchers (Schmoker, 2006).

Research in the 1970s and 1980s mostly labeled teacher work as isolated; however, new bodies of research suggest teachers desire collegial relationships (Horn & Little, 2009; Kardos & Johnson, 2007). Collegial, ongoing interactions about teaching at all experience levels can provide a positive link for the retention of new teachers (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). As new and veteran teachers are placed in PLCs together, the formation of collegial relationships may be impacted by the structures and culture. As diverse staff members join together around a strong belief in collegiality, an integrated professional culture is formed (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). An integrated professional culture contains an organizational support structure aimed at reinforcing collegiality and professional growth which can lead to improved practices (Kardos & Johnson, 2007). Collaboration and collegial learning opportunities must have an intended purpose as schools invest time and resources into structures supporting PLC work.

Purpose of the Study

My study will explore and interpret how instructional practices are influenced when PLCs utilize a district’s new collaboration schedule. The PLC frameworks with relevance to my study are (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning,

and (f) reflective dialogue. The responsibilities placed on a PLC cannot be composed of additional activities taking place outside the regular school day, but a PLC must be strategically placed within the school to connect with other factors in a coordinated way (Harris & Jones, 2010). The PLC frameworks chosen in this study represent the ones commonly found among the literature.

The concept of a PLC is built upon the notion of improving student learning by impacting teaching practices (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Schools are working to create cultures and structures aimed at sustaining PLCs. Altering structures is not the final solution to school reform, as attention to culture, knowledge, and skills is also important (Imants, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Structure can provide opportunities for collegial discussions surrounding student learning and teacher instructional practices. Structural and cultural characteristics are considered conditions for explicit change in teacher practices and student learning (Imants, 2002).

My research will explore collaboration by looking through six PLC frameworks and determining how they influence instructional practices. An instrumental case study aimed at looking at one school's implementation of the ABCD structure will help deepen the literature regarding types of structures intended to stimulate and facilitate the work of PLCs to impact instructional practices. The intent of my study is to shape future policy decisions by helping decision makers understand and interpret the role the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices and collaboration when teachers are members of a PLC.

Research Questions

This study will examine the ABCD schedule and how it has influenced classroom teachers of one elementary school as they strive to function as a professional learning community. My case study will first consider three central questions. As this case study develops, other questions may arise based on participants' shared stories.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How is the ABCD schedule impacting the instructional practices used by classroom teachers when they work in a professional learning community at North Elementary School?
2. How are the classroom teachers implementing the ABCD schedule?
3. How are the six PLC frameworks occurring during the ABCD collaboration time?

North Elementary School is part of the Central School District. In 2010 the district implemented a new schedule for elementary schools with the purpose of providing regular collaboration time for teachers that would occur during the school day. The ABCD schedule's name was based on the plan schools would now organize special classes by designated days as A, B, C, or D instead of the traditional Monday through Friday. With this plan, grade level teachers would have at least one day each week of common planning time and in many cases they might have daily common planning time. The administration also mandated the grade level teachers collaborate at least one day each week during the ABCD time using data.

Conceptual Framework

Professional Learning Communities are driven by (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e)

focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue. The six frameworks are applicable to the case study as I look to interpret the impact the ABCD schedule has on classroom teachers' instructional practices and understand how teachers collaborate when they are members of a PLC. Shared norms and values bring the goals and objectives together among a unified team. For shared experiences to occur, PLCs are responsible for where individuals can learn collaboratively and cooperatively to meet the collective needs of the system (Bruffee, 1999; Gill, 2010). The process of restructuring schools places a demand on the whole organization for individuals to redefine their work in relation to the way the entire school works (Lieberman, 1995).

Shared and supportive leadership is another framework impacting the school's settings and conditions. This is a shift away from traditional school structure, which operated under a hierarchical structure. The administration hands down goals and initiatives to teachers in traditional schools (Eakers, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Giles & Hargreave, 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008). A PLC is characterized by all staff sharing power, authority and decision making (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Through shared and supportive leadership the entire faculty is encouraged to be involved to help determine goals and priorities.

Deprivatization of practice and collaboration are two critical frameworks in this study as the ABCD schedule was designed to stimulate and sustain these practices. These two frameworks can also impact a number of areas such as teacher learning and school culture. Collective knowledge is a change from traditional practices of organizational learning and is about how organizations learn. Collaborative learning supports individual learning by mobilizing peers to motivate and influence one another (Bruffee, 1999).

Collaboration is a tool for PLCs to develop and refine their practice. When the work happens publicly among a PLC, we recognize that work as a deprivatization of practice.

The above PLC frameworks are important and must support the fifth attribute of a focus on student learning. Interpreting the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices will lead to a greater understanding with regards to the PLC's focus on student learning. My study will allow me to look at how the conversations, meetings, and review of documents point to PLCs focusing on student learning.

Organizations, according to Gill (2010), are seeking effective team learning methods to maximize production and get results. In a public school setting the need for continuous school improvement and professional development is fueled by a challenge to help all students meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The final framework of reflective dialogue allows the PLC to have open and honest dialogue surrounding problems of practice. The contemporary view of professional development in schools has shifted the focus from outside experts bringing technical information to teachers to an expanded role of the teacher as an active provider of staff professional development (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Teachers in my case study have formal opportunities to meet at least one time per week. Collegial exchanges provide a powerful norm with great potential to impact professional learning in schools (Little, 1982). Reflective dialogue occurs when teachers have the opportunity to participate in the exchange of information and through peer observations. The sharing of practice and expert knowledge allows teachers to gain an increased confidence in their work, thus leading to a higher degree of risk taking and continuous improvement (Hargreaves, 1994).

PLCs are a growing practice within public schools in the state. The state PLC project added 87 schools in 2010-2011 with the continued intention of supporting PLCs to use collaborative cultures to increase levels of learning for all (DESE, 2010). Working in isolation is seen as a barrier to continuous school improvement, and in order for an entire school to restructure, the school must communicate to individuals the importance of redefining their craft in relation to the way the entire school works (Lieberman, 1995). PLCs strive to focus on results and encourage collaborative practices for the purpose of improving student learning. The spiral of knowledge discussed by Nonaka (1991) provides a good illustration for how new ideas continually emerge from individuals, become transformed through sharing of ideas, and result in organizational learning. A PLC supports a spiral of knowledge by encouraging the sharing of ideas through deprivatization of practice, collaboration, and reflective dialogue to improve teacher learning as a way to enhance instructional decisions.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is intended to help refine future policy regarding the master schedule as a structure to provide collaborative opportunities for staff. More importantly the study will help interpret how the ABCD schedule is impacting teachers' instructional practices and collaboration. There is a continuing need to understand how teachers collaborate so decisions can be made to help create structures and cultures conducive to PLC work. A few studies exist connecting professional development, teacher learning, and student achievement and the ability to establish an empirical connection between student and teacher learning has proved challenging (Supovitz, 2003). This study is not intended to provide a complete and comprehensive connection to

link student and teacher learning, but it does intend to provide a rich qualitative interpretation leading to a greater understanding of collaboration when teachers participate in a PLC.

Background of the Study

A team of elementary school principals began to study different scheduling options to provide consistent collaboration time for classroom teachers during the school day. The principal team needed to come up with a plan without increasing any financial obligations or add time to the school day. A new plan would need to provide time for the appropriate amount of instructional minutes to occur, facilitate the ability of students to access all state required curriculums, and enhance the ability to function as professional learning communities. This new plan was being developed at the same time the district was experiencing a sharp decrease in state funding resulting in the elimination of some programs. The team also needed to address the loss of one program responsible for 100 minutes of plan time each week for fourth and fifth grade classroom teachers.

The team looked at different models and attempted to create a district plan for all elementary schools. Once the team came up with a plan, they shared it with the district level administration. Eventually the team shared the new scheduling plan with all principals and coordinators. Department coordinators examined their allocated staffing and began to determine how each building could be appropriately served in specialty areas such as art, music, physical education, library/media, and counseling. Once the district level administrators, principals, and coordinators concluded the plan could work with existing resources, a common consensus emerged leading to the new schedule being

implemented beginning with the 2010-2011 school year. The plan became a district practice, but never became a formal Board policy.

August, 2010 marked the first time the elementary schools serving the Central School District changed their school's specialists schedule away from the typical Monday-Friday plan. The district implemented a new plan labeled the ABCD schedule (see Figure 1). Unlike the Monday-Friday plan, the ABCD plan redefines each day by either being an A, B, C, or D day. With the ABCD schedule, students attend one of their special classes such as art or music for 50 minutes. Under the prior schedule, students might attend a special class for 30 minutes while other days they would attend a different special class for 60 minutes. This inconsistency meant some teachers would have 30 minutes of release time in a day while other members of their PLC might have 60 minutes on that same day. The ABCD schedule provides common planning time for regular classroom teachers during the normal school day for teachers at North. Some schools in the Central District may not have daily common planning time. The number of days each week of common planning time depended on the number of classroom sections, specialist allocations, and the nature of the day rotation. The revised schedule would allow classroom teachers to meet during their contracted time for approximately 50 minutes. For my study, I am conducting my research at a school that has daily common planning time.

Methodology

A qualitative research design is intended to gain a thick, rich interpretation of a phenomenon by looking through the eyes of participants (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Qualitative methodology supports the

objective of this study to gain a greater understanding of the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices when teachers participate in a PLC. The natural setting is an important element of data collection in qualitative research as conducting research in our participants' natural and familiar setting allows us to observe, understand, and sense what is taking place (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hennink et al., 2011; Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research includes fieldwork and requires the researcher to go directly to the people, site, and setting in order to observe the behaviors in the natural setting (Merriam, 1988).

Case studies play an important role in educational research (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (1988) adds by saying qualitative case study research "is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (p. 2). An instrumental case study will provide an opportunity to focus on one issue of concern and will be a single case bound by one location. The embedded single case study will focus on classroom teachers in one purposefully selected elementary school. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study as I hope to discover, understand, interpret, and gain additional insight (Patton, 1990). A sample should be selected from which we can learn the most from (Merriam, 1988). An important outcome of this study will lead to a greater understanding of teacher collaboration and how instructional practices are impacted when classroom teachers collaborate during the ABCD scheduled time.

Case study data collection helps establish an in-depth picture using multiple methods of data collection to provide "clusters of meanings" (Creswell, 2007). A saturation of data develops leading to the identification of themes. In my study, qualitative research methodologies will provide a saturation of data to help identify

themes present among teachers serving in PLCs implementing the ABCD schedule. Data collection methods will include interviews, focus groups, observations, and document reviews. Once the data is collected, an analysis to highlight significant statements will begin through a coding process. Data analysis is an ongoing process of continual reflection (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1988).

Limitations and Assumptions

Collaboration and collegiality are found within broad definitions and one must be careful not to over generalize their impact and effectiveness. Hargreaves (1994, 2003) uses the term ‘contrived collegiality’ to provide the realization that collegiality can be administratively regulated such as in the case of mandating how plan time is used. The Central School District has placed some administrative mandates on how plan time within the ABCD schedule is used. The impact of contrived collegiality is not an explicit focus of this study, but it could be a variable impacting the collaborative work occurring in the district.

An abundance of literature exists from the 1980s and 1990s regarding PLCs. Fewer works appear during the last 10 years. There is a need to further examine the link between PLCs, teacher learning, and student learning. My research will make a contribution to help bring the teacher role into an expanded discussion as I interpret how the PLCs collaborate. My case study is limited in teacher role by only including 4 participants for individual interviews; however, meeting observations and a focus group will expand the number of participants. A future inquiry could include a larger sample to interpret other dynamics of collaboration. My study is also framed during a time when unions and collective bargaining are beginning to have a stronger voice in impacting

policy and practice. While I am not attempting to advocate for or against collective bargaining, I am cautious to ignore its potential impact on how teachers collaborate.

Two basic assumptions exist regarding the intended participants. One assumption is members of a PLC are concerned about student learning. In my study this may manifest itself by looking at what actually occurs during teacher collaboration time. I am taking the position my purposefully selected participants are interested in promoting higher academic learning among their students. Another assumption is members of a PLC participate in collaborative activities. Some schools are not using the ABCD schedule for a variety of reasons or they have modified the schedule to support their small autonomous school. I have purposefully selected a school using the ABCD schedule allowing me to assume the members do participate in collaborative activities. I also recognize collaboration occurs during formal and informal exchanges. I will use a variety of data collection techniques to identify participants' formal or informal exchanges occurring outside the ABCD schedule.

Summary

A problem of practice in education is a gap between knowing what to do and actually carrying it out (Schmoker, 2006). The challenges faced by teachers leave little room to ignore best practices or to allow the knowing/doing gap to increase. Some teachers, schools, and district are changing their culture and structures as a way to move beyond excuses and ineffective practices. In the last 25 years the idea of a PLC has emerged as a prominent school reform tool. Still, many schools either struggle to get started with being a PLC or never take the initiative for positive change. Regardless, classroom teachers are still faced with many challenges and unless schools can provide

adequate structures of support, students may not always have access to teachers using instructional strategies to best meet their learning needs.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature providing a synthesis of the works focusing on PLCs. The review of literature will provide a deeper understanding of six PLC attributes relevant to this particular study. Looking deeper into the attributes are additional factors believed to influence PLCs in this study. Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the research design and methodology. Following a brief introduction to qualitative research, chapter 3 shares a detailed description of case study research. Additional chapter 3 components include site selection, participants, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and limitations. The last two chapters will draw upon the literature and data collection to provide an interpretation for how the ABCD schedule has impacted teachers' instructional practices when they are part of a PLC. Chapter 4 will provide an overview and description of findings. Writing chapter 4 will provide another opportunity of inquiry as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe writing as a method of knowing. The findings will be organized around relevant themes associated with the PLC frameworks. The final chapter will provide a discussion using the literature and findings to present implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Professional learning communities (PLCs) began to appear in research during the 1960s and gained momentum in the literature following the works of Rosenholtz (1989) and McLaughlin and Talbert (1993). Many of the features found in a PLC were mentioned in works dating back to the 1920s. Dewey (1929), for example, wrote about the role of data and reflective inquiry. The 1970s and 1980s would see more work highlighting the need for reflective practitioners, thinking schools, self-evaluating schools, and the teacher as researcher (Stoll, Bolan, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Through the last few decades a realization concerning the extensive support teachers need to meet today students' needs has fueled a quest to create more supportive teaching environments (Louis & Kruse, 1995). The Central School District is attempting to enhance and sustain the principles associated with being a PLC by utilizing a structure for teacher collaborative planning time to improve instructional practices. To better understand and interpret the role the ABCD structure has on teachers' instructional practices and learn how teachers collaborate when they are part of a PLC, this chapter provides a review of relevant literature to increase our understanding of the frameworks and factors of a PLC.

This review of literature begins by providing an explanation of what a PLC is. Through this section one will begin to understand the principles associated with a PLC as researchers and practitioners describe them. The review will provide a synthesis of the literature to help us discover six PLC frameworks identified as most relevant to the case. The literature will also point to studies reporting on the impact of PLCs to teacher and

student learning. The review of literature concludes with summarizing comments to bring together the major themes covered in chapter 2.

Professional Learning Communities

The literature offers various definitions of PLCs based on the work of researchers and practitioners and as the literature is reviewed one can find various frameworks associated with PLCs. The framework of shared norms and values characterizes the staff's conscious intentions to maintain a student focus (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse & Louis, 1995; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2000). A shared and supportive leadership is the framework present when a balance of power exists among administration and staff as they make decisions (Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, & Fernandez, 1993; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myer, 2007). In a PLC, members are engaged in public practice through what is labeled in the literature as deprivatization of practice (Bryk et al., 1999; Kruse & Louis, 1995; Louis & Marks, 1998; Scribner et al., 1999). Collaboration is another framework, which often supports, or is supported by the other frameworks. Collaboration is when a community is working and learning together to improve student learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Gill, 2010; Hord & Sommer, 2008; Little, 1990). An important function of a PLC is found in the focus on student learning framework (Kruse & Lewis, 1995; Scribner et al., 1999; Senge, 1990; Vescio et al., 2008). Reflective dialogue is the framework which characterizes deeper, strategic conversations occurring within a PLC to lead to a greater understanding of teaching and learning (Kruse & Lewis, 1995; Scribner et al., 1999).

In my study the words professional, learning, and community have relevance as they each represent features found among teachers who are part of a PLC. Understanding

these three words independently will help clarify the meaning of a PLC with respect to the work in schools. Professionals are the individuals responsible and accountable for delivering an effective program to improve student learning. The professionals fuel their own learning with passion and commitment that is transferred to their students through shared responsibility (Hord, 2009). Learning is the activity practiced by professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills. In a PLC, community is more than simply being part of a group (Hord, 2009). Community is about colleagues coming together for a meaningful purpose to learn more intensely about a specific topic that will provide shared meaning and purpose (Hord, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2000). In this study, teachers collaborating with one another represent the professionals responsible and accountable for improving instructional practices and community refer to the schools in which the teachers are a part of. To better explain and interpret how teachers collaborate and how they work in a PLC to improve instruction, I have elected to explain PLCs around six frameworks. The attributes include (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue (DuFour et al., 2010; Hord, 1997, 1998, 2009; Louis & Kruse, 1995, 1996; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). The following sections of this review of literature will provide an expanded understanding of the PLC frameworks and will also contain subheadings to help organize the major themes found within each section.

Shared norms and values

The PLC framework of shared norms and values provides a foundation centered on student learning which can result in a collective sense of responsibility for school

operations and improvement (Bryk et al., 1999). This section is intended to provide clarity regarding shared norms and values as this framework may impact or guide the classroom teachers in my sample. Shared norms and values are further understood by recognizing influences such as organizational structure, physical environment, school culture, trust, and conflict. The five elements are listed as subheadings to help organize this work once the shared norms and values literature is explained.

Shared norms and values refer to the collectively agreed upon professional beliefs that support and sustain successful professional practice among those working in the school (Scribner et al., 1999). In my study, the attention is on the classroom teachers as they support and sustain one another through shared norms and values. The work carried out by PLCs can help provide an interpretation regarding the professional learning occurring in a school as influenced by the sharing of norms and values. In a PLC, the norms and values are influenced by all members of the school and not just the administrators (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Understanding how PLCs develop and sustain shared norms and values can help us understand how teachers collaborate if the PLC has common values. Additionally, the functions occurring as teachers meet during collaboration time can reveal their priorities and purpose.

PLCs are guided by shared norms and values to teach children using common values and expectations for one another (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Vescio et al., 2008). As PLCs develop goals, their common beliefs and values are affirmed uniting members around a shared purpose and mutual identity (Lieberman, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2000). PLC members become encouraged to perform using the parameters of the vision to make decisions about teaching and learning (Louis & Kruse, 1995). The partnership

forged between teachers and administrators lead to shared and collegial leadership in the school, where they grow professionally and learn to view themselves as being on the same team working toward the same goal (Hoerr, 1996). Shared norms and values influence issues such as schools' use of time and space (Vescio et al., 2008).

Physical environment. The physical environment can also impact PLC practices. In the Central School District some teachers instruct in 'mobile classrooms'. Classroom settings located outside the regular building and away from their grade level team members can create a greater likelihood for the existence of privatized practices and traditional school structures (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Master schedules in some schools provide daily teacher collaboration time while in other schools common collaboration time may exist just one day a week. In a study of six elementary schools, teachers in schools labeled as high achieving and high involvement were constantly engaged in collegial conversations regarding classroom practices during formal and informal exchanges (Little, 1982).

Physical factors and structural supports can enhance or impede organizational learning within a PLC (Boyd, 1992; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Large groups may have difficulty finding adequate meeting areas, more trouble coordinating schedules, and face added challenges of building authentic collegiality among the members (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Teachers need regular meeting time during the day to communicate with one another (Pounder, 1998; Supovitz & Christman, 2003). Supportive conditions must be taken into account with respect to both people and physical factors as an interactive mechanism influencing each other (Boyd, 1992; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Pounder, 1998).

School culture. School culture is the common perceptions of school staff detailing collective beliefs, attitudes and values of school personnel which result from their interpersonal interactions (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Oliver, 2008). A school's culture impacts the transformation of a school into a PLC and can alter the structural change on instructional practices (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Even when PLCs made good use of structural changes that supported collaborative work, the restructuring of schools did not change the teaching culture (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). We can learn from that study and conclude developing a structure without paying attention to culture would likely have little impact on instruction (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Researchers have found PLCs to have the potential to change the culture of schools and be sustained by providing a resistance against traditional practices and norms (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). Teacher collegiality is a critical element of school culture supporting collective learning by providing teachers opportunities for developing instructional range, depth, and flexibility (Leithwood & Louis, 1998).

