GOING GLOBAL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF SELF-EFFICACY IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL'S PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Education

With a

Major in Educational Leadership in the

Department of Graduate Education

Northwest Nazarene University

by

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April, 2019

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Darik Gene Williams, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "Going Global: A Phenomenological Case Study of Self-Efficacy in an International School's Professional Learning Communities," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin by acknowledging the amazing sequence of teachers I had the privilege of learning from throughout my K-12 academic career. During those formative years, I was blessed to have teachers who demonstrated constant dedication and collaboration, hallmarks of effective PLCs. While I did not realize it then, they ingrained in me a sense of professionalism that continues to influence me today. I am certain I did not share with them then how profound their models of work ethic were to me, I feel compelled to do so today. They helped me become the educator I am now.

I would also like to acknowledge the faculty and staff of NNU and the NNU cohort to which I belonged. Over the past two years, members of the NNU community have become my second family. They have pushed me harder than I could have ever pushed myself, but they have also been there to offer kind words, kernels of wisdom, and sincere encouragement to just "keep swimming." As a marathoner, I have always likened my doctoral journey to a race. Many faculty, staff, and fellow doctoral candidates have been there for me at various stages in the "race" to offer support in the form of cheers, reinforcements, or whatever else was needed for me to keep putting one proverbial foot in front of the other. I know that they are there with me as I cross the finish line.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my family and friends. During these last two years, I have missed countless events because I needed time to research or write just a little bit more. My family and friends were always there to say, "That's ok. You'll be there next time." I appreciate their patience and persistence with me. I cannot wait to catch up on all of the things I have missed and to make new lasting memories with them!

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my loving network of family and friends. Without their constant support, guidance, motivation, and willingness to be a sounding board, the completion of this study would have not been possible.

This study is also dedicated to my mother, Carla, and to her father, my Grandpa John. They were two of the hardest working people I have ever met. Their individual work ethics inspired me as a child, and they continue to motivate me to this day. They showed me there is no greater sense of satisfaction than from a job well done. I wish more than anything that they both could have been here to celebrate this achievement with me.

ABSTRACT

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged as critical collaborative teacher networks embodying DuFour's (2004) "big ideas" of having a focus on the results of students, involve collaboration and reflection on teacher practices, and consider the impact on student learning. In an effort to expand the literature beyond its examination of PLCs in traditional public school settings, this qualitative phenomenological case study explored PLC practices within one American international school in Southeast Asia.

Data from interviews with individual teachers, observations of elementary and middle school PLCs, and documents were used to understand international schoolteachers' perspectives on what they valued about their participation in PLCs. Individual teachers' self-efficacy was also examined within the context of PLC experiences to gauge how teachers perceived their sense of self-efficacy impacted their ability to engage in tasks associated with the work of PLCs. A process of open coding of the data resulted in the emergence of three key themes: PLCs as a Tool for Instructional Improvement, PLCs as a Tool for Teambuilding, and the Challenges of PLCs in International Schools.

Whether existing in public schools or within international school settings, PLCs have shown an ability to transform student achievement. However, in light of perspectives offered by participants of this study, it is recommended international school leaders consider the unique contextual factors of international schools when implementing PLCs in order to maximize their effectiveness.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Schools across the globe are engaged in a variety of educational reform efforts aimed at examining how teachers impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ding & Sherman, 2006; Tai, Hu, Wang, & Chen, 2012). One of the key features of current reform initiatives is professional learning communities (PLCs) (DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Sims & Penny, 2015; Tam, 2015). These reform efforts are of interest to many schools. Whether public or private, domestic or international, school stakeholders are examining how organizational structures like PLCs promote the collective capacity of teachers to improve student performance.

Tasks and responsibilities generally associated with PLCs involve teachers exchanging ideas, materials, and strategies to develop common understandings of how best to improve student learning and achievement (DuFour, 2004; Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2016; Watson, 2014). Beyond the generalized duties of PLCs, these organizational structures are typically composed of grade-level and support staff teachers who share students and/or content areas. For stability purposes, Louis (2008) argues for a semi-permanent composition of PLC teams, and, though variations in execution and composition for teams may occur within and among school districts, PLCs generally operate during the contracted workday of the teaching staff, and teachers rotate responsibility for leading sessions. Hord (1997) framed the goals of PLCs with five key descriptors:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Shared values and vision
- Collective learning and application