Trust. Trust among teachers is a basic foundation of well-performing PLCs (Baier, 1986; Park et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). When teachers view the actions of their colleagues as meeting their own role expectations, they will perceive colleagues as trustworthy (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Sitkin & Roth, 1993). Colleagues also establish trust when there is mutual understanding about personal obligations and expectations (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Teachers need to trust one another in school-based PLCs in order to engage in reflective dialogue, open the door of their classroom, and collaborate with a focus on student learning (Bryk et al.,

1999). Trustworthiness will encourage other's actions through their shared relationships (Coleman, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 1998).

PLC members gain a sense of trust when an organization is transparent in sharing information. In a study of a high school, Wignall (1992) discovered teachers find help, support, and trust as a result of developing warm relationships with each other. The absence of trust may impede a team from fully developing or developing at all (Lencioni, 2002). Mutual respect and understanding are fundamental requirements for a trusting culture (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Factors such as homogeneity and student challenges can impact the level of trust among teachers. A homogeneity staff is more likely to nurture a teacher's trust in a colleague (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). The same study noted the teachability culture is affected by a school's socio-economic status. Teachers working at schools with a low SES may view their students as more challenging and less teachable, thus producing greater tension among teachers and a lesser degree of trust (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

Conflict. Conflict is a natural product resulting from diverse ambitions, goals, ideas, and processes among the individuals composing the organization (Pounder, 1998). Increased opportunities for collaboration develop from greater interdependency among a PLC, but this also increases the potential for conflict (Pounder, 1998). Goal discrepancy impacts the level of conflict when individuals have an incompatible set of objectives (Morgan, 1986; Pfeffer, 1981). A mismatch among the members to achieve shared norms and values can also impact conflict. Organizations may avoid conflict by having vague

and general goals, and organizations that agree on goals may still struggle on the details of how the goals are reached (Pfeffer, 1981).

For teams to be effective, organizations must consist of people who desire the same goals, share knowledge, support one another, work collaboratively, and celebrate team successes (Gill, 2010). Effective teams do not ignore or avoid conflict, but instead face their fear of conflict (Lencioni, 2002). Conflict becomes productive in great teams, but in mediocre teams there is either a denial of conflict or there is a rigid division (Senge, 1990). Teams engaging in productive conflict are driven to produce the best possible solution in the most efficient amount of time (Lencioni, 2002).

Conflict can occur in different forms and serve unique functions in teams. Ideological conflict can be limited to concepts and ideas. Ideological conflict avoids people-focused, mean-spirited attacks, but can have the same external appearance and impact as interpersonal politics such as passion, emotion, and frustration. (Lencioni, 2002). A fear of conflict may cause team members to avoid open debates and turn to behind the scenes personal attacks (Lencioni, 2002). Conflict will even occur around vision, as vision is the collection of different personal ideas (Senge, 1990).

Conflict can occur when defensive reasoning drives a person to protect not only their identity, but also the thinking around their views (Senge, 1990). This type of conflict can be detrimental to double-loop learning teams who not only share their conclusions, but also express the thinking behind their learning (Argyris, 1999). Unfortunately from this thinking we develop defensive routines which are actions or policy that stop people from experiencing undesirable surprises, embarrassments, or fears, and simultaneously prevents the organization from reducing or removing the causes

of the surprises (Argyris, 1999). Most of these routines go unnoticed and are likely to occur in leaders functioning under the mindset they must know everything and not make mistakes. This mindset is further evidence for the need of shared leadership and collaboration found within PLCs.

Shared norm and values is an important framework to help my study look at how the PLCs develop goals and distribute responsibilities among the classroom teachers. In my study I will look to see how shared norms and values are shaped by the PLC who collaborates to improve instructional practices. My study will look to see how the PLC norms and values shape the collaboration and how trust and conflict manifest into the work. Within a PLC, shared norms and values are encouraged when a supportive leadership aims to build a culture to allow the sharing and exchange of ideas.

Shared and supportive leadership.

Shared and supportive leadership occurs when administration and staff share power and authority for making decisions while promoting and nurturing leadership (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hipp et al., 2008). This section of the review of literature will share information relevant to the framework of shared and supportive leadership. It is important to note leadership is framed in this study as shared among the teachers. In this sense leadership has been distributed to the PLC. Shared and supportive leadership is important to examine as a framework that might manifest itself with other frameworks such as collaboration and focus on student learning. Shared and supportive leadership might impact community and collective responsibility, which are presented as subheadings later in this section.

Bolman and Deal (2008) stated, “Progressive organizations give power to employees as well as invest in their development” (p. 149). Empowerment occurs when employees are encouraged to participate, feel informed, find meaning in their work, and serve in an organization supporting teams (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Hord, 1997). Unlike traditional school structures, which include top down decision-making, PLCs encourage teacher leadership. When individuals responsible for implementations are included in the shared decision-making process, the change is more likely to be effective and enduring (Scribner et al., 2007). PLCs have the capacity to serve an individual’s need to feel empowered through the sharing of ideas and leadership roles. The phrase ‘professional community of learners’ describes teachers and administrators continuously seeking and sharing learning (Astuto et al., 1993). A PLC is about teacher and administrators working together and the ABCD schedule is the Central School District’s attempt to provide collaboration time for PLCs. Participation is a powerful tool that increases morale and productivity (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Hord, 1997).

Community. Community among professional staff is likely to promote greater teacher commitment when people are provided the relationships to feel connected, value others, and be valued by the community (Byrk et al., 1999; Sergiovanni, 2000). Teachers serving in schools where staff members are actively engaged as a PLC (a) worked less in isolation, (b) had a higher rate of satisfaction, moral, and attendance, (c) had an increased craft for powerful teaching and classroom practices, and (d) possessed a higher commitment to the mission, vision, and goals of the school. My study will use shared and supported leadership to see how new ideas are encouraged specific to instructional practices in the PLCs. For shared leadership to stimulate and propose new ideas about

learning, the members of a PLC must view their team as holding the authority to solve problems (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Schools organized as PLC promote a higher level of student engagement in classroom work (Byrk et al., 1999). Adults and children learn simultaneously and in the same place to solve relevant problems in a community of learners (Barth, 1990). School may be interpreted as learning communities when students and staff are dedicated to thinking, growing, inquiring, and where a comprehensive attitude of learning exist (Sergiovanni, 2000). Participation in professional learning activities must be openly appreciated and intentionally stimulated by the school environment (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).

School norms, structures and practices may either enable or inhibit teacher learning (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). These conditions are influenced by when, where, and how the team can regularly meet for the purpose of learning (Boyd, 1992; Louis & Kruse, 1995). In order for PLCs to function productively, the physical or structural conditions and the human qualities and capacities of the people involved must be optimal among the PLC (Boyd, 1992; Hord, Rousin, & Sommers, 2010; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Marks & Louis, 1999).

A shared and supportive leadership may influence the human capital element of a PLC. Early studies of formal organizations' culture suggest organizations have clearly recognizable identities manifested in the members' behavior patterns, thoughts and norms (Deal & Peterson, 1999). In a PLC, collegial relationships exist through team, organization and community learning (Gill, 2010). Literature also shows cultural patterns have a powerful impact on performance and shapes the way people, act and feel (Deal &

Peterson, 1999). Individuals must demonstrate a willingness to accept feedback and work towards improvement in a PLC (Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Collective responsibility. High quality teams (a) shape performance in response to a demand, (b) translate common purpose into specific, measurable performance goals, (c) develop the right mix of expertise, (d) develop a common commitment to working relationships, and (e) hold themselves collectively responsible (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Hansen, 2009). Effective teams take a critical look at their purpose through both an individual and collective lens allowing the goals to be examined to provide vision and minimize confusion (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). PLCs need to have the right mix of participants demonstrating the right mix of skills while also being composed of the right number of members. Groups of ten or less are effective at remaining focused on a common mission and allowing greater collaboration (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

A shared and supportive leadership may encourage an exchange of ideas among teachers striving for instructional improvements as they work together in a PLC. Shared and supportive leadership also means there can be an exchange of roles among teachers and administrators (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Teachers take on (a) leadership roles, (b) share and trade off the roles of mentor, advisor, or specialist, and (c) administrators even step into the classroom (Louis & Marks, 1998).

Deprivatization of Practice

Teachers working in a PLC have the opportunity to exchange and process ideas when the school's PLC are guided by a deprivatization of practice. Deprivatization of practice is when teachers practice their work openly (Bryk et al., 1999; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Lieberman and Pointer-Mace (2009) used the term "going public" to explain what

happens when teachers learn with a group of peers and break the isolation of their world to become part of an intellectual community drawing upon each other to learn. In short, deprivatization of practice is simply public practice, which may result in a PLC sharing information to improve their practice and make better teaching decisions. Understanding the difference between deprivatization practice and collaboration will provide a deeper layer of understanding of how teachers collaborate and more importantly how their work impacts instruction. This deprivatization of practice section will include a synthesis of literature regarding shared practice and then look at individualism and the contradictions between individual practices and communal practices. This section will highlight some past studies that demonstrate the value of PLCs.

Shared practice. Shared practice for the purpose of learning is framed by the school's capacities for innovation that exist in an ability to collectively process, understand, and apply new ideas about teaching and learning (Louis, 1994). Shared practice is public which means teachers are encouraged and supported to observe and discuss each other's practices through a reciprocal process (Hord & Sommers, 2008). This practice may become a natural part of the culture over time leading to a higher level of a collaborative community that moves beyond a simple verbal exchange of information. PLC can use different structures to facilitate deprivitization of practice in their schools. Teachers can be assigned to two-person teams, grade level teams, and department teams (Louis & Marks, 1998). Strategies such as team teaching and peer coaching allow teachers to share methods and philosophies when practices are deprivatized (Bryk et al., 1999). One study found teachers using structures for deprivatization had daily discussions about pedagogy (Louis & Marks, 1998). Another

study found a team that shared professional development experiences and who maintained strong network ties with individuals and groups were able to sustain collective endeavors (Horn & Little, 2009).

Working collaboratively sustains reflective dialogue and deprivatization of practice to nurture the sharing of expertise and creating shared understanding of complex situations and information (Louis et al., 1996; Scribner et al., 1999). Through deprivatization of practice, a teacher may take a new discovery and implement it into a classroom activity as other members observe (Bryk et al., 1999). In a deprivatized setting, teachers may trade off and on the role of mentor or specialist to help one another solve difficult problems and improve practice (Bryk et al., 1999; Little, 1990). Deprivatization of practice may not happen by chance or without challenges. One challenge to deprivatization of practice is individualism.

Individualism. Individual learning and individualism are two distinct issues as we consider deprivatization of practice in a PLC. Individualism is when people strive to function independently from the organization or they bring biases and limitations to the learning that is independent of the organization's requirements (Argyris, 1999). Uncertainty and isolation are found to co-exist in “stuck” schools when there is an absence of innovation and are considered impoverished learning settings (Rosenholtz, 1998). Impoverished learning settings are schools that lack little organization and learning involves teachers who normally work alone and fail to ask for help (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Private learning cultures exhibit low levels of trust among colleagues, have low levels of innovation, and do little to improve student achievement (Barth, 1990; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Conversely, PLCs allow teachers to gain a greater

knowledge of student learning and outcomes by including all educators in cooperative decision making (Pounder, 1998).

Opposite to Rosenholtz's term "stuck" schools is the term "moving" schools (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). A moving school is characterized as a learning community where teachers work together and believe in the need to continuously learn. These PLCs also have a higher level of trust, which allows members to provide important feedback to one another regarding issues inside and outside of school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). PLCs learn how to learn together so student learning can improve.

For schools to be transformed by PLCs, teachers must continuously deliberate with one another on how to solve problems that relate to teaching and learning (Fullan, 2001). The professional isolation of teachers restricts access to new ideas and better solutions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Collaborative organizations contain people sharing information, sharing in decision-making, and sharing in the work by changing their patterns of relationship to become more interdependent (Pounder, 1998). Lieberman (1995) provides additional insight by saying, "Learning theorists and organizational theorists are teaching us that people learn best through active involvement and through thinking about and becoming articulate about what they have learned" (p. 592). In a PLC, active learning includes the community sharing ideas and discoveries through deprivatized practice.

The key to improved learning for students is the continuous, job-embedded learning among staff that can occur in a PLC (DuFour & DuFour, 1996). Teachers need frequent collaboration time built into their schedules to work interdependently towards

common goals (DuFour et al., 2010). The Central School District has created a structure aimed to provide common collaboration time for PLCs.

Collaboration

Collaboration is mentioned often in the literature when talking about PLCs (Bryk et al., 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1996; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hansen, 2009; Harris & Anthony, 2001; Hord, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989; Scribner et al., 2007; Vescio et al., 2008). Through a review of literature, collaboration can be described as a systematic process in which teachers work together as teams to analyze and improve classroom practices for the purpose of improving student learning (DuFour, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). A short definition summarizes collaboration as mutual work striving to meet a common goal (Hord & Sommer, 2008). Collaboration is also considered an instrument for teacher learning by supporting and encouraging the collective discovery, sharing, and application of knowledge (Gill, 2010). This section of the literature review will provide an understanding of collaboration as it relates to the work of PLCs by looking at a number of influential factors including: affiliation, collegiality, organizational learning, and teacher learning.

Four types of collaboration can occur including (a) scanning and storytelling, (b) help and assistance, (c) sharing, and (d) joint work (Little, 1990). Of these four collaboration types, Little suggests joint work is the strongest form of collaboration and includes practices such as team teaching, action research, sustained peer coaching, and mentoring. Teachers working in a PLC may have an opportunity to participate in activities associated with joint work if the appropriate structures are in place. The desire

to improve student learning prompts the professional staff to study and work together (Hord, 1997). Collaborative planning time can provide contract time for teachers to (a) team teach, (b) conduct and share action research around instructional practices, and (c) provide peer mentoring and coaching.

Affiliation. Collaborative work increases teachers' sense of affiliation with each other and with the school and increases their sense of mutual support and responsibility for effective instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Louis et al., 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989). When teachers have opportunities for collaborative inquiry and the learning associated to it, they are able to develop and share a body of wisdom collected from their experience (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989). A teaching environment has a relationship with teaching quality as teachers who feel supported in their own continuous learning and classroom practice are more committed and effective than those with less support (Rosenholtz, 1989). Teachers with a high sense of their own efficacy were more likely to adopt new classroom behaviors and also more likely to stay in the profession (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Collegiality. Collegiality builds a school culture consisting of better decisions, more effective implementation of decisions, higher level of morale, and increased level of trust among colleagues (Barth, 1990; Hord & Sommers, 2008). PLCs focused on instructional practices are guided beyond discussions regarding logistical and technical issues unrelated to learning. A PLC produces new materials and activities to enhance instruction, curriculum and assessment for students while also improving professional development opportunities (Fullan & Hargreave, 1996; Hipp et al., 2008; Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Collaboration within a PLC increases learning opportunities and the

number of knowledge exchanges (Rosenholtz, 1989; Vescio et al., 2008). In a PLC, collaboration is a critical element allowing teachers to question and learn from one another (Snow-Gerono, 2005). Collegiality can exist in diverse forms and occur in different structures with some types having a greater impact on collaboration.

Organizational learning. The process of forming and applying collective knowledge to problems and needs is organizational learning (Gill, 2010). Isolation from peers can create a wall minimizing the value collaborative work has on teaching practices and can limit the sharing of professional learning occurring among teachers (Scribner, 1999). Structure, according to teachers in one study, can facilitate collaborative work by including professional development opportunities as teacher meet and share ideas (Scribner, 1999). Scribner's study also highlighted the need for the school culture to support formal and informal learning opportunities if a PLC is going to support a professional learning environment (Scribner, 1999). PLC can learn together when they have time built into the regular school day that is protected from mandates unrelated to instruction (Scribner, 1999). The ABCD schedule in the Central School District is an attempt to protect scheduled collaboration time and increase professional learning and practices.

PLCs facilitate the exchange of learning between expert and novice teachers through a knowledge in practice context, which occurs when teachers reflect on, inquire about, and transform their experience into learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teachers learn collaboratively through inquiry and network communities and teachers open themselves up to learning from one another through collegial and professional community (Lieberman, 1992). As a result, PLCs develop more trusting relationships and

a refined framework. A strong PLC is able to confront failures by openly talking about disappointing student outcomes and shifting to a critical review of practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Collaboration provides an opportunity for teachers to share and place into practice their learning. Teacher collaboration can occur in a PLC when teachers (a) challenge their own assumptions, (b) identify promising practice, (c) present problems, (d) study their students and environment (e) construct and modify curriculum, and (f) share leadership (Little, 1990). The main goal of knowledge of practice is understanding and modifying practice to stimulate fundamental change in classroom, schools, programs, and professional organizations so that student learning and development will have a positive change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The changes in instructional practices among classroom teachers could be one way of examining how teachers construct knowledge of practice during collaboration.

School reform efforts continue to focus on professional development.

Unfortunately school reform policies fall short in directing the appropriate types of activities that can truly engage teacher learning and provide a channel for teacher learning to impact student achievement. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) wrote:

The vision of practice that underlies the nation's reform agenda requires most teachers to rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never taught before – and probably never experienced as a student. (p. 597)

The learning involved within a PLC can be influenced by the members, their knowledge, and their experiences to construct new teaching strategies acquired through regular

collaboration. Teachers need time to process and reflect on their learning to appropriately implement new discoveries into their classrooms and connect new knowledge to the needs of students (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Collaborative practice places teachers in a dual role of teacher and learner (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Teacher learning. Teacher learning is a complex process that should maintain an ongoing focus to deepen educator's awareness of teaching methodologies and students (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Professional learning practices are most effective (a) when the activity is school based and part of a teacher's daily work, (b) engages teachers with their materials, and (c) requires teachers to learn in ways that reflect how they should instruct (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Effective teacher learning should have the following characteristics: (a) focus on instruction and student learning specific to their environment, (b) be sustained, (c) reflect teacher influence about what and how they learn, (d) provide opportunities to collaborate with colleagues inside and outside the school, and (e) assist teachers in identifying a theoretical understanding of the concepts and knowledge needed to learn (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Professional development has been shown to be more effective in improving teacher learning and teacher practices if teachers from the same school, department, or grade level participate collectively (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). A PLC places teachers serving in the same school together providing a learning opportunity during their collaboration time. The National Council of Staff Development (NCSDE) intentionally replaced the name Standards for Professional Development with Standards for Professional Learning to demonstrate the emphasis on learning (Mizell, Hord, Killion, &

Hirsh, 2011). The clear purpose on professional learning of these standards is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practice, and dispositions they need to help students achieve at higher levels. When looking at the impact the ABCD schedule has with instruction, my study will look to see how the PLCs share knowledge, skills, and practices to impact instruction.

Student learning increases are anticipated when collaborative teacher learning occurs (Hipp et al., 2008). Transformation to collaborative practices must not be individualized and fragmented (Louis & Marks, 1996). Instead the learning practices must be collaborative and embedded into the day-to-day work occurring in schools to meet the needs of students. Teacher learning must focus on instructional practices (Hipp et al., 2008; Little, 1982). A study by Supovitz and Christman (2003) found student achievement gains were significant when PLCs engaged in structured, sustained instructional discussions, and investigated the relationships between instructional practices and student work. Unfortunately, their study also exposed how the majority of PLCs were unable to sustain this practice over time causing a failure in reform efforts to increase instructional direction (Supovitz & Christman, 2003). In their policy brief, Supovitz and Christman (2003) stated only in a few schools did the reform efforts include an instructional intervention. To redirect PLCs around instruction, organizations should focus the teams around instructional improvements utilizing a process, which includes both a cultural and an organizational shift (Supovitz & Christman, 2003).

A PLC's collaborative efforts encourage knowledge exchanges, mutual support, and accountability for effective instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Louis et al., 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989). A PLC impacts a school when the members focus on issues to

improve student learning and work collectively to achieve defined learning goal for their students and teachers (DuFour et al., 2010). The purpose of collaboration in a PLC is not only intended to help the adults learn, but a key attribute of a PLC is a focus on student learning.

Focus on Student Learning

A focus on student learning is a key PLC framework in my study. A focus on student learning is when PLCs establish students learning as a prime professional goal (Scribner et al., 1999). A key occurrence of a PLC is when members are engaged in sharing information for the purpose of improving student learning through better teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Louis, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). Through a continuous inquiry of learning and improvement, actions are defined and goals are established to benefit student learning (Astuto et al., 1993). This section will transition to literature specific to student learning outcomes to demonstrate the influence and effectiveness of PLCs when a focus on student learning is maintained.

A collective focus on student learning is when the teachers' professional actions focus on decisions that impact students' learning experiences (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Louis et al., 1996). Strong PLCs positively influence the learning environment and student learning outcomes (Borko, 2004; Scribner, Douglas, & Warne, 2002). High school teachers with strong professional community held higher expectations for student achievement and behaviors when compared to schools with weak professional community (Birk & Driscoll, 1988). In another study, evidence revealed strong professional community decreased educational disparities for students in urban elementary schools (Bryk et al., 1999). Teachers serving in schools with continuous

collegial interactions around shared goals were found to have a higher level of confidence regarding instructional practices (Rosenholtz, 1989).

A study of a PLC that was learning about technology integration found students to have a higher level of active cognitive engagement due to PLC members working to adapt technology to enhance learning (Cifuentes, Maxwell & Bulu, 2011). The members of the PLC taught each other, modified the curriculum to integrate technology, and shared lesson plans to improve student learning. The teachers expressed a desire to continue working together in what would be described as a PLC. Another study contained a similar finding suggesting PLCs can create a paradigm shift in how teachers wish to function (Andrews & Lewis, 2002).

The QUASAR (Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning) is another study that allows us to examine what happens when a PLC works to enhance instruction (Borko, 2004). Teachers in this study over the course of a year modified their mathematical instructional practices and saw their classrooms as a place for their own learning and their student learning. Borko's (2004) research concluded strong PLCs can foster teacher learning and improve instructional practices. Like the other studies, this one also included a socio-cultural element where the educational institution functioned as a social entity allowing the sharing and exchange of ideas. PLCs draw on a framework that teacher learning occurs through the social exchanges among teacher teams. The Central School District's ABCD schedule is an attempt to place teachers in collaborative groups to influence instruction and student learning. Collaborative processes and a focus on learning require communication among

colleagues assisted by the appropriate types of dialogue. Strong PLCs are built on teachers who engage in reflective dialogue about their practice (Bryk et al., 1999).

Reflective Dialogue

Teachers reflect on and evaluate their professional practice through conversations with colleagues through reflective dialogue (Scribner et al., 1999). PLCs need to master the practice of dialogue and discussion to enhance PLC performance and minimize opportunity for groupthink to permeate the team (Rowe, 2008; Senge, 1990). Some suggest teachers can examine assumptions regarding best practices by participating in in-depth conversations about teaching and learning (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). In a PLC, teachers may use reflective dialogue as a way to learn as a team. Team learning develops as individuals practice collaborative dialogue (Senge, 1990). A trusting and safe environment is an important characteristic as reflective dialogues put practice and pedagogy under examination. These examinations are important to challenge and change teaching practices that are failing to produce evidence of student learning (Bryk et al, 1999; Sebring et al., 1995). The conversations are intentional and strategic to meet the needs of the students and school by occurring within the context of a PLC.

The learning skill of action science has two broad categories including the skill of reflection and skills of inquiry (Senge, 1990). The skill of reflection involves slowing down our own thinking processes so that we can become more aware of how we form our mental models and the way they influence our actions. A concern with this process is a person's over generalization occurring as assumptions become treated as facts through what is labeled "Leaps of Abstraction" (Senge, 1990). This concern is further explained

by suggesting people move too quickly from direct observations to generalizations without first testing. Utilizing the skill of reflective dialogue slows down this process and allows the community to digest meaning and interpretation (Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2005).

The second category in learning skills of action is skills of inquiry, which describes how we deal face-to-face with others during times of conflict (Senge, 1990). This challenge is heightened when trying to balance inquiry and advocacy during challenging and conflicting matters (Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2005). Schools have been labeled inquiring communities when the principals and teachers devote themselves to collective inquiry as they reflect on their practices and search for solutions to problems they face (Sergiovanni, 2000). Problem solving in a PLC involves the exchange of ideas among the members. Critical reflection provides evidence the organization is maintaining a focus on mission and goals (Mezirow 2000). One of the most useful skills of a PLC would be the ability to recognize when people are not reflecting on their own assumptions, when they are not inquiring into each other's thinking, and when they are not exposing their thinking in a way that encourages others to inquire into it (Senge, 1990). The discipline of dialogue also involves learning how to recognize the patterns of interactions in teams that undermine learning (Senge, 1990).

Dialogue. Dialogue is deep listening to one another and suspending of one's own view to provide a stream of meaning flowing among and through participants to help establish new understanding (Bohm, 1996; Sparks, 2005). With dialogue, a group attempts to access a larger collection of ideas with the whole organizing the part instead of the part organizing the whole (Senge, 1990). Discussion exists when different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions

that must be made at that time (Senge, 1990). An attempt is made to get one's agenda passed and approved, which means another person may not have their idea accepted. This is contradictory to the PLC attribute of shared norms and values which operates by the collectively agreed upon goals. Teams need to be able to distinguish between the dialogue and discussion and move consciously between the two (Senge, 1990).

Three conditions are necessary for dialogue (Bohm, 1996). These are necessary for the unrestricted flow of meaning to pass through a group by decreasing the flow's resistance. All participants must suspend their assumptions and literally to hold them as if suspended before us (Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2005). The flow of dialogue can become blocked when a person buckles down creating the need for all PLC members to suspend all assumptions. The second condition is all participants must regard one another as colleagues by seeing one another in mutual accord for deeper insight and clarity (Senge, 1990). PLC members must see themselves as colleagues with different views and not adversaries (Senge, 1990). The third condition is the existence of a facilitator who holds the context of dialogue. In a PLC this person is not a hierarchical figure with elevated status and power. A PLC is a system built on shared leadership and encourages dialogue to be a free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues. Through dialogue and reflection, team members can evaluate their professional practices to produce quality instruction. PLCs must find ways to communicate and focus their work around objectives that will improve student learning even at a time when schools are called to perform many duties. Reflective dialogue provides an avenue for PLCs to participate in focused conversations surrounding the shared norms and values to ultimately impact student learning.

Summary

Each of the six PLC frameworks shared in this review of literature are considered relevant to this study as we focus on a district structure intending to provide common collaboration time for teachers. Shared norms and values are important in guiding the work occurring among a PLC. Leadership is shared and supportive by members who take on various roles for the benefit of the PLC. Teachers gain greater insight from one another as they deprivatize their practices through peer observations and mentoring. Collaboration is often used in a general sense, but in a PLC the collaboration is specific to the member's agreed upon work. A focus on student learning is what drives instructional practices to be improved. This also means the PLC must work together to identify their students' needs and understand the environment they work in to help match the best possible instructional practices. Reflective dialogue is important by establishing an awareness of the specific function of dialogue and discussions. Through understanding and being aware, teams can minimize defensive reasoning and use dialogue as a way to communicate and share ideas.

School reform initiatives, professional development, and school policies are all aiming to improve student learning. At its core, the concept of a PLC rests on the premise of improving student learning by improving teaching practice (Hord & Sommer, 2008; Vescio et al., 2008). As stakeholders invest time and resources into PLCs one must have the full confidence the structure will lead to the ultimate goal of better student learning.

An organization must be flexible to support their emerging and valued ideas, or it is likely to block its own innovation (Morgan, 1986). A PLC is understood in this study by framing the concept around six attributes. Shared norms and values, shared and

supportive leadership, deprivatization of practice, collaboration, focus on student learning, and reflective dialogue are key features that will help interpret the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices when teachers serve in a PLC and also provide a deeper understanding for how the PLCs collaborate.

The next chapter of this study will explain the research design and methodology. A qualitative case study is being used to help interpret the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices when the teachers work in a PLC. The study will also provide a rich understanding for how teachers collaborate when using the ABCD schedule. Chapter 3 will explain the data collection and data analysis used. The chapter will end by sharing ethical considerations and limitations.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methods

Through the review of literature, the frameworks of a PLC relevant to this study and the impact PLCs have on teacher and student learning were seen (Borko, 2004; Bryk et al., 1999; Cifuentes et al., 2011; Rosenholtz, 1989; Scribner et al., 2002; Vescio et al., 2008). PLC schools operate with (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue (DuFour et al., 2010; Hord, 1997; 1998, 2009; Louis & Kruse, 1995; 1996; Scribner et al., 1999; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). These PLC frameworks have relevance to this case study as I look at how they exist and influence teachers' work when they are part of a PLC. In this case study, I will attempt to interpret how instructional practices are influenced by the ABCD schedule when teachers serve in a PLC and how teachers collaborate.

A need exists to interpret and describe schools' attempts to create structures conducive to teacher professional learning so teachers can implement effective instructional strategies. The review of literature cited studies pointing to teacher dissatisfaction with professional learning opportunities (Lieberman, 2008; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990), but also discussed the benefit of teacher collaboration as a way to improve learning (Barth, 1990; DuFour & DuFour, 1996; Hipp et al., 2008; Lieberman, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993, 2006; Schmoker, 2006; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Vescio et al., 2008). What is yet to be determined in the research is how teaching practices impact the opportunities created through collaborative planning time. The purpose of this single bound case study is to interpret and understand

the impact the ABCD schedule has on elementary classroom teachers' instructional practices in the Central School District, and how teachers within a PLC collaborate.

Research Questions

1. How is the ABCD schedule impacting the instructional practices used by classroom teachers when they work in a professional learning community at North Elementary School?
2. How are the classroom teachers implementing the ABCD schedule?
3. How are the six PLC frameworks occurring during the ABCD collaboration time?

Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis in a case study design can be described as the groups of individuals participating in an event or activity or organization that are examined by researchers (Creswell, 2007). In this case study design, the group includes classroom teachers using the ABCD schedule to collaborate. The Central School District has mandated teachers meet at least one day per week during the ABCD common collaborative planning time to look at student achievement data and plan instruction.

Qualitative Methodology

This research study will use qualitative research methods to interpret how instructional practices are influenced by the ABCD schedule when teachers participate in a PLC, how classroom teachers collaborate, and how the six PLC frameworks occur during the ABCD collaboration time. Qualitative research methodology provides the tools necessary to draw an accurate picture of the phenomenon under investigation by looking through the lens of the study's participants. Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2011) suggest by identifying issues through participants' perspectives, we are better able to

understand the meaning and interpretations they give to behaviors, events, and objects. When looking at the influence the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices, uncovering the dynamics associated with the participant's reflective dialogue will strengthen the interpretation of the case by using qualitative methodology.

A single definition of qualitative research is difficult to find in recent publications (Creswell, 2007). Creswell says an evolving definition keeps the definition from becoming "fixed". Other researchers such as Hennink et al. (2011) claim defining qualitative research is challenging due to the wide range of techniques and philosophies situated within its practices. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) provide a deeper explanation regarding the absence of a unified definition of qualitative research by saying qualitative research is defined mainly by a series of tensions, contradictions, and hesitations. They attribute tension to the diverse uses of qualitative research found among different disciplines.

Regardless of the evolving and expanding definition of qualitative research, key components and assumptions can help develop an effective qualitative research design. Creswell (2007) says qualitative research "begins with an assumption, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaningful individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). Unlike quantitative research methods, which may take apart a phenomenon to examine component parts through a predetermined hypothesis, qualitative research methods attempt to put multiple parts together to gain a depth of understanding regarding the meaning of the phenomenon (Hennink et al., 2011; Merriam, 1988). The multiple parts of this case study may include the six frameworks of a PLC. To interpret the impact the

ABCD schedule has on instructional practices and teacher collaboration, a complex, detailed understanding of the case needs to be provided.

Qualitative research methods occur in the natural setting to provide an opportunity to observe, understand, and sense what is taking place (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Hennink et al., 2011; Merriam, 1988). Through observations in the natural setting, researchers can generate a rich, thick description of problems to be explored (Creswell, 2007). The natural setting can only be truly obtained by meeting directly with the people in their natural and familiar environments. Qualitative research includes fieldwork and requires the researcher to go directly to the people, site, and setting in order to observe behaviors in the natural setting (Merriam, 1988). Meeting in the natural environment allows one to understand the context or settings in which participants confront problems and issues through the use of multiple measures (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1988).

Since qualitative research is descriptive, words and pictures are used to express what the researcher has learned (Merriam, 1988). This is important considering Merriam's (1988) view that a 'thick description' provides a complete, literal description of the case being studied by presenting information in a variety of ways. The audience should be considered and what they would like to know about the case when determining what to write (Merriam, 1988). Merriam goes on to say knowing who will be interested in reading the case study can help the writer determine the structure and style.

My research is important to help policy makers understand how teachers collaborate so effective structures can be developed or reinforced. Unlike a quantitative

research methodology, which may provide a statistical analysis and reveal how much collaboration takes place and how many times teachers collaborate, using qualitative methods will provide an in-depth description of the case and allow me to gain a comprehensive understanding of how PLCs collaborate and how the collaboration influences instructional practices when using the ABCD schedule (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative research can occur through a number of approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The following section provides rationale and explanation for why I selected to conduct a qualitative case study. The next section also explains the connection between my research topic and case study research.

Case Study

A case study approach best supports my research to understand and interpret the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices when teachers participate in a PLC and to understand how teachers collaborate within the PLC. The study seeks to interpret a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. Qualitative case study research design is appropriate for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena (Merriam, 1988). Case study is an inquiry strategy in which the researcher extensively explores a program, activity, event, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation is the ABCD structure as an attempt to provide teacher with collaboration time for the purpose of impacting teaching practices through the teachers' participation in a PLC.

Merriam (1988) summarized case study characteristics by using four essential terms: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Particularistic refers to a case

study's focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). My study will look at the ABCD policy as a particular process to support the PLC frameworks relevant for this study. Descriptive means the end product is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon being looked at (Merriam, 1988). In my study, I will be descriptive in interpreting the meanings of the data by using qualitative measures. The descriptions will conceptualize six PLC frameworks in relation to the research questions. Heuristic is about stimulating the discovery of new meaning, extending the reader's experience, or confirming what is known. Once this study is complete there will be an extended interpretation of the phenomenon. Inductive reasoning is a product driving the study to find new concepts, connections, and understanding. Case studies are concerned with understanding and describing process more than behavioral outcomes (Merriam, 1988).

Qualitative case study research occurs in the natural environment to allow the researcher to authentically experience the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1984). Furthermore, the social context in which teachers working in a PLC serve provides a theoretical basis for understanding teacher learning when part of a PLC. Qualitative researchers attempt to answer questions to highlight how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). My case study will occur within the social setting where teachers interact with one another. Teacher learning occurs in a PLC as professionals share and exchange ideas. Case study research provides a qualitative opportunity to study this phenomenon in a natural setting.

Case study research has been used in education to inform policy; however, case study research predominately strives to understand specific issues and problems of

practice (Merriam, 1988). An extensive look at teacher learning in a specific PLC structure will provide a comprehensive view of the collaborative practices experienced by elementary classroom teachers in their natural setting. My study aimed to interpret how teachers collaborate when the attributes of a PLC are present. My case study focused on one issue of concern and was a single case bound by one location. The embedded single case study focused on the classroom teachers within the professional learning communities since this research was concerned with how the teachers' instructional practices are impacted by the ABCD scheduled collaboration time and how teachers collaborate.

PLC operate by focusing on student learning, collaborating, and deprivatizing practice. My study looked at how my participants were concerned with student learning. In my study, this may manifested itself by looking at what actually occurs during teacher collaboration time. Second, I looked at how my participants engage in collaborative activities. The ABCD schedule provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate during contracted time, but do the teachers actually collaborate and does the collaboration involve instructional practices? A few important components of collaboration should be noted. According to Scribner et al. (1999), team members working collaboratively protect reflective dialogue and deprivatization of practice. In my study, I considered additional frameworks as I suspected their existence may impact the PLC. Collaboration is a factor responsible for teachers being more successful in meeting the difficult intellectual and physical challenges posed by teaching (Scribner et al., 2002). This study attempted to see and hear how teachers in the Central School District are collaborating. More importantly,

qualitative methods will allow the participants to share thick descriptions regarding their view and practices surrounding collaboration.

Data Collection

Case study data collection helps establish an in-depth picture using multiple methods of data collection to provide “clusters of meanings” (Creswell, 2007). A saturation of data develops leading to the identification of themes. In my study, qualitative research methodologies provided a saturation of data to help identify themes present among teachers serving in the PLC implementing the ABCD schedule. Merriam (1988) says, “Qualitative data consist of ‘detailed descriptions’ of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors” (p. 67). My study drew upon the situation data by looking at the ABCD schedule. Event data contained information gained from evidences of collaborative practices such as meeting agendas, interviews, observations, and notes. The interactions of people during observations and focus groups added to the detailed descriptions. Additionally, qualitative data included direct quotations from participants regarding their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. Excerpts and entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories will also be used (Merriam, 1988).

Site Selection

The school district chosen for this study, the Central School District, is a mid-size school system located in the Midwest. The community is influenced by three institutions of higher education including a state university and two private college campuses. The 2010 Census shows the city’s population increased 28.4% since 2000 (United States Census Bureau [U.S. Census], 2010). The economic community is strongly supported

through the education, healthcare, and insurance industries. Over 50% of adult residents have a Bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2010). The Central district is composed of thirty public schools serving 16,863 students in 2011. Since 2002 the district has seen a total enrollment increase of 804 students (DESE, 2012). The city and district are also experiencing challenges as the percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch has increased over 10% in the last 8 years. Like a growing number of schools in the state, the Central School District is drawing upon the principles associated with professional learning communities to impact teacher and student learning.

Within the Central School District, I chose to focus my analysis within one elementary school. North Elementary was chosen due to its size, location, and history of professional practices. The ABCD schedule has been used at North Elementary since its informal adoption in 2010. Due to the number of classroom sections, teachers at North Elementary are able to have daily collaboration during their contracted time. The school's physical location provides accessibility for the researcher to attend team meetings, conduct interviews, and collect artifacts. Finally, North Elementary contains an established professional practice history with few staff turnovers during the past 3 years. I am using six of the attributes of a PLC to frame the work occurring among the classroom teachers.

Sampling

Two basic sampling types exist in qualitative research: random and purposeful (Patton, 1990). My study used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, and gain new insight. An important outcome of this study will lead to a greater understanding of teacher learning and how

instructional practices are impacted when they collaborate during the ABCD scheduled time. Merriam (1988) suggests a sample should be selected which one can learn the most from. Purposeful sampling is used as a strategy when one wants to understand and interpret something about selected cases without wishing to generalize to all similar cases (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling provides an exchange between the desire to collect in-depth detailed descriptions and the ability to generalize (1990). My study hopes to provide rich interpretations and descriptions of teachers' instructional practices and collaboration as influenced by the ABCD schedule.

Teachers chosen for this study are classroom teachers who have worked at North Elementary for a minimum of 3 years. I recognize the number of years the teams have worked together might influence the data. Utilizing teachers who have worked at this site for a minimum of 3 years, promises to yield grade teachers who have worked as a PLC prior to the start of the ABCD schedule.

The identified time frame for this study is important as the ABCD schedule was adopted in 2010 and I hope to interpret the how the teachers' instructional practices have been influenced through collaboration since the implementation of the ABCD schedule. I acknowledge other variables may impact instructional practices, which will be further discussed in the limitations section. The purposeful selected teachers are part of a school that adheres to the ABCD schedule. Some schools in the district have become small autonomous schools and have altered their schedules based on the unique need of their buildings.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with classroom teachers from four different PLCs. Interviews provide one of the most important sources for case study information (Yin, 1984). Hennink et al (2011) describes in-depth interviewing as ‘meaning making partnerships’ with the interviews becoming ‘knowledge-producing conversations’ (p. 109). In-depth interviews are not intended to be two-way conversations where both share the story (Hennink et al., 2011). Instead only the interviewee is to tell the story while the interviewer prompts the story. Questions must be carefully considered and constructed. Creswell (2007) recommends asking participants open-ended questions to lead to “textural and structural description of the experiences” (p. 61). Open-ended questions that are less structured can provide a greater opportunity to access the perspective of the person being interviewed (Patton, 1990). Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher obtain specific information from all the respondents, yet at the same time gain insight to new topics through the participants’ worldviews (Merriam, 1988).

Questions were designed to help me gain an understanding of the participants’ experiences, opinions, and knowledge as they work in a school using the ABCD schedule. Using Patton’s work (1990), I designed questions termed the following: experience/behavior questions, opinion/value questions, knowledge questions, and background/demographic questions. These question types allowed me to gain a greater perspective of the participants to go beyond simply answering what is collaboration with the ABCD schedule. I wanted to hear and interpret how the participants are experiencing collaboration. The experience/behavior question helped describe experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that would be observable if present. In my study, finding out how

the classroom teachers are collaborating and what the collaboration looked like prior to the ABCD schedule was an important experience question. Opinion/value questions helped me understand what the participants think about the phenomenon. In the case of interpreting the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices, value questions provided a deeper understanding regarding the intentions, desires, and values of the participants. Value questions also allowed me to see the PLC attributes of shared norms and value, deprivatization of practice, collaboration, and reflective dialogue. Factual questions helped describe how teachers are collaborating and what truly happens during the scheduled ABCD collaboration time. PLC attributes may emerge with these questions dealing with shared and supportive leadership and a focus on learning.

I took notes during my interviews. Written notes permitted the recording of nonverbal messages and anecdotal information regarding the physical environment. Written notes also allowed the researcher to listen for key words and phrases that might emerge with themes later on. Interviews were voice recorded and stored in audio computer files. Recording the interviews enabled me to observe more during the interviews.

Observations

Observations provide additional evidence relevant to the research topic (Yin, 1984). In my study, observations took place in multiple settings within the case to capture relevant behaviors and environmental conditions. Observations were done as a complete observer to take field notes on the behaviors and activities of participants and to record the physical composition of the environment (Creswell, 2009). Observations included PLC meetings, focus group, and physical space. Field notes, anecdotal accounts, and

diagrams supported the observations. Observations played a role in not only monitoring behaviors, but also in providing a deeper understanding of the organizational structure. The observations will let me look for evidence of shared norms and values. Observation is an important tool to go along with interviews and focus groups to provide complementary data to understand issues from different perspectives (Hennink et al., 2011).

Focus Groups

Focus groups reveal information regarding interactions among participants (Creswell, 2007). Since deprivatization of practice and collaboration are PLC attributes, this can provide for a purposeful data collection method. A focus group is a unique in regards to purpose, size, composition, and procedures (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Specific to this study, a focus group provided an opportunity to better understand the issues and outcomes associated with instructional practices as teachers participate in a PLC. My focus group included the fourth grade classroom teachers at North. The focus group meeting occurred in the teacher's natural work environment as a way to encourage the freedom to share in a relaxed setting. The questions and approach were carefully planned to help better understand teacher collaboration. As an observer, I looked for similarities and differences between what was shared when working with individuals and what was shared collectively as a group. My purposeful focus group was guided by Krueger and Casey's (2000) questioning route to navigate through five types of questions. My questioning route included opening, introduction, transitions, key, and ending questions.

A questioning route begins with opening questions to get participants talking. Opening questions should be easy to answer and directed towards all participants.

Krueger and Casey (2000) recommend questions with factual answers that can be answered in about thirty seconds. After opening questions, introductory questions are used to stimulate conversations and provide a connection with the topic. Opening questions are more open-ended. Transition questions follow introductory questions to move conversations into key questions that drive the study. Two to five key questions follow the transition questions to drive the study. Key questions will likely require ten to twenty minutes to provide a response. There are usually two to five key questions that will yield important analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Finally, ending questions provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on previous comments. Krueger and Casey (2000) propose ending questions bring closure to the discussion and should be framed around three themes: (a) an all-things-considered question is intended to identify the final position of participants on important matters, (b) a summary question is used following the summation of the moderator to help participants provide reflection regarding the adequacy of the summary, and (c) a final question occurs after a short overview of the study has been shared to “ensure that critical aspects have not been overlooked” (p. 46).

Document Review

Written records and documentation are tools researchers may use to enrich data. Documents may include a range of artifacts and written materials and often applies to all data forms not collected during interviews or observations (Merriam, 1988). A few challenges exist when utilizing documents. One challenge is determining the authenticity and accuracy of documents; the researcher has the responsibility to determine the documents' authenticity and accuracy. Documents might be hard to understand and interpret since they were not originally produced for the research being done. A major

benefit of documents is stability as the subject matter does not change or alter positions based on the investigator's actions. Documents have an important function in verifying and supplementing evidence from other sources (Yin, 1984). A final benefit is documents can help provide inferences by observing patterns that may lead to additional inquiry (1984). I collected meeting agendas and collaboration logs from the classroom teachers. Documents provided evidence regarding (a) shared norms and values, (b) the consistency of collaboration, (c) the topics discussed, and (d) participants' views on matters such as focusing on student learning, knowledge, and actions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is an opportunity to have an ongoing process of continual reflection leading me to a deeper understanding of the case (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1988). Data analysis included going through the data, coding the data by reducing the data into themes, condensing the data, and sharing the data in a discussion (Creswell, 2007). I began by creating descriptors of my participants by using pseudonyms and descriptive information surrounding years teaching and grade level they teach at North Elementary. Initial codes were established using the six PLC frameworks relevant to this study: (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue. Furthermore, I listened for topics teachers shared during collaboration time to see how those relate to instruction and how they are influenced by the six PLC frameworks. I managed my coding by using a computer program called Dedoose. This program allowed me to assign appropriate codes for data analysis as they emerged.

To help ensure my research results are dependable and consistent I will follow three methods offered by Merriam (1988). First, I revealed my position with regards to theory and assumptions guiding this study by sharing the population sample along with a description of the sample, reason for their selection, the social context from which data was collected, and my position in the group. Second, I triangulated multiple sources of data in my analysis. Finally, I provided an audit trail, or ‘chain of evidence’, by describing how data were collected, how categories were developed, and how decisions were made during the inquiry (Yin, 1984). The transcriptions and other analysis contained memos about codes and definitions.

Member checking is another method described by Creswell (2009) to check for accuracy. My presence as a researcher, along with the interactions between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick descriptions all impact trustworthiness (Merriam, 1988). Since the research will involve interactions with human subjects, careful considerations were made to maintain high ethical standards protecting the rights and confidentiality of all members.

Ethical Consideration

Protecting individuals is an important responsibility for researchers. Patton (1990) provides a statement to help frame our commitment to ethical considerations:

Because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal, because naturalistic inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live, work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people-qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other quantitative approaches. (p. 356)

Qualitative research is rich in description and opens participants up by occurring in natural and familiar settings. Because qualitative research occurs in the participant's environment, they are subject to increase vulnerability. The researcher has an obligation to protect participants from any harm. The Belmont Report has provided guidelines for the university to follow when approving research. This research project will undergo approval by the Institution Review Board (IRB) to insure protective measures are put in place to protect participants.

Participants were protected through informed consent, self-determination, minimization of harm, anonymity, and confidentiality. The interviewer provided opportunities to ask questions, but maintained the role of researcher and avoided taking on the role of council or advisor. The researcher does not work at North Elementary School and is not an insider at the site.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledges four teachers represent a small percentage of teachers currently using the ABCD schedule. Since the purpose of this study was not to generalize findings, the researcher will provide interpretations and descriptions to help lead to an understanding of one district's structure to enhance instructional practices. Qualitative research is more interested in describing and explaining phenomenon so others can interpret (Merriam, 1988).

Another limitation of this study is time. A study following the teachers over multiple years could help provide additional insight regarding the transformation of instructional practices influenced by longitudinal participation in a professional learning community using the ABCD schedule. Future inquiry could include follow-up studies to

continue interpreting the impact the ABCD schedule has on teachers and the instructional practices occurring in their classrooms and provide an even deeper description of how teachers collaborate. North Elementary Teachers are required to meet on both Tuesday and Thursday during the ABCD collaboration time. My observations only included the Tuesday ABCD meetings featuring the classroom teachers. I did not observe a Thursday ABCD meeting which included classroom teachers and other staff members.

The number of individuals in the focus group is another limitation of this study. Most focus group discussions include six to eight members (Hennink et al., 2011; Krueger & Casey, 2000). My study only included four focus group participants. A future study may want to consider taking a specific team of teachers across several schools to gain a wider view of how the ABCD schedule is impacting instructional practices.

Gaining access through the gatekeeper included navigating through logistical procedures established by the school district. Creswell (2007) recommends a qualitative researcher share with participants they are participating in a study, explain the purpose of the study, and avoid being deceptive about the nature of the study. One advantage to gaining access is the researcher's familiarity with the sample. Though familiarity may provide an advantage in gaining access, the researcher acknowledges a potential bias.

The researcher is a current employee of the Central School District and has a working relationship with the administrator at North Elementary. Though the researcher does not work directly with the administrator, they have served together on district teams. The researcher was also an administrator during the development of the ABCD schedule and continues to advocate for additional collaborative time for schools.

Human behaviors change and organizations change creating a challenge for qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984). The Central School District is diverse in their school structures and practices. Some schools are not using the ABCD schedule. The researcher questions the fidelity of implementation among buildings and acknowledges that might be a phenomenon for future inquiry. A future study may aim to look at the impact on instructional practice among those who are using the ABCD for collaboration and those who are not.

Significance

My research will add to the conversation regarding PLCs and help inform policy makers regarding how teachers collaborate when using a specific structure. More importantly, this research will attempt to interpret the impact through the views of participants. Organizational learning has four components with only one highlighting individual learning (Gill, 2010). With a great deal of focus on collaborative practices one must understand the impact and understand the phenomenon through the experiences of those directly affected. Decisions are being made to embrace collaborative practices in schools. School schedules, calendars, professional development, and staffing are being organized around collaboration. This study will guide decision makers to effectively plan and structure collaborative planning time in attempt to improve instructional practices. By using qualitative research methods, the researcher will be able to communicate relevant themes.

Schools are designing professional development around the PLC themes and in some cases completely changing the school schedule for additional time for collaborative efforts. If structural elements are being changed, educational leaders must have the

knowledge to support and enhance the collaborative practices associated with PLCs. Teachers must also have a voice and an understanding of the perceptions among colleagues. Policies and practices need to support new and experienced teachers. The intention of this research is to contribute to the field through an interpretation and description of teacher collaboration through one organizational structure as a tool to impact instructional practices as the classroom teachers serve in a PLC.

Current literature exists pointing to the leadership styles found in PLCs (Astuto et al., 1993; DuFour, 2004; Hord, 2009; Little, 1999; Scribner et al., 2007; Stoll et al., 2006). Though this study does not focus on administrative leadership characteristics in a school fully utilizing PLCs, the findings may support the work school leaders are doing. Furthermore, the framework of shared and supportive leadership is important to understand the influence of teacher leaders as decision makers. The study will add to the body of literature surrounding professional learning communities as a way to improve instructional practices.

Chapter 3 has intended to provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology used to help interpret the influence the ABCD schedule has on teachers' instructional practices as they participate in a PLC, how teachers collaborate, and how the six PLC frameworks occurring during the ABCD collaboration time. The next two chapters will draw upon the literature and data collection to provide an interpretation for how the ABCD schedule has influenced teachers' instructional practices when they are part of a PLC. Chapter 4 will provide an overview and description of findings. Writing chapter 4 will provide another opportunity of inquiry as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe writing as a method of knowing. The findings will be organized

around relevant themes associated with the PLC attributes. Particular attention will be given to the areas of deprivatization of practice, collaboration, focus on student learning, and reflective dialogue. The final chapter will provide a discussion using the literature and findings to present implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 4

Findings

Chapter 4 provides an opportunity to draw upon the literature and data collection to provide an interpretation for how the ABCD schedule has influenced teacher instructional practices when they are part of a professional learning community. The Central School District has implemented the ABCD schedule as a way to provide consistent collaboration time for teachers. The intent of my study is to inform future policy decisions by helping decision-makers understand and interpret the role the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices and collaboration when teachers are part of a professional learning community. Understanding how teachers collaborate when they are part of a PLC can assist policy makers in creating and supporting opportunities for teachers to collaborate over issues of instruction.

The Central School district implemented the ABCD schedule in 2010 for all elementary schools. The new schedule would provide regular collaboration time for teachers that would occur during the school day. The ABCD schedule's name was based on the plan schools would now organize special classes by designating days as A, B, C, or D instead of the traditional Monday through Friday schedule. With this plan, grade level teachers have at least one day each week of common planning time for 50 minutes and in many cases they might have daily common planning time. The district administration also mandated the grade level teachers collaborate at least one day each week during the ABCD time using data. My study attempts to understand the impact the ABCD schedule has with instruction as the PLCs share knowledge, skills, and practices.

Participants provided details to help better understand the ABCD schedule at North Elementary School. Classroom teachers at North have the same planning time each day and they are required to meet together every Tuesday and Thursday during their ABCD planning time. The schedule says the classroom teachers have 50 minutes to meet as a grade level team. Classroom teachers meet every Tuesday during their ABCD collaboration time to go through their core academic subjects and each Thursday is a required data collaboration meeting. On Thursdays, the grade level teachers meets with the building administration, fellow mentor, special education teacher, school psychologist, and school psychologist intern to discuss communication arts, math, and behavior data. The classroom teachers have common planning time the other three days, but are not required to meet on those days. Teachers indicated they sometimes meet on the other planning days, but also use the time to work individually or talk with parents.

Organization of Findings

Through my analysis of data several significant themes emerged to help inform the case. These themes are shared in this chapter by looking through my study's conceptual framework. My study is guided by a Professional Learning Communities conceptual framework. I have organized the themes by placing them in the same order the PLC framework was presented in chapter 2. The PLC framework includes (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue. My study intends to highlight the teachers' voice as a way to best explain the case and lead future decisions that directly impacts the work of PLC members.

Shared norms and values

Shared norms and values can help capture the community investment into collaboration. Shared norms and values refer to the collectively agreed upon professional beliefs that support and sustain successful professional practice among those working in the school (Scribner et al., 1999). All participants in my study spoke of themes supporting the existence of shared norms and values as they worked together during the ABCD time. For collaboration to involve meaningful work and have an impact on instruction, the PLC must have a collective belief in the value of collaborative time that exists when members trust one another (Bryk et al, 1999; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert 2006). PLC members in my study expressed a common belief in the value of collaboration. The teachers shared during individual interviews they have a trusting relationship within their PLC and that helps them provide authentic feedback regarding issues of instruction. This section is organized around the themes of collective beliefs and trust as they emerged through my data collection.

Collective Belief

The teachers shared during individual interviews that collaboration is an essential part of their school, their classrooms, and the curriculum. A collective belief in the importance of collaboration on learning was shared by the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers I interviewed. A fifth grade teacher said, “I think we all share the belief that collaboration is an important piece of our success and our kids’ success. We definitely used that to our advantage this year and learned a lot from each other’s strengths.” The ABCD schedule provides a consistent collaboration time that teachers can depend on each week as teachers commit to Tuesday being their collaborative plan day to help stay

on the same page and build off of each other's ideas. I observed two different PLCs meeting during their Tuesday ABCD meeting and found teachers going through their curriculum resources and planning for the next five to ten days. The teachers began their meetings discussing non-curriculum matters and then went through major subject areas discussing what and how they would instruct their students.

I found the fourth grade PLC members starting with math and going through writing, science, and social studies when I observed their Tuesday ABCD meeting. The PLC has mutually determined they will organize their collaboration by how their schedule is arranged. Since math is the first subject they teach, math is the first subject they discuss. The fourth grade PLC talked about learning objectives and student performance issues related to the academic subject. Time ran out prior to the team having the necessary time to completely discuss each subject area. Fourth grade teachers spent the majority of their time talking about math seeking consistency and clarity for teaching students about arrays. The fifth grade PLC agenda contained math, writing, science, reading, and word study, but only had time to really cover writing, math, and science. They spent most of their time talking about writing, math, and science. Their PLC also ran out of time and did not have much time for reading. The fifth grade teachers worked together to determine how to differentiate their instruction for students to write their fantasy stories and then they spent several minutes with one teacher sharing work samples and lesson ideas for their drug awareness unit. When I observed the fourth grade PLC and fifth grade PLC, neither PLC had enough time to fully collaborate during the ABCD meetings, but their actions and planning demonstrated a collective commitment to planning and collaborating. I observed their agenda to be too long to adequately cover

everything in the 50 minutes. When asked what could make the ABCD collaboration better, all interviewed teachers replied by saying more time.

Teachers need regular meeting time during the day to communicate with one another (Pounder, 1998; Supovitz & Christman, 2003). A fourth grade focus group member, who taught at North 11 years ago shared that prior to the implementation of the ABCD schedule, teachers did not have consistent collaboration time. The ABCD schedule is intended to provide collaboration time for the purpose of influencing instructional practices. For any structure to be effective in providing opportunities for instructional discussions, the PLC must support the importance of using the time for instructional purposes (Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Inmats, 2002, McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). A third grade teacher captured the tension between a collective belief in collaboration and the struggle to have enough time to work. She said:

I just feel like the way that collaboration has evolved since PLC, um, I think it's better for everybody involved. I know that people are like, oh! Not one more meeting. But, you know, it really is an essential part of our school, of our classrooms and our curriculum. And, I guess if a teacher hasn't been or hasn't experienced a non-collaborative situation, they don't appreciate it as much. Or when you have a team that doesn't work well together, you really appreciate your team.

The third grade teacher said she feels her PLC values collaboration and it has become an important element of the school. Teachers have many responsibilities placed on them and finding common ground over what to talk about could prove challenging if a PLC did not have shared norms and values. These shared norms and values can be seen when teachers cooperate to determine what to talk about during their collaboration time.

The teachers at North have daily common planning time due to the ABCD schedule and the PLCs choose to meet outside the ABCD time including before school,

lunch, and after school. For some PLCs this was regularly scheduled while others said they meet as needed. The teachers are not required to meet outside of school so the decision to meet after hours is a PLC decision. All individually interviewed teacher and focus group members voiced their concern that 50 minutes is not enough time for their collaboration and in most cases their collective belief in collaboration motivated their PLC to meet weekly outside the ABCD time. Fifth grade teachers reported they meet for 90 to 120 minutes each Tuesday after school to accomplish their goals. Fourth grade teachers do not meet each week outside the ABCD time, but do meet when they have a need. Fourth grade teachers shared with me they normally meet when they have common assessments to grade. The third grade teacher told me her PLC meets every other Monday after school for about 3 hours. She feels the extra time is really needed to look at their common assessments. The classroom teachers at North are expected to administer a number of common assessments in reading, writing, and math. Since the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers reported to me their work is more about their grade level as opposed to their own classrooms, they need more time to grade the assessments, interpret the results, and develop the appropriate instructional plan for the students. Without the extra time, the PLCs are not able to utilize the depth of data they are collecting.

All participants reported meeting beyond the ABCD time is necessary to take care of everything required to meet the needs of students. The classroom teachers shared their collaboration outside the ABCD time involves going over student data. The teachers described this time as an opportunity to look at student scores on assessments and make adjustments to their groups. The fourth grade focus group described using this time to look at data and plan instruction. The informal collaboration times outside of the ABCD

time that happens during contracted hours, was not described as having the structure and planning as the Tuesday or Thursday collaboration. Instead, teachers described the time as an opportunity to finish up what was not completed during their Tuesday collaboration. Teachers are trying to find a way to make important instructional decisions through their formal and informal collaboration. An outcome of this collective belief is teachers feel they are on the same page allowing their PLC to build off each other's ideas to support their instructional decisions.

Some PLC members shared their desire to acquire additional collaboration time. One example was observed during a fifth grade Tuesday PLC meeting. Their team discussed partnering with first grade teachers to alternate supervising the other grade level's students so the other PLC could have more time to collaborate. The limited collaboration time associated with the ABCD scheduled 50 minutes has prompted teachers to consider additional ways to collaborate. In addition to the fifth and first grade teachers who are considering providing release time for one another to collaborate, the fourth grade teachers shared they meet most days during lunch. A third grade teacher said her PLC uses emails to constantly share ideas and her grade level is close to launching their website which they will also use to share ideas. The PLCs are committed to collaboration and when asked what could make their collaboration better, all participants expressed an interest in finding more ways and more time to meet.

A collective belief has to be fostered as PLCs determine goals (Brindley & Crocco, 2009; Hipp et al., 2008). The teachers discussed the challenges of trying to collectively agree upon what they teach. They shared a process of looking at what the district expects of them and how that applies to their building and students. A third grade

PLC member reinforced the importance of their work being a collaborative effort to help defuse the frustrations of trying to balance what they see as important learning targets for their students and those mandated by the Common Core Curriculum. Teachers shared some frustration in trying to teach a curriculum they feel has too many objectives and fails in allowing them to utilize strategies with leverage. The participants have varying past experiences with collaboration, but their responses to questions revealed they teach children using common values as they are impacted by the collective belief that comes through their shared norms and values.

The participants at North Elementary use the ABCD schedule to provide dependable collaboration time that occurs during their contracted day. As PLCs develop goals, their common beliefs and values are affirmed uniting members around a shared purpose and mutual identity (Lieberman, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2000). The past schedule did not provide consistent or dependable collaboration time for teachers at North and teachers found it harder to communicate and work together. A fourth grade teacher highlighted what she feels is a benefit of having the ABCD schedule:

[The ABCD Schedule] makes planning so much easier if we can stay together... and we know that certain days it's going to take longer for another subject area than another class or one class might be getting it, one might not. But, it kind of pushes me more to make sure that I'm close in the area with the rest of my team.

The fourth teacher was stating what other teachers said about the benefit of having reliable collaboration time. The ABCD schedule provides a weekly opportunity for teachers to plan with one another while also maintaining some accountability for delivering the curriculum according to the district's expectations. A fifth grade teacher referenced the ABCD scheduled collaboration time by saying it keeps her PLC on track and she feel the

time is valuable. She went on to explain how valuable the time is since teaching can be overwhelming when trying to teach all core academic subjects. She finds comfort in knowing she does not have to carry the weight by herself and she has other teachers to share ideas with.

The classroom teachers spoke during individual interviews of how the ABCD schedule provide opportunities for their PLC to meet, which is helping them feel like they are doing a better job teaching by using their time well. A fifth grade teacher said, “I think we try and help each other as much as we can, and using our time in a smart way.” All interviewed teachers spoke favorably of the ABCD schedule as providing a dependable time to meet and work on mutually determined agendas. The ABCD schedule provides consistent and reliable time for PLCs to operate using shared norms and values. The teachers at North say they value the collaboration time together and have established trusting relationships. A third grade teacher credits the issue of trust as helping her team feel comfortable sharing students and working together to make sure students are getting what they need.

Trust

Colleagues establish trust when there is mutual understanding about personal obligations and expectations (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Teachers need to trust one another in school-based PLCs in order to engage in reflective dialogue, open the door of their classroom, and collaborate with a focus on student learning (Brindley & Crocco, 2009; Bryk et al., 1999). Teachers said the word trust when explaining what causes their PLCs to work well. A third grade teacher shared she feels secure in sharing her struggles with students and feels her PLC is able to use trust to problem solve through the

struggles. A fifth grade teacher described how her PLC is able to address issues directly and openly. The PLC members trust one another to be on board with making sure kids get what they need as they share students during interventions. They not only trust other teachers with ideas, but they also share their students. Students are placed with different classroom teachers for math interventions and reading groups based on their performance on common assessments. Teachers trust their students are receiving the appropriate intervention when they leave their classrooms and go with another teacher.

Relationships built on trust allow a flow and exchange of ideas. Teachers voiced the importance of a PLC in establishing trust up front. A fifth grade teacher shared during an individual interview that her PLC did things outside of school at the beginning of the year such as eating dinner together and sharing about their lives outside of school. This seemed like an important theme as many of the PLCs have welcomed new members to their teams. Trust does not have to depend on mutual agreements according to fourth grade teachers, but fourth grade focus group members suggest teachers need to be comfortable voicing their own opinions and being open with one another. A fifth grade teacher said, “The thing that is important is that you build that trust and relationship up front on a new team so that people are willing to share their ideas and being accepting of each other’s ideas.” The PLC framework of reflective dialogue will further explain the presence of teachers being open with one another later in my findings.

The ABCD schedule provides daily opportunities for teacher collaboration. Shared norms and values are evident by how the teachers described their PLC working together. According to a fourth grade teacher who taught at North prior to the ABCD schedule, a cultural shift has occurred promoting and encouraging collaboration. The

structural change seems to have also impacted the culture as the PLCs at North have a collective belief that is shaped by their shared norms and values. A third grade teacher who worked at another school prior to teaching at North shared how she values the opportunities for collaboration. I observed fifth grade teachers trying to find additional time to collaborate when they met during their Tuesday ABCD time. Teachers operate from shared norms and values to help develop their PLC agenda and determine what items are given the most attention during the ABCD collaboration time. Additionally, some PLCs have established times to collaborate outside the ABCD scheduled time as their interest in collaborating is reflected in their shared norms and values. Trust is a common thread throughout the PLC framework and is an important attribute in shaping the norms and values. The PLC members are able to operate with shared norms and values by having a leadership structure and culture that supports their work.

Shared and supportive leadership

The teachers and administration provide leadership for the collaborative activities at North Elementary. Teachers share in the leadership by taking the lead when organizing and facilitating Tuesday ABCD collaboration meetings. The administration has taken teacher feedback into account when designing tools for teachers to use during collaboration. The administration also supports the PLCs by participating in some ABCD meetings and providing training to teachers. The ABCD schedule provides opportunities for classroom teacher to meet each day, but the administration only mandates the classroom teachers meet during their Tuesday and Thursday ABCD time. The administration at North supports teachers' collaboration. "Our administrator loves for us to collaborate and to be together as often as we can," said a fourth grade teacher during an individual interview. Her statement seems to capture what other participants feel when

describing the support structure at North as PLCs work within the ABCD scheduled collaboration time. Shared and supportive leadership occurs when administration and staff share power and authority for making decisions while promoting and nurturing leadership (Hipp et al., 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Shared and supportive leadership exist during the ABCD collaboration time as PLC members report there is an absence of a hierarchy and the building administration actively support their work.

Absence of Hierarchy

There is shared and supportive leadership occurring during the ABCD collaboration time as described by the teachers and observed during meetings. The participants reported building administration support lateral leadership among their PLC members. Even though each PLC has a team leader, each participant I spoke with explained the leadership as shared among members. Two PLC meeting observations revealed members exchanging roles and sharing leadership.

Each grade level teacher indicated formal and informal roles members assume. All teams indicated they have a team leader, but were quick to clarify they did not feel their PLC was governed by a hierarchy. A fifth grade teacher stated, “Although Michelle is our team leader, I don’t feel like there’s that hierarchy. I feel like we’re pretty much, when we sit down at the table, it’s a level playing field.” I observed a teacher during the fourth grade PLC meeting serve as the meeting leader even though she is not the team leader. She led the meeting by following the agenda, asking for clarifying remarks, and kept the meeting moving. For the Tuesday ABCD collaboration meetings the only defined role among the PLCs is that of team leader, yet members seem to share that role during meetings. The team leader serves as a liaison between the building administration

and the grade level PLCs. This is intended to provide a more efficient stream of information sharing between the classroom teachers and administration. A fourth grade teacher put it this way:

We have a team leader, but we all kind of play a part of being a leader at some point or within our team. But, we have a set team leader where our administrators will go to for questions for all of us instead of getting all different answers from all of us. When we meet as a team, that one team leader can direct whatever is needed to our administrator that we were asked of.

The efficiency provided by having one PLC member identified to communicate directly to the administration is not intended to isolate other PLC members from the administration. The PLC members share in other leadership responsibilities such as contributing to the agenda, leading curriculum content discussions, and representing their PLC on building-wide committees. I observed PLCs demonstrating shared leadership during both observed planning times. Each PLC member created and led in different parts of the discussion resulting in a free exchange of information.

Shared and supportive leadership means there can be an exchange of roles among teachers and administrators (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Teachers and administrators share in decision-making at North Elementary when it comes to determining collaboration protocols, setting goals, and making meeting agendas. A third grade teacher provided this example regarding developing the collaboration log to demonstrate the sharing of responsibilities:

I started it a long time ago and it's kind of evolved into the whole school. They had a terrible team, not very nice, but they weren't very collaborative. I was new to the district and I felt like I really needed someone to say, you know, this is how we're going to do it.... I just starting jotting things down and [the principal] and I shared that. It's really evolved.

The absence of a hierarchy allows mutual exchanges to occur among all staff members and enables teachers and administrators to share in roles and ideas. Developing the collaboration log was just one example.

The interviewed teachers told me all teachers influence the work occurring during the ABCD collaboration time at North. All PLC members influence the Tuesday agenda. The Tuesday agenda is a meeting tool that guides PLC member during their Tuesday ABCD collaboration. Some PLCs referred to the Tuesday agenda as their collaboration log. The agenda tool contains a list of topics the PLC plans to talk about during their collaboration. The teachers create the agenda prior to their Tuesday ABCD collaboration and then turn the form into their administration with notes and comments following their meeting. The third and fourth grade teacher participants stated their meeting expectations has become a habit based on what they expect of themselves as a grade level and what their administrators expect. The teachers told me they feel the consistency of their meetings and the predetermined structure has created a template they follow each time. Fourth grade focus group members were critical of having to complete the collaboration log and would like to see the form changed. They supported this claim by saying their team has progressed beyond what the log requires them to write and they feel it is now just busy work. They did state that some teams have created a new log and gained permission from their principal to use the new form they developed. Their team has not requested or attempted to change their log.

There is not a hierarchy among the team when deciding what to talk about just as I did not observe hierarchical governance during the two meetings I observed. My other observation was that teachers would switch leadership roles based on the strength of

teachers with the agenda items. During my observation of a fifth grade Tuesday ABCD meeting, the teacher considered the strongest in each subject area would lead when discussing that curriculum content area. Fourth grade teachers confirmed during their focus group meeting that teachers typically lead in the content area they are the strongest. In grades with four classroom sections, this usually means each teacher takes on the leadership role for each core content area. In fifth grade, since they only have three teachers, they normally lead in the area they are strongest and take turns with the other content area.

Teachers also share leadership roles when creating their Tuesday ABCD agendas. The participants shared with me their agendas are created by PLC members contributing ideas throughout the week that they want to cover. There are some predetermined agenda items based on the collaboration log to make sure each meeting covers the core academic areas. Even within those agenda items, the members still have autonomy to bring specific issues and planning to the group and avoid any restrictions placed by hierarchical governance. The teachers use email correspondence and informal conversations to help determine their agendas. A third grade teacher said the conversations and emails help determine what is most important and determine what they spend the most time on. Fourth and fifth grade teachers added they have informal exchanges throughout the week that helps determine their Tuesday ABCD collaboration. I found during my observations that sometimes the group have unfinished business from the last meetings to discuss. The teachers I interviewed said these unfinished items are often topics they discuss at lunch or after school.

Administration Support

The building administration supports the PLCs. The teachers described the principal and assistant principal as being involved and supportive. Both administrators participate in the Thursday ABCD collaboration meetings focusing on data, studying learning processes, and setting goals. All members of the school have been trained in the Decision Making for Results process. The building has collectively developed building goals and used their PLCs to determine grade level goals. “We set goals as a team in our data team meetings of things that we want to accomplish and we do that as a school and as a grade level with our administrator,” explained a fourth grade teacher during an individual interview.

The school has supportive leadership that values the innovation of the PLC members while at the same time provides the supports necessary to help teams. A third grade teacher put it this way to describe her building principal, “She has just been a huge supporter for us. She even had them...kind of act out what it looked like when they were collaborating.” The administrators are also known by the teachers for their craft with helping teachers have collaborative conversations as they have provided training and offered coaching in their meetings.

Shared and supportive leadership is a PLC framework occurring as teachers use the ABCD schedule. The interviews, meeting observations, and documents reviewed contained evidence that leadership is not hierarchical, and the teachers are supported by one another and the building administration. Effective teams take a critical look at their purpose through both an individual and collective lens allowing the goals to be examined to provide vision and minimize confusion (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). The PLCs at

North Elementary have a shared investment into the success of students. They operate according to the building and grade level goals and have built a culture of collaboration driven by shared and supportive leadership. The PLCs seem to value one another as leaders and the input of their building administration.

Deprivatization of Practice

Deprivatization of practice is when teachers practice their work openly (Bryk et al., 1999; Louis & Kruse, 1995). The term “going public” captures the phenomenon that occurs when teachers learn with a group of peers and break the isolation of their world to become part of an intellectual community drawing upon each other to learn (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). My study included talking with teachers about their public practices to understand how deprivatized practices could exist with the ABCD schedule in place. The individual interviews contained various examples of teachers sharing their open practices regarding instruction and dealing with difficult behavioral issues. A teacher provided a description of how her PLC is deprivatized by explaining how they are like a village. The feeling of being a village stems from the teachers sharing students during interventions, planning lessons together, and openly sharing struggles they have with student behaviors. She further described how a teacher can share challenges with kids and their PLC will guide them through a problem solving process during the ABCD time. Another teacher said, “A lot of our collaboration is not necessarily what is in each one of our classes, but we’re talking about our entire fourth grade.” The classroom teachers do not focus on their own classrooms and their own students. Instead, their PLCs plan and design lessons for their entire grade level. The grade levels also share students by placing them in different classrooms based on their individual needs.

Teachers change students for interventions, which makes it important to have open conversations about student progress and behavior. Interventions at North refer to supplemental instruction that involves teaching beyond the core material. For example, in fourth grade students are placed in intervention groups for word study. During instruction for word study, students learn about word patterns as opposed to just memorizing unrelated words. The teachers must identify what word patterns students have mastered and which pattern they are struggling with. From that information, students are placed in an intervention group for two or three weeks designed to work on the associated word patterns. I found reoccurring examples of sharing ideas when conducting the individual interviews, but I did not find any specific examples of teachers observing one another in the classroom. The flip side of having shared planning time each day is the teachers at North Elementary are always teaching at the same time and they would need to find other staff or substitutes to cover their classes if they were to observe one another teach.

The teachers spoke mostly about instruction. The teachers did say they meet at times to discuss special events and activities, but for most of their Tuesday and Thursday collaboration, they stay focused on academics and behavior. The PLCs are deprivatized as teachers constantly seek opportunities to be engaged with one another regarding instructional practices, student issues, and building events. The fifth grade teachers spent a great deal of time talking about Christmas activities during their Tuesday ABCD meeting I observed. They were trying to come up with service projects and activities to do for the holidays. The fourth grade PLC meeting started by teachers sharing about the work occurring within the building-wide committee each teacher is serving on. The PLCs were eventually able to talk about instruction as they went through the core academic

areas. As one fourth grade teacher said, “We always have questions and we’re all there just trying to help figure out the best way for our kids and for us to get [the curriculum] in.” Her team is always having conversations about learning as way to help each other.

Teachers know what their grade level PLC members are trying to accomplish as they work on the same objectives at the same time because they have planned their work together. The fourth grade teachers use a lot of their planning time to talk about instruction and learning as a grade level and not simply as isolated classrooms. Earlier in the findings a fourth grade teacher explained how their collaboration time is focused on the entire grade level as they share students for math and word study. The fourth grade teachers also talk about their guided reading instruction as a way to deprivatize their instructional practices. These conversations include what strategies they are using and how the students are responding. Reading, word study, and math are predominately what the PLC discussed during their Tuesday ABCD time. The fourth grade teachers share students during reading interventions prompting constant discussion around student performance. The PLC discusses student performance so they can make the appropriate placement. A fourth grade teacher made this statement about their PLC planning and being on the same page:

If there are certain kiddos that we know are not getting it or they’re...above and beyond where we’re going, we’ll just switch them out to other classrooms so they get what they need. So, that’s something we’re always focusing on. Making sure that we’re talking and all of our kids are where they need to be.

The exchange of students is a way to deprivatize practice as teachers share in the responsibility of educating each child at the grade level and not simply focusing on their isolated classroom. The teachers focus on the entire grade level to provide remediation

for students who are struggling and enrichment for those who are already performing at grade level.

The PLCs shared how deprivatized practices have led to instructional changes with their grade level. A third grade teacher shared how she brought the concept of the Daily 5 to her grade level last year. The Daily 5 is a structure designed to help students develop daily habits of reading, writing, and working independently for the purpose of equipping students for a lifetime of literacy independence (Boushey & Moser, 2006). She described how the process began by open sharing about the Daily 5 during the prior year and that her PLC began to jump on board. She added the PLC has been working together to try and figure out how the system works in their rooms. The teacher credits the successful implementation to their PLC working together. The teacher's example demonstrates how the sharing and exchange of ideas can occur when practices go public. A fourth grade and a fifth grade teacher provided more of an overview of how their instructional practices have been changed when part of a PLC. A fourth grade teacher shared how she has gotten so many great techniques from her PLC members and she has learned by communicating and talking through experiences with her PLC to improve her teaching.

The impact on instructional practices is fostered when teachers are able to deprivatize practice through sharing ideas and evaluating how their current strategies are working. As stated above, the PLC learns through their reflective dialogue as they consider what is working and what is not.

The PLC must be willing to share failures as well as successes, which connect to the earlier finding of trust. Teachers acknowledged the importance of having the support

of the PLC when trying new things in your classroom. A participant expressed her satisfaction in being able to bounce ideas back and forth with her PLC and share feedback regarding how it worked. She believes having that working agreement allows them to stay focused on their goals and objectives. The deprivatization of practice was shared by teachers with a range of experiences. A third grade teacher with 17 years of professional teaching experience says she learns something new all the time by using her PLC members as a resource. A focus group participant with less than three years of experience shared the PLC works well as a team because members are honest in sharing what does and does not work. He has benefited by the experience teachers speaking up and sharing alternative ideas when he brings an idea to the meetings that may not have worked in the past. Another teacher with less than five years of experience says her PLC influences her instructional practices by helping her make sure she is keeping up with the curriculum pacing of the more experienced members of the team. She says being able to go to an experienced teacher to gain assistance with how to approach a tough learning skill has definitely influenced her teaching for the better.

The participants appear to enjoy and grow from opportunities to work publicly with members of their PLC. One teacher even described her public practice by using a teacher who is not part of her grade level PLC. She invites the fellow mentor into her room to observe her interactions with some challenging student behaviors. The teacher shared that situation to support her desire to watch each other teach. The deprivatization of practice has value among the PLC members. The teachers deprivatize practice as a way to handle everyday teaching and tough situations. They are willing to share and observe practices. The ABCD schedule allows teachers easy access to deprivatize ideas

and share work; however, finding time to observe one another would need to come by other means.

Teachers shared work samples and lessons during my observations demonstrating their public practices. A fifth grade teacher is intentionally trying to be at least one day ahead with her science lessons so she can share with the other two teachers her students' work and how her pupils are responding to the lessons. This deprivatized practice allows the other teachers to anticipate challenges and also learn what is working well. Another example happened as a fifth grade teacher shared her students' response to a math game created by another teacher. Again, the teachers were engaged in reflective dialogue regarding what they have learned from their students' experiences. The fourth grade PLC had a public discussion showing their student work with arrays. One teacher was struggling with how to teach the concept to her students and wasn't certain what the student work should look like. Another fourth grade teacher shared what she was doing and even presented some work samples. Both observed PLC meetings contained work samples and examples shared by teachers.

Teachers working in a PLC have the opportunity to exchange and process ideas when the school's PLC are guided by a deprivatization of practice. The teachers at North collectively agreed that they are able to benefit from a deprivatization of practice. My findings support teachers sharing instructional practices and students. The teachers bring ideas, lessons, and work samples to their PLC meetings. Their public practices have caused changes in instructional programs and lessons as PLC members have learned from one another and as the teachers have evaluated student performance together. Deprivatization of practice is able to exist when teachers meet during their ABCD time

through sharing work samples and ideas. Collaboration is impacted by the ABCD schedule as teachers have regular contracted time set aside to meet.

Collaboration

Collaboration can be described as a systematic process in which teachers work together as teams to analyze and improve classroom practices for the purpose of improving student learning (DuFour, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). The teachers at North Elementary School adhere to the district's ABCD schedule as a way to collaborate. Each teacher talked about their PLC's experiences collaborating during and outside the ABCD scheduled time. The individual interviews, focus group meeting, and PLC meeting observations contained relevant statements pointing to the collaborative work taking place at North. Participants spoke about the reciprocal exchange among members as they taught lessons and came back to the PLC to report how the lesson went. This demonstrates a critical purpose of collaboration as being used to evaluate work and make the necessary changes to improve learning. The PLC has a systematic process using the defined ABCD time to meet, follow a consistent protocol, and analyze student work to improve instruction. The participants spoke frequently about the use of protocols, the reliability of the ABCD time, and teacher learning.

Protocols

The PLCs use collaboration logs, agendas, and developed processes to collaborate. The collaboration log is a tool members use to plan and document their collaboration and contains a place for teachers to pose questions to the building administration. PLCs are expected to complete the log each time they meet during their Tuesday ABCD scheduled collaboration. I observed the log serving as a meeting guide,

but I also saw the log acting as a tool to summarize thoughts and make sure accurate statements were shared with administration.

The teachers follow a consistent routine as they meet. The collaboration log guides them through their ABCD collaboration time. PLC members typically begin a Tuesday ABCD time by having members report out on the building level committees they serve on. From that point, they normally go through the core academic areas, breaking down the areas, and talking through specific subject area lessons. When observing Tuesday ABCD times I noticed the teachers following this process and providing a greater emphasis on the agenda items the PLC determined needed more attention. The fourth grade PLC spent more time on math while the fifth grade PLC spent most of their time talking about writing and science. A fourth grade teacher said her PLC spends more time on content areas the students seem to be struggling with the most. When I observed their Tuesday collaboration meeting, they spent the most time talking about how to teach the math concept of arrays. The teachers did not have a good model for teaching arrays in their teaching books, so the members spent time making sure they were teaching the concept in the same way. The fifth grade teachers did not spend much time on reading during their meeting I observed. When the leader asked if anyone had any questions or concerns regarding reading, the teachers said no. Since they were short on time, the teachers moved on to the next subject. The participants shared they go back and cover omitted agenda items during other times such as lunch or after school. Most teachers said they bring their teaching guides and supporting information for what they have done in the past to the meetings to support the items they plan to cover.

There is one collaboration log originally designed for all PLCs to use during their Tuesday ABCD time, but not all PLCs use the same form or use the form in the same way. The fifth grade PLC uses a collaboration log organized around three sections: 1) Quick run through pages for each subject, 2) Stuff, and 3) Subject Break Down. The fourth grade teachers collaborate during the ABCD time by identifying as a group what they are going to focus on most. Their process involves organizing their meetings to follow their schedule and their meetings are also based on questions they generate throughout the week. A third grade teacher says her team leader meets with the building principal and the two of them discuss what to cover during collaboration and then their team will go through the checklist covering the items. Like the other teachers, she said the bulk of their work is focused on the core subject areas. In many cases the teachers collaborate throughout the week to develop their agenda. They reported informal exchanges occurring throughout the week that contributed to the Tuesday agenda.

The collaboration log is a tool intended to organize the order of the PLC collaborative time, but my observations noticed it also acted as a tool to help clarify and summarize important statements supporting reflective dialogue. The collaboration logs provide accountability for the PLC members and administration. Furthermore, the log serves as a document members can refer back to. I noticed during my focus group meetings that members looked back at their log book to help explain some of their topics.

All grade levels use the same collaboration log for the Thursday ABCD collaboration time. Unlike the Tuesday ABCD collaboration agenda, which is established by the classroom teachers at most grade levels, the Thursday ABCD time is determined by the administration.

The teachers shared some mixed reviews concerning the collaboration log they are expected to complete during each Tuesday ABCD meeting. The fourth grade focus group participants voiced a concern the log is just one more thing to do. One concern included the redundancy of some of the information the participants are expected to fill out. A fourth grade teacher said, “Because we are all filling out in our own plan book and making notes and then so like to have someone else redo it again it just takes longer”. Another concern is the size and format makes it difficult to sufficiently record their objectives, and how they differentiate. The fourth grade team feels the collaboration log may not be as necessary now since they are confident in knowing the collaboration process. When asked what they would keep or what they would change about the collaboration log, one focus group participant said she would have a collaboration log that is similar to the plan book they use. She said they could copy their plan books of what they just talked about and turn that in. The focus group members did share some positive aspects of the collaboration log including the sections guiding them to share out from their building level committees and the communication to administrators. The members agreed the form needed to be made to work for them. A third grade teacher voiced her support for the log as a tool guiding her PLC to be more organized in their meetings. The focus group shared they would like to modify the log, but they have not taken the time to make any changes.

Reliability

Words associated with consistency, efficiency, and reliability was spoken throughout interviews and the focus group conversation. When I considered those three words, it seemed like the participants kept going back to the idea of knowing the ABCD

time was going to be there for them. They spoke confidently and positively of the ability to always have the ABCD time to meet. The word reliability seems to best capture their views of the collaboration offered by the ABCD schedule. The teachers voiced the benefit of having reliable time for communication. Teachers also spoke of the value that other staff members always know when they were meeting. The PLCs did not have to spend time sharing schedules and trying to figure out when to meet. The time is always set and they can depend on it. Meeting on Tuesday and Thursday is the norm and other activities are scheduled around that time causing fewer disruptions in the collaboration time. The teachers are able to plan their time accordingly knowing Tuesday collaboration time is protected. A fourth grade teacher's comments summarized how the ABCD schedule helps her PLC plan:

We know ahead of time, okay, we're meeting on this day so we need to have this, this and this ready to go and ready to share of our upcoming units that we know we want to talk about. Knowing that scheduled time it can be planned and organized and ready and it's consistent which makes it awesome. I would really hate all of us being at different times, going and doing specials. That would not be good.

A problem with the old schedule is teachers rarely had the same amount of plan time on a given day. Since the grade level teachers did not have common plan time each day, the teachers found it challenging to find time to meet during contracted time. A fourth grade focus group member who taught 11 years ago and recently returned to North, said the grade level teachers rarely met because it was so hard just to organize a time when using the former schedule. The reliability promotes collegial work and provides teachers an opportunity to move away from isolative practices.

The focus group meeting revealed more support suggesting the ABCD schedule offers a needed reliability. The focus group participant who taught over 11 years ago and

then returned 2 years ago described the value she found in collaboration. Her comments reflected her past work of mostly being in isolation and having different schedules, to now being part of a PLC that meets on a regular basis and has common time to meet each day. The teacher feels she is a better teacher having the reliable support from her PLC. She also mentioned her past grade level team had less time to meet since sometimes their specials were shorter. The other focus group members talked about their collaboration time prior to the ABCD schedule and pointed out the fact not all specials lasted 50 minutes. Some specials such as P.E. and music lasted 30 minutes while art lasted an hour. This caused inconsistencies in the available times as teachers would not have reliable times to collaborate.

There were varying responses from participants concerning the transferring of reliable collaboration time to changes in instructional practices. A third grade teacher said collaboration has had a huge impact on her teaching, but she is not sure instructional practices have really changed as a result of the ABCD schedule. A fifth grade teacher said, "I don't know that the schedule, the ABCD really affects our ability to work together." She went on to say having some type of set planning time is important. She does feel the ABCD schedule works well in providing common planning time. The common plan time provided by the ABCD time has led to the acquisition of new knowledge for teachers.

Teacher Learning

A PLC's collaborative efforts encourage knowledge exchanges, mutual support, and accountability for effective instruction (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Louis et al., 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989). PLC members reported they come with diverse experiences and

strengths to help provide subject area expertise about different curriculum areas. My observations of PLC meetings found teachers leading subject area discussions according to their reported strengths. The teachers typically rotated who led the discussions when talking about the core academic subjects. The team leader may introduce or say what subject was next, but the subject area expert clearly led in the discussion. The other teachers would ask questions and also share ideas.

The teachers use the collaboration time to approach the challenges of implementing the curriculum with fidelity. The participants voiced the tension of trying to stay true to the curriculum when there might be times the students needed something else. They described the value of the collaboration time in being able to break down the objectives by topic utilizing each other's strengths and experiences. They have learned how to collaborate and make better decisions. The PLC members feel the Thursday ABCD time focusing on data has also allowed their team to better break down the objectives. Both Tuesday and Thursday ABCD times have been suggested by participants to benefit student learning.

A PLC impacts a school when the members focus on issues to improve student learning and work collectively to achieve defined learning goal for their students and teachers (DuFour et al., 2010). The PLC framework of collaboration clearly occurs during the ABCD scheduled time.

Their consistent collaboration time is an important tool to help them talk about the students at their grade level as well as the curriculum. The reliable time together provides an opportunity for teachers to learn from one another. Their ABCD meetings have a predictable agenda and a clear process allowing the teachers to focus on student learning.

Focus on student learning

The PLCs at North Elementary meet twice a week during the ABCD collaboration time. Each meeting involves teachers discussing academic content and student learning. The teachers spoke of matters associated with instruction during interviews, I observed PLCs talking through curricular matters, and their collaboration logs guide each Tuesday ABCD meeting to include core curriculum work. The teachers also described the Thursday ABCD meetings as a collaboration time focused on looking at student data associated with a specific academic content area. A key occurrence of a PLC is when members are engaged in sharing information for the purpose of improving student learning through better teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Louis, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). A focus on student learning exists during the ABCD collaboration time. During my study, instructional and student learning themes repeatedly pointed to a focus on student learning. These themes included conversations and observations of differentiated instruction and data decision-making.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction refers to the efforts teachers make to respond to the variances among learners in their classrooms (Tomlinson, 2000). Teachers brought differentiating up when discussing what topics they talk about during the Tuesday ABCD collaboration. A fourth grade teacher said, “We really like differentiating to meet the needs of those learners. So, we can give those extra, those gifted kids extra work or focus more attention on those kids that need more time for that objective that we’re learning.” Each teacher mentioned they go over the lessons and talk about how to differentiate the learning to meet more learners. The fourth grade teacher emphasized her grade level’s

interest in differentiating by saying, “We are differentiating, whether it be small groups for math, partner works, whole class instruction, we focus on that for each subject area.”

Teacher at North spoke of differentiating instruction as an important practice and topic of collaboration. The word differentiation kept coming up during the interviews, observations, and document reviews. I observed teachers coming up with ways to differentiate learning when I observed their PLC meetings. When observing a fifth grade PLC meeting. The teachers were brainstorming different ways to have their students complete their fantasy writings. This discussion was important as the teachers were attempting to find ways to give students a choice to complete the objective. Fourth grade teachers worked to differentiate their lessons during their PLC meeting by modifying lessons and regrouping students. A fourth grade teacher said they level kids into intervention groups that allow them to teach lessons to the group’s levels.

Differentiation occurred as PLC members worked together during their ABCD collaboration time. Teachers shared how being part of a PLC and how using the ABCD schedule has influenced their ability to differentiate instruction. I saw this happen as the fifth grade PLC planned for science and writing instruction. The members freely shared ideas to allow students choices for how they finish their fantasy stories. They were striving to differentiate by providing choices that might fit different student learning styles. During this same meeting, a different teacher took the lead when discussing science. Again, the PLC discussion contained planning driven by the practice of differentiating instruction. This specific example included the teacher saying she is intentionally remaining one day ahead of the other two so she could deprivatize her practice to help the other teachers be effective.

The teachers talked about and I observed discussions surrounding lesson planning during the ABCD collaboration time. I asked some questions to try and understand if the PLC work went beyond planning and into dialogues regarding strategies. Teachers at North provide academic interventions by grouping students according to performance data. The students are assigned to different groups based on their instructional needs.

Data Decision-Making

The teachers in my study described using student performance data to guide their decisions. Using student data is one way to focus on student learning as a PLC seeks to answer the questions (a) what knowledge and skill do we want students to learn, (b) how will we know if each student has acquired the knowledge and skills, (c) how will we respond when they don't learn, and (d) what will we do for those who already know the intended outcomes (DuFour, 2004). Examining data allows PLC members to answer the four corollary questions.

Teachers consistently described what happens during their ABCD collaboration time by discussing the role of data. A fifth grade teacher described the role of data collection to monitor student progress and help determine student groupings and fourth grade teachers described using math and reading data to create learning groups. They explained how their PLC administers pre and post-test to make sure they are meeting their students' needs. The PLC creates math classes based on needs and then assigns students to a class that will teach the concept on their level during that unit. The fourth grade PLC also divides their students up for word study. According to the teachers, the process might be a bit informal, but the teachers are considering academic needs and making sure they have good student group dynamics.

Talking through all subject areas and looking at data for all students in two subject areas normally creates a need for the meeting to continue into lunch. This work is time consuming, but considered important to the teachers as they go beyond the ABCD scheduled time to complete the objective. A fourth grade teacher explained how they informally write a list of students grouped according to test scores. They also consider the dynamics of the group to make sure the classes are balanced by size and without major student cliques. Often times this PLC uses their lunch time to complete this work. By focusing on the student learning, and not simply the textbook pages, the teachers feel they are better able to meet students' learning needs by looking at student progress and making collaborative decisions about what interventions to use.

The teachers are growing in their understanding of the curriculum as they talk through the academic subjects and have conversations about academic interventions when they collaborate. The focus group suggested the Thursday ABCD time is an opportunity to use data and really dig deeper into a specific content area. Teachers are trying to balance the district curriculum, Common Core Standards, and needs based on assessments to help determine what they teach. The teachers rely on local and standardized assessments to help determine instructional decisions and intervention placements.

The PLCs use progress-monitoring data to help with academic interventions. A third grade teacher shared they use the STAR online reading assessment results to help determine student placement in reading intervention groups. The district mandates the STAR assessment to benchmark and progress monitor reading performance. The STAR assessment is a computer adaptive test designed to measure students' reading

performance. These data are important in guiding decisions concerning reading interventions at North. STAR data helps teachers place students into groups based on achievement level and specific reading skill deficits. The purpose of reading interventions is to provide targeted reading support to students that are more specific to their individual needs. The PLCs use locally developed fact assessments to help determine placements of math intervention groups. An observation of a fourth grade PLC found the teachers using locally developed assessments to look at student math performance. The fourth grade PLC is also involved with a building-wide initiative to pilot a system to help chart and place students.

The participants reported having an increased awareness of using data as they collaborate during their Thursday ABCD time. One PLC shared a specific example regarding focusing on writing and looking deeper at the students scoring in the bottom two levels. The members use subsequent meetings to monitor those students and make sure they are improving. PLCs make change between the pre-test and post-test to help the students be more successful. They modify instruction based on the data. According to the fourth grade focus group, they do not feel the Tuesday ABCD time affords enough time to fully examine data since they have so much to cover. The fourth grade teachers feel the Thursday ABCD time contains a greater opportunity to really look at and consider the data since those meetings are more focused on one specific content area or process. The Thursday ABCD time appears better structured to facilitate the PLC attribute of focus on student learning.

Schools are often charged with multiple tasks and find themselves consumed with varying goals and objectives (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The foundational goal of educators

is to improve student learning. Focus on student learning is found when PLCs collaborate during the ABCD schedule at North Elementary School. The significance of the focus on student learning drives members to spend additional time beyond the school day to complete the work. Each data collection process found evidence of teachers focusing on student learning. The participants are engaged in constant communication with one another. The focus on student learning exists as teachers engage in reflective dialogue.

Reflective Dialogue

Teachers reflect on and evaluate their professional practice through conversations with colleagues through reflective dialogue (Scribner et al., 1999). PLCs need to master the practice of dialogue and discussion to enhance PLC performance and minimize opportunity for groupthink to permeate the team (Rowe, 2008; Senge, 1990). Reflective dialogue occurs during the ABCD collaboration time as teacher reported dialogues and discussion occurring both during their Tuesday ABCD collaboration time and during other parts of the day. Dialogue and discussion are at times used interchangeably; however, dialogue has a distinct meaning as it refers to deep listening to one another and suspending of one's own view to provide a stream of meaning moving among participants to help build new understandings (Bohm, 1996; Sparks, 2005). Discussion is more about presenting and defending different views to search for the best decisions that must be made at that time (Senge, 1990). To best understand how the concept of reflective dialogue occurs when PLCs use the ABCD schedule, my research looked for evidence of teachers listening to one another without judgment to stimulate and maintain conversations centered on new learning.

Teachers need to know how to move between dialogue and discussion. A third grade teacher made this comment regarding what makes her PLC effective:

I really think a combination of the collaboration and then respecting of different teaching styles of each other because we really sit here and plan very similarly and have the same maps, but we each know that in our classrooms that is going to look very different. And, it has been really helpful because then we come back to the table and one says, 'Well, I did it this way and it went really well.' 'I did it this way and it didn't go so well.' And, we've been able to share that together.

The PLCs did not seem bound by groupthink or a concern about how others might judge them. A fourth grade focus group member attributes the absence of judgment by saying their PLC is focused on student learning and what is best for kids. The teachers are able to suspend judgment because the focus is not on themselves.

The observed PLCs at North are able to move back and forth between dialogue and discussion. The reflective dialogue allows the team to share new ideas. A fourth grade teacher said she has benefited from being part of a PLC by communicating with her PLC and sharing experiences. The PLCs' open exchange of ideas created a flow of communication without judgment, which seemed to encourage members to take risk and share from their experiences. This also supported the PLC frameworks of shared norms and values and deprivatization of practice discussed earlier. The fourth grade focus group spoke of the benefit of not being judged by one another as they keep their focus on students. The focus group members contribute their ability to work together to being open-minded, using humor, and acknowledging they have and are going to make mistakes. The PLC is open to having dialogue concerning things that are going well and things that are not.

With dialogue, a PLC attempts to access a larger collection of ideas with the whole organizing the part instead of the part organizing the whole (Senge, 1990). The PLC members at North provided evidence of sharing information as a way to extend the collection of ideas without the fear of rejection or conflict. A third grade teacher shared the difference between the team she is on now and those in the past. She said:

I have been with people who may not necessarily agree with what the team is saying but don't feel comfortable voicing their own opinion and then they're not happy or they just go ahead and do their own thing in their classroom. So, I think that has been helpful that we're open with one another.

The teacher went on to say how her current team is able to work through differences by listening and looking through all perspectives. She went on to explain how through this open dialogue her PLC is able to move from disagreements to common consensus.

Dialogue can be suspended when there is a fear of conflict that results in a lack of trust and innovation of ideas. Additionally, if members are trying to persuade through discussions, the team is going to perceive winners and losers. Through reflective dialogue the PLC is able to share a flow of information uninterrupted by individualism and minimize the won/loss factor.

Participants spoke of the value of open dialogue. Through dialogue they are able to communicate with a sense of trust. As PLC members build trust, their confidence to take risk grows and members are likely to deprivatize their ideas (Brindley & Crocco, 2009). The PLCs' trust allows members to ask deeper questions. PLC members say they are able to approach issues honestly and openly. One focus group member said, "I think we can all be honest with each other without hurting feelings or anything like that because really we're just all in it for the kids and we have to have an open mind about it."

Another member of the focus group described how she tries to help the newer teacher when she feels he might make a mistake that she may have experienced. The teachers said they don't see correction or advice as personal attacks, instead they feel the correction and advice is genuinely given to help. The participants have a collective belief into the value of reflective dialogue.

The PLCs are not without conflict and their journey towards collegiality have been challenging. The PLCs contain members from different experiences and backgrounds. They have learned about each other and how to work together. A fifth grade teacher shared her team is able to approach issues head on and how their mutual understandings have allowed them to feel comfortable talking through challenging subjects. The PLC does not have a formal norm written about how to handle disagreements, but the members do have a common understanding. The PLCs have been able to come to a mutual understanding through their dialogues and discussions.

Reflective dialogue allows an unrestricted flow of meaning to pass through a group with minimal resistance caused by teachers trying to push their individual agendas on other PLC members. The ABCD schedule allows reflective dialogue to occur as members meet at least twice a week. The teachers voiced the growing level of trust among their colleagues as they meet on a continual basis. The PLC members did not talk about formal norms regarding dialogue and discussion, but a Thursday ABCD meeting agenda document contained written norms and a time to review the norms. Some norms included (a) report and accept thoughtful ideas with respect, (b) all conversations and efforts focus on improving effectiveness as educators, and (c) be honest about data and curriculum implementation.

Reflective dialogue occurs while PLC members collaborate using the ABCD schedule. Their dialogues involved developing common learning objectives and lessons, but through the collaboration the teachers would also share when they were going to do a different activity with their students. The fourth grade PLC showed evidence of maintaining some autonomy to make decisions to match their classroom needs. A third grade teacher also said her PLC members also recognize individual autonomy and that teachers can agree to disagree. In the third, fourth, and fifth grade PLCs, the teachers' collective knowledge served as a resource the PLC trusted and relied on. Their dialogue allowed the teachers to have a common understanding for what was expected of their students and guided them in what they needed to do.

Findings Summary

PLCs are driven by six concepts that I used as a framework to interpret the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices as teacher work in a Professional Learning Community. My qualitative case study relied on individual interviews, a focus group meeting, meeting observations, and document reviews to provide a saturation of data to help understand the impact the ABCD schedules has on the instructional practices used by teachers working in a PLC. When looking at how teachers collaborate, the interviews and observations revealed shared norms and values as teachers operated from a collective belief in collaboration and built strong professional relationships built on trust. The teachers shared leadership roles and the building administration is supportive of the PLC work. Participants consistently described a leadership structure free of hierarchical governance, but supported by an active building administration. Teachers openly share their practices with one another and even allow others to observe as their

practices are deprivatized. Collaboration occurs as teachers meet during and outside the ABCD scheduled time. Collaboration is carried out by the use of protocols. Teachers expressed satisfaction in the reliable nature of the ABCD schedule and feel they have learned from their time together. Teachers focus on student learning as they differentiate instruction and use data to make instructional decisions. Reflective dialogue exist during the ABCD meetings and within the PLC culture at North as teachers suspend judgment to actively listen to one another. My findings will be interpreted with the literature to provide a discussion in Chapter 5 to answer the research questions.

Chapter 5

Discussion

I believe there is a problem of practice in schools concerning how collaboration is utilized among PLCs to support student learning. My study was necessary to better understand how a school's structure can lead to collegial opportunities to discuss and impact instruction. I hoped to understand how one district's new schedule is impacting their PLCs' ability to impact instruction. My study was designed to listen to teachers and learn from them how they collaborate.

Purpose of the Study

My study was designed to gain a greater understanding of how the ABCD schedule functions to discover whether there is adequate collaboration time for PLC members. Schools must develop structures that can stimulate the active exchange of professional skills creating a climate that involves interpersonal support for problems with current and future task (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Schools should create systems and structures aimed at promoting collegial interactions among PLC members. If schools are not able to create structures to sustain PLCs, teachers might be stuck working in isolation (Ingersoll, 2003; Lieberman & Mace, 2008). Research indicates teachers desire collegial interactions (Horn & Little, 2009; Kardos & Johnson, 2007) and schools should be centers of inquiry for both adults and children (Schmoker, 2006).

The Central School District implemented the ABCD schedule beginning in August 2010 to provide consistent collaborative planning time for classroom teachers. The ABCD schedule provides grade level classroom teachers the opportunity for reliable collaboration during their contracted school day. At North Elementary, the ABCD

schedule provides daily opportunities for teachers to meet during their 50 minute planning time. Classroom teachers at North Elementary are required to meet every Tuesday and Thursday for 50 minutes. In the past, the teachers did not have reliable collaboration time during the school day. Teachers need opportunities to have discussions regarding materials and strategies as a way to impact instructional methodologies (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). The classroom teachers at North Elementary are using the ABCD schedule to address issues associated with instruction.

My study is guided by a PLC conceptual framework that commonly occurs in the literature. The PLC frameworks with relevance to my study are (a) shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue. These PLC frameworks are occurring as teachers use the ABCD schedule. The concept of a PLC is built upon the notion of improving student learning by impacting teaching practices (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). My case study looked at one school's implementation of the ABCD schedule to help deepen the literature regarding types of structures intended to stimulate and facilitate the work of PLCs to impact instructional practices. My case study hopes to influence future policy decisions by helping decision-makers understand and interpret the role the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices and collaboration when teachers are members of a PLC.

Research Questions

My study examined the ABCD schedule and how it has influenced classroom teachers of one elementary school as they strive to function as a professional learning community. My case study explored three central questions:

1. How is the ABCD schedule impacting the instructional practices used by classroom teachers when they work in a professional learning community at North Elementary School?
2. How are the classroom teachers implementing the ABCD schedule?
3. How are the six PLC frameworks occurring during the ABCD collaboration time?

My research questions were designed using ‘how’ questions to bring interpretation to my qualitative case study. The intention of my study is to bring a greater depth of understanding through the shared stories of classroom teacher participants. An important outcome of my study will lead to a greater understanding of teacher collaboration and how instructional practices are impacted when classroom teachers collaborate during the ABCD scheduled time.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was utilized in my study to gain a greater understanding of the impact the ABCD schedule has on instructional practices when teachers participate in a PLC. I conducted a case study at one elementary school by selecting teacher participants who are currently using the ABCD schedule. The teachers individually interviewed all taught prior to the implementation of the ABCD schedule and are now using the ABCD schedule. I also used a focus group interview, meeting observations, and document collections.

Discussion of findings

How is the ABCD schedule impacting instructional practices?

The ABCD schedule is impacting instructional practices as teachers work in a PLC. Teachers throughout my study spoke of the ABCD schedule as a reliable

opportunity to collaborate. The PLCs are using the reliable time to plan lessons, discuss effective practices, examine student data, and match students with necessary interventions. The ABCD schedule impacts instructional practices by providing teachers with the necessary time and accountability to discuss matters associated with learning. Through my study I found examples of teachers sharing how they used the ABCD time to help their peers implement new programs such as the Daily Five. The teachers are able to differentiate instruction by examining student data together, matching instructional strategies with needs, and evaluating their practices when they meet. I saw teachers discussing different ways of presenting materials and developing alternate activities for students based on the learners' needs. Teacher spoke frequently during the interviews and focus group about having the time to talk about differentiating instruction.

Newer teachers have gained valuable insight from veteran teachers as they have planned together. Teachers who taught under the previous schedule reported they mostly worked in isolation and never really had the much of a chance to collaborate and learn from one another. The ABCD schedule provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. The ABCD schedule by itself has not impacted instruction. Instead, the way teachers have learned to use the ABCD schedule and how the school has structured the time is contributing to the transformation of North into a PLC that relies on collaboration to improve student learning. North Elementary has been intentional in using collaboration tools and processes to improve the teaching practices. In addition to impacting the structure, the ABCD schedule has also influenced the culture at North Elementary.

The teachers at North share a collective belief that collaboration is important and they use the ABCD time to share instructional activities and strategies, student work

samples, and achievement data. The PLCs' work is deprivatized through their reflective dialogue as the teachers consistently engage in conversations focused on student learning. A number of recurring themes support my finding that instructional practices are impacted by the ABCD schedule. The themes associated with this finding are (a) a collective belief, (b) deprivatized practices, (c) reliability, (d) focus on student learning, and (e) reflective dialogue.

A Collective Belief

Teachers need regular meeting time during the day to communicate with one another (Pounder, 1998; Supovitz & Christman, 2003). The teachers at North are guided by a collective belief that collaboration is important to impact instruction. Teachers at North are invested into the collaboration that guides them to stay on the same page to make better instructional decisions as they use the ABCD time. The ABCD schedule provides opportunities for teachers to discuss issues associated with instruction and participants shared changes they have made as they use the ABCD collaboration time to discuss instruction. Without the consistency of the ABCD scheduled time, teachers would not have contracted time to build upon their collective belief that collaboration is important in helping their PLCs improve instruction.

PLCs are able to make better instructional decisions when they have time to focus their planning on issues of instruction. The collective belief is driven by a shared responsibility to do what is best for kids. The teachers at North place their own agendas aside, and maintain a student-centered focus. The fourth grade teachers emphasized during the focus group meeting how they keep the focus on students and that allows their PLC to suspend judgment of one another. They openly tell one another when they feel a

practice is not going to work. The fourth grade teachers share their successes and failures. A collective belief in the importance of collaboration also promotes teachers to make their practice public.

Deprivatized Practices

Deprivatization of practice is when teachers practice their work openly and the result can be the PLC sharing information to improve their practice (Bryk et al., 1999; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Several examples of deprivatized practices were either shared by participants or observed during PLC meetings demonstrating the importance and relevance of this theme. During the ABCD time teachers share lessons and work samples for others to use and they share students during interventions. This deprivatized activity drives the PLCs to deal collectively with instructional issues. Teachers taking on different roles develop a deeper understanding of curriculum issues, which is another characteristic of a deprivatized setting.

The teachers reported they use the time available by ABCD schedule to learn from one another. This finding is consistent with the research that says teachers alternate the role of mentor or specialist to help one another solve difficult problems and improve practice (Bryk et al., 1999; Little, 1990). Deprivatized practices can lead PLCs to go beyond discussing 'surface level issues' to engage in reflective dialogue to identify and use effective teaching practices when teachers are involved in shared practices (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The teachers said they are honest and open about confronting one another when one suggests an instructional practice that may not work. Their deprivatized practices are strengthened by their trust in one another and they share a motivation to improve student learning. For collaboration to stimulate innovation and

drive teachers to improve instructional practices, PLC members must be open and public about the work they are doing.

Reliability

The ABCD schedule provides reliable collaboration time for teachers to discuss instruction. The teachers are able to plan their schedules according to the ABCD scheduled collaborations. The teachers rely on the ABCD scheduled time to analyze student work and make instructional decisions. Collaboration is a systematic process in which teachers work together as teams to analyze and improve classroom practices for the purpose of improving student learning (DuFour, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Prior to the ABCD schedule, teachers at North did not have reliable collaboration time and were left without much time to discuss instructional issues. Now the PLCs have predetermined time for collaboration and they utilize that time together. The PLCs rely on the ABCD time to plan for instruction, engage in reflective dialogue regarding what is working, seek clarity for learning objectives, prioritize objectives, and learn from one another.

Focus group participants spoke specifically about the Thursday ABCD time as being an opportunity to learn more deeply about instructional process and data collection. The Thursday ABCD time results in deeper instructional discussions because its collaboration is focused on one content area or process. The fourth grade focus group members believe collaboration that allows a greater depth of understanding surrounding instructional issues is more valuable when making teaching decisions. Unfortunately, the Tuesday ABCD times limits the depth of discussion since the Tuesday agendas have multiple topics and subjects to cover.

Focus on student learning

A key occurrence of a PLC is when members are engaged in sharing information for the purpose of improving student learning through better teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Louis, 1994; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). Teachers use the ABCD time to differentiate instruction and use data to make instructional decisions. Differentiated instruction refers to the efforts teacher make to respond to the variances among learners in their classrooms (Tomlinson, 2000). Teachers anticipate the time provided by the ABCD schedule to be prepared at each Tuesday ABCD time to collaborate around issues associated with differentiated instruction. Differentiating instruction can be a powerful tool to impact learning and can only be effective when there is a match between student needs and effective strategies (Marzano, 2009). Teachers are responsible for providing instruction to students that serves their needs. The teachers at North use the ABCD scheduled time to plan and differentiate instruction by modifying classroom lessons, placing students into intervention groups, and using data.

Data informs teaching decisions and the teachers at North use data during their Tuesday and Thursday ABCD time. Their use of data informs the decisions they make surrounding instructional practices. Teachers should rely on their knowledge of students, their teaching content, and their situations to identify the most appropriate instructional strategies (Marzano, 2009). The actions among PLC members using the ABCD schedule are consistent with Marzano's claim. The teachers use student data to guide instruction and organize student learning groups, teachers share successes and failures from professional experiences, and they share their knowledge when given the opportunity to

meet during the ABCD time. The practice of looking at student performance data every 2 or 3 weeks is a way the PLCs are able to monitor if their instruction is working or if the instruction needs changed. The data discussions occurring during the Thursday ABCD were described by the teachers as being systematic and focused. The systematic sharing of ideas occurs consistently now that teachers have reliable collaboration time through the ABCD schedule, whereas the previous schedule did not provide that consistency.

Reflective Dialogue

Teachers reflect on and evaluate their professional practice through conversations with colleagues through reflective dialogue (Scribner et al., 1999). The ABCD schedule allows reflective dialogue to occur as members meet at least twice a week prompting members to grow in their trust of one another as they share ideas, student work, and lessons. The culture of sharing has been stimulated by the practice of PLCs meeting at least twice a week during the ABCD time. Teachers can examine assumptions regarding best practices by participating in in-depth conversations about teaching and learning (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Participants have benefited from learning through other PLC members' shared experiences as they engage in dialogue regarding new strategies they were trying in their classrooms and being open about practices that did not work. These shared experiences occur during the ABCD scheduled time. Reflective dialogue allows PLC members to discuss instructional practices without judgment.

Collaboration within a PLC increases learning opportunities and the number of knowledge exchanges (Rosenholtz, 1989; Vescio et al., 2008). The ABCD schedule is impacting the instructional practices at North Elementary by increasing the number of

opportunities PLCs have to meet during contract time. The structure does provide reliable collaboration time for a staff that shares a collective belief driven by a focus on student learning. The PLC deprivatizes their practices during the ABCD collaboration time and as a result instructional practices have been impacted. Despite some limitations posed by only having 50 minutes to meet, the PLCs are become more skillful and strategic at using the ABCD time to impact instructional practices.

How are teachers implementing the ABCD schedule?

In my study, I was interested in gaining a better understanding of how the classroom teachers are implementing the ABCD schedule. Some have argued that decision makers should attempt to create and sustain collaborative structures for teachers and avoid schools becoming impoverished learning settings (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Collaborative cultures can facilitate the transformation of a stuck school into a moving school when teachers work together and believe in the need to continuously learn (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). A stuck school is considered a setting with low levels of innovation that seem to exist when teachers are working in isolation. Collaborative settings are characterized as moving schools when innovation is encouraged as staff members work to improve learning conditions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). I consider North Elementary to have a collaborative culture and the teachers are continuing to use the ABCD scheduled to work on instructional issues. Teachers are guided by protocols, are influenced by time and time constraints, and benefit from the training and support provided to help them collaborate effectively. To understand how the classroom teachers implement the ABCD schedule I break this discussion into three themes labeled protocols, time, and training and support.

Protocols

Teachers use the ABCD schedule by using meeting tools. Teachers create and maintain a collaboration log during Tuesday ABCD collaboration time. The collaboration logs create an agenda and guide PLC members' work. I recognize the value of the meeting protocols in providing a systematic and structured template for the PLCs to follow. The protocols guide teachers in maintaining a specific focus around instruction, place an emphasis on data-driven decisions, and serve as an accountability measure. PLCs are able to generate high student achievement when they are engaged in structured, sustained instructional discussions (Supovitz & Christman, 2003).

The collaboration log is an effective tool in guiding the PLCs to discuss core academic areas. PLCs are able to stay on topic when they use the collaboration log. The collaboration log also helps teachers come to meetings prepared as they know in advance what objectives and content they are going to cover. There is also a direct connection between the collaboration logs and instruction as PLCs are expected to record in their logs how they are collaborating. This practice also provides a standard of accountability to make sure the PLCs are dealing with issues of instruction. The teachers shared some mixed reviews concerning the collaboration logs, but I found the logs providing additional benefit for collaboration. Teachers had to check statements to ensure they were recording their work accurately. This caused the groups to clarify meaning and communicate clearly. At times, clarifying questions would lead to additional discussion or dialogue. The collaboration log is one piece of how the teachers use the ABCD schedule and log is used to communicate and document the PLCs' work and guide them in future meetings. Collaboration protocols are important to define and should be

maintained to insure PLCs have a systematic collaboration process during the ABCD time.

Time

Teachers need regular time during the day to communicate with one another (Pounder, 1998; Supovitz & Christman, 2003) and frequent collaboration time is needed for teachers to work interdependently toward shared goals (DuFour et al., 2010). The ABCD schedule provides daily opportunities for teacher collaboration, but the length of available time provides some challenges for PLCs to adequately cover all topics. Because of this limitation, PLC members must prioritize what topics are given the most attention and some agenda items are left without being discussed. The Tuesday ABCD collaboration meetings move quickly and lack the depth of coverage participants would like. The Tuesday ABCD time is limited by only having 50 minutes to cover all core academic areas. The specific focus associated with the Thursday ABCD collaboration time allows PLCs to go deeper with the specific content and processes. The Tuesday ABCD collaboration would benefit from either adding more time, or by narrowing the focus of each meeting.

The ABCD schedule does not provide enough time for collaboration. All participants spoke frequently of their need to meet outside the ABCD time to acquire the collaboration necessary to accomplish their objectives. Classroom teachers meet outside the ABCD collaboration time to review student data, plan lessons for subjects they were not able to get to during the Tuesday ABCD time, and talk about other issues important to their work. The participants shared varying responses to how much time is necessary for collaboration. Some said another 15 minutes would make a big difference while

others said they really need another hour or more. Teachers should be continuously engaged in collegial conversations regarding instruction and the ABCD schedule provides time for PLCs to have formal and informal exchanges. In high achieving schools with highly involved teachers, educators are constantly engaged in collegial conversations regarding classroom practices through formal and informal exchanges (Little, 1982).

The ABCD schedule does not allow time for all teaching partners to participate in the Tuesday collaboration. Special education and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers serve students at North Elementary, but due to their schedules they are not able to participate in the Tuesday ABCD meetings. Classroom teachers must find other times to collaborate with special education and ELL teachers. Typically these collaborative meetings occur after school. The ABCD schedule is a reliable structure for classroom teacher collaboration, but modifications are necessary to include all professionals who are serving the students. The inability of the ABCD schedule to include special education and ELL teachers is a problem concerning those teachers who are trained to provide differentiated instruction and could add valuable insight to the PLCs.

Training and Support

The teachers have learned how to collaborate through ongoing training and support. Teachers use the ABCD schedule by utilizing trained PLC members to provide guidance for their work. Teacher learning should maintain a continuous focus to deepen educator's awareness of teaching methodologies and students (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). The PLCs at North are receiving ongoing support from administration, team leaders, and outside consultants. These supports are

helping teachers utilize data and use collaborative processes. Learning is the activity practiced by professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills (Hord, 2009).

Teachers need time to process and reflect on their learning to appropriately implement new discoveries into their classrooms and connect new knowledge to the needs of students (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). The teachers at North are continuously engaged in professional learning and their collaboration is becoming more automatic. The school has been involved in training to build their collaboration proficiency and now the teachers report their process has become just the way they do things. Focus group participants highlighted this finding as they described how some of the collaboration log has become unnecessary, as they feel confident in their collaborative processes. Interview and focus group participants suggested a variation in the collaboration skill found among different grade level PLCs.

Professional development has been shown to be more effective with improving teacher learning and practices if teachers from the same school, department, or grade level participate collectively (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Past in-services have allowed the teachers to learn together and they continue to refine their practices as they collaborate regularly during the Tuesday and Thursday ABCD collaboration times. The PLC is continuously learning together as they share ideas. The focus group participants spoke of the ongoing training taking place among the team as their administrators continue to help them learn the Decision Making for Results process. The schools should continue to offer training as new staff members join the PLCs so the school can continue to advance forward in their ability to use data.

Teachers use the ABCD schedule by sharing ideas to provide professional support to PLC members and maintain a focus on student learning. An ongoing theme among participants and observations is the sharing of ideas that can be translated to teacher learning. Teachers serving in schools where staff members are actively engaged as a PLC have an increase craft for powerful teaching and classroom practices (Sergiovanni, 2000). The ABCD schedule allows classroom teachers to work as a PLC and be engaged in dialogue concerning instruction. The PLCs at North are involved in reflective dialogue and working without a fear of conflict as members trust each other.

For schools to be transformed by PLCs, teachers must continuously deliberate with one another on how to solve problems that relate to teaching and learning (Fullan, 2001). Teachers at North Elementary spoke of the exchanges taking place during their ABCD collaboration time and how those conversations often lead to additional meetings outside of the ABCD time. In a PLC, community is about colleagues coming together for a meaningful purpose to learn more intensely about a specific topic that will provide shared meaning and purpose (Hord, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2000). The ABCD schedule provides reliable opportunities for teachers to collaborate together. The PLCs are collaborating during the ABCD time by using protocols to systematically plan. This would not be possible if the teachers did not have reliable time each week. The PLCs have used the ABCD collaboration time to learn new instructional strategies and practices and they draw upon each other's experiences for continued professional growth. The professional isolation of teachers restricts access to new ideas and better solutions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

How are PLC frameworks occurring?

Professional learning communities is a framework that can guide the way teachers work. There are six PLC frameworks occurring at North Elementary as classroom teachers use the ABCD schedule: (a) Shared norms and values, (b) shared and supportive leadership, (c) deprivatization of practice, (d) collaboration, (e) focus on student learning, and (f) reflective dialogue. I wanted to see how these frameworks occur when PLC use the ABCD schedule so future structures can be created to nurture and stimulate the existence of these frameworks as teachers work together. For this reason my study explicitly looked for the six PLC frameworks as initial themes existing as teachers collaborate during the ABCD scheduled time.

Shared Norms and Values

Shared norms and values occur during the ABCD scheduled collaboration time. Shared norms and values refer to the collectively agreed upon professional beliefs that support and sustain successful school practices among those working in schools (Scribner et al., 1999). At North Elementary, shared norms and values are best explained by recognizing the collective belief among teachers and the value of trust as expressed by participants. Policy makers need to understand the role shared norms and values plays in stimulating and supporting collaborative activities among PLC members. Shared norms and values can define a culture as found at North.

PLC's common beliefs and values are affirmed uniting members around a shared purpose and mutual identity as they develop goals (Lieberman, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2000). The teachers shared their belief that collaboration is an important piece of their success and ultimately their kids' success. The participants have learned a great deal from each

other and depend on the ABCD schedule to provide reliable collaboration time. The classroom teachers develop Tuesday ABCD meeting agendas based on their shared norms and values and collectively build the agenda through formal and informal exchanges throughout the week. Their focus on instruction and desire to meet together demonstrated the PLCs have placed value on the collaboration provided through the ABCD schedule.

Trust among teachers is a basic foundation of well-performing PLCs (Baier, 1986; Park et al., 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). Trust was mentioned by participants when describing their PLC and how they work together effectively during the ABCD time. Teachers need to trust one another in school-based PLCs in order to engage in reflective dialogue, open the door of their classroom, and collaborate with a focus on student learning (Bryk et al., 1999). Shared norms and values are encouraged when relationships among PLC members are built on a trustworthy foundation. The teachers at North Elementary have built trust by working together, spending time outside of school with one another, and recognizing the value each person has to help one another. Shared norms and values are cultivated by a shared and supportive leadership.

Shared and Supportive Leadership

Shared and supportive leadership exist during the ABCD collaboration time in the PLCs when there is an absence of a hierarchy allowing members to take on leadership roles and when building administration actively supports their efforts. The literature supports these attributes and suggests shared and supportive leadership occurs when administration and staff share power and authority for making decisions while promoting

and nurturing leadership (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hipp et al., 2008). A shared and supportive leadership has produced a free flowing exchange of ideas among PLC members at North. Teachers at North are also empowered to make instructional decisions driven by an innovation that can exist when members feel free to take and share risk during the ABCD collaboration time.

North Elementary teachers stated there is not a hierarchy governing their collaboration. The absence of hierarchy exists in two different ways at North. The first is the administration does not entirely dictate the PLC work. The building administration and teachers have developed a plan to collaborate, a meeting log to assist collaboration, and operate within a culture seeking collaboration time. An absence of hierarchy also exists when teachers share and exchange leadership roles. Each PLC has an appointed team leader; however, observations and interviews found other PLC members provide leadership during the ABCD times. Classroom teachers have been involved in leadership by participating with administration to develop the collaboration log, work together to determine meeting agendas, and working collectively to develop goals. A transparency among PLC members is developed as they share leadership to support each another.

Shared and supportive leadership means there can be an exchange of roles among teachers and administrators (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The PLCs at North have one formal role assigned to a teacher at each grade level. The team leader is responsible for being the liaison to provide a clear and consistent flow of information between the building administration and teachers. As one teacher said, having one go to person allows the administration to give one concise answer and avoid giving answers that could be interpreted differently if multiple people were asking the same one. The PLC members

share leadership roles based on their expertise and driven by what is needed. The emergence of experts occurs during the ABCD collaboration time as teachers took the lead in the instructional areas they had the most experience with

The building administration actively supports the PLCs by providing guidance when needed, participating in Thursday ABCD meetings, and establishing a culture of collaboration. The building principal has also provided school-wide support by using district flex time to provide training for how to collaborate. PLCs need to have the appropriate training and knowledge to use the ABCD collaboration time effectively. In order for collaboration time to impact instruction, the leadership must protect the Tuesday and Thursday ABCD time for collaboration. The individuals responsible for implementations should be included in the shared decision-making process for the change to be effective and enduring (Scribner et al., 2007).

Deprivatization of Practice

Teachers “go public” when they learn with a group of peers and break the isolation of their world to become part of an intellectual community drawing upon each other to learn (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2009). The PLCs at North deprivatize their practices by meeting every Tuesday and Thursday during their ABCD time to openly share ideas, share student work, reflect on what is working well, and look at their students’ assessment data. The ABCD schedule provides time for teachers to collectively process, understand and apply new ideas about teaching and learning which is described as a purpose of deprivatization of practice (Louis, 1994). Teachers at North also deprivatize practice through shared examples of how to teach concepts, questioning one

another regarding how they were teaching concepts, and asking for clarification regarding activities designed by one another.

The deprivatization of practice occurring during the ABCD time has provided meaningful learning experiences for teachers. Communication and talking about each other's experiences have helped the teachers gain confidence in their instructional practices. The communication among the teachers provides a deprivatization of practice and the ABCD schedule provides a consistent and planned time for teachers to go public with their work.

Teachers are encouraged and supported to observe and discuss each other through a reciprocal process when practices are deprivatized (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The Thursday ABCD time is about sharing grade level communication arts, math, and behavior data. This data informs the PLC and helps them establish instructional groups. The teachers place the students into different classrooms to be taught in differentiated groups that are designed to teach to their needs. This work could take place at any time just like other work described above; however, the value in the ABCD schedule is that it provides reliable time for PLCs and it symbolizes the importance of collaboration in the culture at North Elementary.

Collaboration

Collaboration occurs during the ABCD time. PLC members describe collaboration at North as being a systematic process as teachers collaborate during the Tuesday and Thursday ABCD time. Teachers working together as teams to analyze and improve classroom practices to improve learning are products of systematic collaboration (DuFour, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995). A systematic process of collaboration

characterizes the work at North as the ABCD schedule provides regular scheduled time for PLC to collaborate and the PLCs use consistent structures to focus their meetings such as collaboration logs. The PLC framework of collaboration exists during the ABCD time by providing teachers time to plan curriculum, monitor students, and share ideas during their collaboration.

Collaboration provides an opportunity for teachers to share and place into practice their learning and teachers need opportunities to challenge assumptions, identify promising practices, present problems, increase their understanding of their students, develop curriculum, and share leadership (Little, 1990). The Tuesday ABCD time is utilized as a time to collaborate around curriculum. The curriculum collaboration occurs during the ABCD time by providing reliable time for teachers to discuss instructional matters. The classroom teachers depend on the ABCD time and plan in advance to use it for curriculum planning. As teachers collaborate around curriculum, the members express they are learning more about teaching and learning.

The PLCs shared the responsibility for effective instruction. Teachers at North bring new programs through collaboration, share effective practices when meeting together, are honest when processes do not go well, and design instruction to meet the diverse needs of their learners. Team learning forms and applies collective knowledge to problems and needs (Gill, 2010). Teachers in my study are growing in their knowledge through experiences gained by collaboration. This was evident as the teachers discussed how to teach math concepts, communicate with parents, and deal with difficult student behaviors during ABCD Tuesday meetings. Collaboration is mutual work striving to

meet a common goal (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The focus on student learning is another PLC framework found as teachers collaborate using the ABCD schedule.

Focus on Student Learning

A focus on student learning occurs when schools establish student learning as a priority (Scribner et al., 1999). The PLCs at North place an emphasis on student learning as they discussed topics such as differentiating instruction and using data to make decisions. Teachers meet over matters relevant to student learning such as when PLCs talk about differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners and helping kids accomplish their learning objectives. The teachers use student data for small group instruction, partner work, and whole class instruction for the purpose of improving student learning. A collective focus on student learning is when the teachers' professional actions focus on decisions that impact students' learning experiences (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Louis et al., 1996).

The teachers use the ABCD time to go beyond simply following the textbooks as PLC members utilize data. Focusing on student learning occurs at North as teachers pay close attention to how the students are learning. Teachers at North conduct pre-assessments, examine the results, and then plan units during their ABCD time. These actions are important in guiding PLC to make instructional decisions during their ABCD collaboration time. There is a tension among the teachers as they attempt to teach through the enormity of the mandated curriculum while also trying to teach needed concepts at depth. There is a lack of time provided through the ABCD collaboration time so the PLCs arrange time to meet after school to thoroughly plan for their teaching.

Thursday ABCD time is spent with classroom teachers meeting with the administrators to go over data. The data conversations allow the PLCs to focus on learning. The school has invested time learning how to look at data to make decisions and PLCs maintain a focus on student learning as a way to have real and reflective dialogue. Strong PLCs positively influence the learning environment and student learning outcomes (Borko, 2004; Scribner et al., 2002). Teachers at North openly shared their PLC is able to avoid issues associated with group think and fear of conflict as they focus on the students and not on themselves.

Reflective Dialogue

Teachers reflect on and evaluate their professional practice through reflective dialogue (Scribner et al., 1999). The PLC framework of reflective dialogue occurs during the ABCD scheduled time as the teachers participate in deep conversations about teaching and learning. To better explain how reflective dialogue occurs during the ABCD time my study recognized the occurrence of two conditions: 1) participants see their PLC members as colleagues and being in mutual accord and 2) the existence of a facilitator who holds the context of dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2005).

The participants in my study regularly talked about the value of their PLC members. The members did not limit one another based on years of experience or title. Instead, the members recognized each person came to their PLC with diverse experiences to contribute value. PLC members in my study used the ABCD time to allow ideas to flow among participants regardless of their status. Teachers ask questions of one another and listen to one another without judgment to stimulate and maintain conversations centered on new learning. Dialogue occurs in a PLC as members recognize one another

as colleague with the ability to make contributions for the improvement of student learning. The PLCs use the ABCD collaboration time to openly share ideas and ask each other questions to help inform group decisions.

Each PLC has an appointed team leader who serves as a facilitator, yet all members share in the role of facilitator. Regardless of the facilitator, the context of dialogue occurs when members collaborate during the ABCD time to engage in critical reflection concerning learning. Critical reflection provides evidence the organization is maintaining a focus on mission and goals (Mezirow 2000). The PLCs have developed goals and the school has collectively established goals. The PLC work is aligned with their goals. The PLCs reflect on their practices and inquire into each other's thinking during the ABCD collaboration times. The discipline of dialogue involves learning how to recognize the patterns of interactions in teams that undermine learning (Senge, 1990). The PLCs are confident in their knowledge of how each other works.

Implications for Practice

My qualitative case study examined the ABCD schedule and how it has influenced classroom teachers of one elementary school as they strive to function as a PLC. I specifically wanted to answer three research questions that would ultimately lead to a greater understanding of teacher collaboration for the purpose of equipping schools with the knowledge to develop and sustain collaborative structures. This section provides some implications for practice and in some instance the implications serve as recommendations.

School leaders need to develop and nurture collaboration schedules that are reliable and protected. The classroom teachers voiced support for the reliability in

collaboration time provided through the ABCD schedule. The teachers know when they are going to meet and can plan accordingly to come to the meetings prepared. Reliable collaboration time also provides teachers with the opportunity to engage in reflective feedback concerning past decisions. Teachers have many responsibilities placed on them. The reliability nature of the ABCD schedule allows teachers to know when and how to schedule other meetings and tasks. School leaders can protect collaboration time by implementing and enforcing the expectation that other events and activities never disrupt the collaboration time. This means scheduling drills and assemblies outside of the Tuesday and Thursday collaboration time. The administration can also protect the plan time by making sure teachers are not disrupted during the collaboration meetings. This means calls from the office, impromptu visits by parents or other agencies, and additional work assignments during the collaboration time should be avoided.

PLC members need to maintain defined plans of communication, as communication is an important component of collaboration. Schools must make sure strong communication structures are in place and provide training for collegial interactions. While face to face communication is the preferred method among participants, the PLC members also talked about the role of technology. PLCs would benefit from formal training with how to use technology to communicate and share ideas. This could include the use and development of message boards, online document sharing, and video conferencing. PLC members would also benefit by understanding the difference between dialogue and discussion. Improved communication also leads to better efficiency. The ABCD schedule provides a consistent plan of communication and

availability informing administrators and teachers to when each other is available making it easier to ask questions and share ideas.

School leaders must provide the appropriate training and support for collaboration. The administrative team has been intentional in providing professional development to teachers. Contracted flex time has been used to provide opportunities for staff to learn how to collaborate and use data. Participants reported their training and administrative support as factors improving their confidence in collaborative work. The district could incorporate differentiated collaboration training during the back to school professional development meetings and continue offering training throughout the year. The level of training should be guided by an assessment of current practice. Specific training areas could include: designing and using an agenda, developing and enforcing group norms, problem solving, using data, and matching instructional strategies and interventions with student needs. The Central School District mandated the collaboration expectations of using data before providing the training to effectively use data to make decisions. In the future, the appropriate training should occur prior to the mandate.

PLCs need tools and defined processes to enhance the sharing and utilization of new learning. The PLC members at North have developed a collaboration log, but some participants voiced a concern the log was redundant to other forms they must complete or the form was not user friendly. PLCs should work with administration to recreate a collaboration log that works together with other protocols. I would further recommend the log connect with the teachers' plan books to further strengthen the tie between instructional planning and collaboration Teams need to have an efficient instrument they can record their work as a way to communicate, document their priorities, and serve as a

tool to make sure they are clear on their shared statements. This document should be guided by key components that are aligned with building level goals, but should have flexibility in format to best meet the needs of the PLC.

Collaborative structures should include all members who impact the learning of students. Participants spoke of the need to include special education teachers and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers in their collaboration time as a way to gain additional strategies for differentiating instruction and as a resource to help plan lessons to meet all learners' needs. Since the ABCD collaboration occurs during the school day when students are present, the special education and ELL teachers are shared among other grade levels and are often serving students when PLCs are meeting. Special education teachers are present during the Thursday ABCD meetings, but they are not present when the teachers are designing their lessons and interventions during the Tuesday ABCD time. If schools would consider a late start or early dismissal, students would not be at school and specialists could participate in the PLC meetings. Schools should consider both structural and cultural characteristics if they expect changes in teacher practices and student learning (Inmats, 2002).

Collaboration structures must occur within the teacher contracted school day and teachers should have input in designing the structures. The responsibilities placed on a PLC cannot be composed of additional activities taking place outside the school day, but a PLC must be strategically placed within the school to connect with other factors in a coordinated way (Harris & Jones, 2010). Even in a collaborative culture like North, there are still structural changes that can enhance the sharing of information. Focus group members suggested moving the collaborative meetings to the beginning of the week and

avoid mandated meetings on Thursdays since other demands distract their attention when meeting on Thursday.

The ABCD schedule is a noble attempt to enhance the collaborative opportunities for teachers at North Elementary. The teachers' instructional practices are being impacted and the culture has emerged as a collaborative community. There are still some deficit areas that could be addressed if the school could either implement a late start or early dismissal for students. The school needs to create a larger block of collaborative time that includes all staff members responsible for instruction. My research findings were very clear that teachers do not feel there is enough time for deep collaboration that can really dive into solving problems of practice. Furthermore, key professionals are not able to be involved with classroom teacher and must meet outside of contracted time to discuss student issues. The school would need to engage parents in a dialogue regarding the impact on families if the school started later or dismissed early one day each week for collaboration. The school could also investigate an extended partnership with other community and university organizations that could help provide appropriate supervision of children while teachers collaborated.

The school leadership at North may also want to modify how teachers use the Tuesday ABCD time. Currently teachers attempt to cover all academic subject areas and at times have additional non-curricular issues to discuss. The PLCs should consider having a core subject rotation. An example could include collaborating over communication arts and science the first and third week of each month, and math and science the second and fourth week of each month. The PLCs could still use their informal opportunities to touch base as needed. The teachers at North feel they need more

time during their collaboration blocks and feel they are not able to address each subject at depth.

The school is restricted with how much time they have during their contracted time, so the emphasis may need to be on how to use the time most effectively. The ABCD time does provide reliable time and the PLCs maintain a focus on instruction. The structure now needs to be modified to allow teachers opportunities to cover each academic area with more depth. My recommendations are based on my findings and the emergence of the Common Core Curriculum which will provide new instructional challenges for PLCs.

Recommendations for Future Research

I draw upon ideas of interest that emerged during my study to provide recommendations for future research. A big issue that came up is how teachers go beyond the ABCD collaboration schedule to gain the time the PLCs felt was necessary to be effective. If I were to extend this case study, I would want to explore what happens when teachers collaborate outside the ABCD schedule. How are the issues related to instruction present when teachers meet after school? Are there any connection between the amount of time spent collaborating outside of school and the collective belief and trust experienced among PLC members? Is the issue of needing more time a matter of having too broad of objectives, being the recipients of too many unnecessary duties, or a problem with efficiency?

My study was limited to one school that has a schedule allowing teachers the same planning time each day. In some Central School District schools, PLCs do not have common collaborative time each day. A future study could use this study's research

questions to examine the ABCD schedule in schools with fewer days of common planning time. I would be interested to hear if the teachers spend as much time outside the ABCD time collaborating and how the PLCs frameworks occur in those settings.

The six PLC frameworks are critical to the work occurring among teachers. I chose six PLC frameworks from the literature that I understood to have strong utility for teachers working together for meaningful school improvement. A future study could take one of the frameworks and closely look at its impact. As a school leader, the PLC framework of shared and supportive leadership could provide useful insight into developing and sustaining teacher leaders, provide suggestions for how to encourage teacher leadership, identify processes most effective in leading PLCs, and add to a greater understanding of leadership. The study could look at the leadership styles of the administration of North and those leadership characteristics of PLC members.

My study was not designed to examine the impact the ABCD schedule is having on student achievement. A future study could take the study a step further and explore the impact on student achievement. My study was an initial step to see how the ABCD schedule is impacting instruction. I found instructional practices are being impacted as PLCs use the ABCD schedule. My study did not attempt to determine if specific frameworks had a greater impact on instructional decisions.

The Central School District is working to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) models. RTI is a structure to enhance instructional effectiveness through the use of evidence-based practices, systematic data collection, and data-based decision making. Schools are able to utilize RTI as a structure to identify and provide the necessary support for struggling students. Through RTI, interventions are being provided to the student as

they are struggling as opposed to waiting to see if the students have failed to a defined point before providing support. A future study designed to look at the intersection of collaboration as school implement an RTI model could provide greater insight into the utilization of partnership services. My study found support teachers such as special educators and English Language Learners were not part of the Tuesday collaboration. I would like to further investigate how support teachers and classroom teachers interact during collaboration when working to improve student learning. A future study could look at how instructional practices are administered by special education, Title I, ELL, and classroom teachers when they are working with students who have various learning needs. Another component to this suggestion would include examining the influence on student learning outcomes when classroom teachers and partnership service teachers collaborate. My current research was limited in that partnership service teachers were not part of the case study.

Deprivatized practices occur when teachers work within a PLC. As teachers work within a PLC they need to demonstrate a proficiency in collaborative practices. Likewise, deprivatized practices bring about a shared accountability among PLCs. Future research could provide a path to develop an alternative method to evaluate PLCs and provide a way to examine the effectiveness of PLCs within a school.

Meeting observations seemed to reveal authentically what was happening when PLCs collaborated. A future study would include more meeting observations to gain deeper data concerning the interactions among PLC members. I would also observe the Thursday collaboration time in a future study since those meetings contained classroom teachers, administration, and special education staff. The Thursday meetings focused on

one content or process which would provide a deeper understanding of how teacher draw upon those meetings to impact their instruction. It would be fascinating to select one grade level and follow them through an entire school year. This type of study could provide deeper insight into the six frameworks. My study only observed two selected PLCs during one meeting at a time when they have already established their identity.

Concluding Thoughts

There is nothing magical about the ABCD schedule. Rather, the value appears in how the PLCs have learned to use and rely on the time provided by the ABCD schedule. The ABCD schedule is providing teachers reliable opportunities to discuss matters of instruction as they work in a professional learning community. PLC members operate by shared norms and values as they have learned to trust one another. They benefit from a shared and supportive leadership that values teacher input and decision-making. Teachers deprivatize their practice as they openly share ideas and exchange students for interventions. Collaboration is valued in the culture at North and members have grown professionally as they learn from one another. A focus on student learning prompts members to continuously look for better ways to teach and prompts teachers to suspend their judgment of one another to engage in reflective dialogue regarding their practices.

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Figure 1. Sample ABCD schedule

Rotation 1																			
Day A				Day B				Day C				Day D							
Time	Art	Mu sic	PE	Coun selor	Med ia	Time	Art	Mu sic	PE	Coun selor	Med ia	Time	Art	Mu sic	PE	Coun selor	Med ia		
9:10-10:00	5T	5P	5N	5S		9:10-10:00	5S	5T	5P	5N		9:10-10:00	5N	5S	5T	5P			
10:00-10:50	4P	4L	4S	4G		10:00-10:50	4G	4P	4L	4S		10:00-10:50	4S	4G	4P	4L			
10:50-11:40	3V	3S	3F	3Z		10:50-11:40	3Z	3V	3S	3F		10:50-11:40	3F	3Z	3V	3S			
11:40						11:40						11:40							
Specialist Lunch																			
12:10-1:00	1H	1B	1D	1K	1H	1K	1H	1B	1D	1K	1H	12:10-1:00	1D	1K	1H	1B	1H		
1:00-1:50	Specialist Planning Time					Specialist Planning Time					Specialist Planning Time					Specialist Planning Time			
1:50-2:40	2E	2H	2M	2T	2H	2T	2E	2H	2M	2T	2H	1:50-2:40	2M	2T	2E	2H	2E		
2:40-3:30	K	KD	KP	KS	KD	KP	KS	KD	KP	KS	KD	2:40-3:30	KP	KS	KD	KD	KS		
3:37	Dismissal Procedures Begin																		

Figure Caption

Figure 1. The first number in each block represents the grade level. The letter that follows a number represents teachers' last name initial. Kindergarten is represented with an initial K in front of the teacher's last name initial. Rotation 1 means third, fourth and fifth grade students have counselor and kindergarten, first and second grades have media. The two groups switch which grades have counselor and which grades have media for rotation 2.

VITA

Danial Lee Boatman was born November 18, 1972 to James and Nancy (Fryer) Boatman. He grew up in rural northeast Missouri in the small town of Wayland. Danial married his high school sweetheart Michelle (Phillips) Boatman in 1995. Danial and Michelle currently have four children: Mora (12), Bryce (9), Bennett (9), and Maren (3).

Danial graduated from Clark County R-1 High School in 1991. He attended the University of Missouri-Columbia where he earned a Bachelor's of Science in Elementary Education and later earned a Masters of Education in Educational and Counseling Psychology. Danial fulfilled a dream of earning a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri in 2013.

Danial began his professional career in 1995 teaching fourth grade at Fairview Elementary in Columbia, Missouri. He followed that experience by accepting a school counseling position with the Columbia Public Schools serving both Lee and Mill Creek Elementary Schools. Danial's administrative career began with the Clark County R-1 School District in Kahoka, Missouri where he served as an elementary building principal from 2001 to 2008. He returned to Columbia Public Schools after that time to serve the district as a principal and pursue his doctorate degree. Danial has served in public education for over 17 years.