- Shared personal practice
- Supportive conditions

At the heart of PLCs is a focus on collaboration to build teacher capacity centered on improving student performance (DuFour 2004; Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012; Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015). Educational scholars argue that teacher networks are important to increasing student performance because they expand teachers' skill sets and strengthen confidence in collectively promoting student achievement (Moolenaar, 2012; Moolenaar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2012; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Having identified PLCs as a vehicle for teacher collaboration, an examination of what contributes to a successful PLC is warranted. Possessing the ability to study a topic in depth and engage in rich, ongoing conversations around a selected topic are critical factors to positive implementation of PLCs (Elmore, 2004; Linder et al., 2012). Additionally, effective PLCs emphasize the need for trust and respect among colleagues (Cranston, 2011; Hord, 1997). Sharing instructional practices implies a level of vulnerability among educators, and meaningful dialogue can only occur if teachers feel safe and valued among their colleagues (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Over the past several decades, teacher self-efficacy has emerged as a key concept in explaining how confident educators feel in their own instructional capabilities to impact student learning (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011). Bandura (2002) characterizes self-efficacy as thinking in potentially self-enhancing ways to motivate individuals to persevere when confronted with difficulties to achieve a desired outcome. Focusing on a belief in oneself, Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) refer to self-efficacy as a belief in what one is able to do and in the level of success associated with task accomplishment. When teachers experience issues with self-

perception of confidence in their ability to participate in specific tasks or outcomes, like data-driven conversations or collaborative inquiry with their colleagues, motivation diminishes, and they may begin to disengage from others in the face of obstacles (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). This apparent lack of teacher self-efficacy has been shown to be a barrier to long-term successful collaboration in general, and specifically within teacher collaboration networks like PLCs (Chong & Kong, 2012; Moolenaar et al., 2012). A breakdown occurs in the ability of the PLC to function with a unified and collective focus and to sustain a construct for collaboration over time.

Statement of the Problem

Previous studies have shown that teachers' self-efficacy had an impact on job performance (Cherian & Jacob, 2013; Judge & Bono, 2001). When K-12 teachers demonstrated self-efficacy, they showed greater determination and an ability to persist through many of the challenges that occurred on a daily basis (Bangs & Frost, 2012; Scheerens, 2010). Teachers were able to regroup and develop strategies to solve problems that arose from their work with students, parents, and colleagues.

However, as research related to the personal impact of self-efficacy has grown over the past few decades, it continues to be lacking in its ability to address richer context-specific applications for teachers (Klassen et al., 2011; Ramos, Costa, Pontes, Fernandez, & Nina, 2014) such as applications that investigate the differences in instructional settings, student populations, and workplace conditions for teachers. Further examination of teachers' sense of self-efficacy is needed within the context of a PLC structure (Stegall, 2011). Given that PLCs are rooted in the notion of collaboration and shared decision-making, it is imperative researchers uncover obstacles to building and sustaining teacher efficacy (Sweigart, 2012). By discovering beliefs

and practices that nurture greater synergy and collaboration among teachers, greater senses of trust can be cultivated within the teacher networks (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Moreover, certain school contexts remain less explored regarding teacher perspectives with PLC-development initiatives (Gray & Summers, 2016; Toole & Louis, 2002). American international schools operate across the globe and have been serving schoolchildren and their families from a variety of cultural backgrounds for many years. However, a gap in the literature exists in how the organizational structure of PLCs manifests itself in these international school settings (Gray & Summers, 2016). For purposes of this study, the terms international schools and American international schools are used interchangeably and are defined as PK-12 private schools that espouse a Western-oriented curriculum and operate outside of the geographic boundaries of the United States (Hayden & Thompson, 2011).

More than 130,000 children attend American international schools (United States Department of State, 2017). There are essentially two types of students who attend American international schools. First, significant portions of students attending these types of schools are children whose parents are in the foreign country because of work-related matters. As soon as the contract or negotiated agreement between the employer and parent ends, the children and their families leave the country. Another segment of the student population attending American international schools is composed of students from wealthy host-country families. These families want the type of high quality curriculum and English language-based education that American international schools provide (Erickson & Kulinna, 2012). However, little research has been conducted within these school contexts to examine educational initiatives, including PLCs (Gray & Summers, 2016).

A systemic issue associated with these types of schools is frequent teacher turnover (Gillies, 2001; Hardman, 2001; Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010; Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Tkachyk, 2017; Weston, 2014). However, there is a lack of research examining teacher retention efforts within the international school context (Cox, 2012; Desroches, 2013; Odland, 2008). Hayden and Thompson (2011) contend the typical initial teacher contract is approximately two years in duration, and Hardman's (2001) study, which revealed that only 48% of international schoolteachers renew their initial contracts, remains the most comprehensive study to date on this issue.

Some American teachers leave U.S. schools to experience new cultural and travel opportunities available to them as teachers in international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2011; Savva, 2015). Since teachers in international schools enjoy change and thrive on new experiences, their desire to experience new things and places may lead to instances of greater mobility for teachers in these schools (Mancuso, Roberts, White, Yoshida, & Weston, 2011). Issues with teacher turnover can damage institutional stability and create financial burdens for international schools (Odland, 2008). While the research on teacher turnover specifically in international schools is minimal, Ingersoll's (2001) landmark study on teacher turnover in the United States offers important implications and guidance for international schools as well. The study showed an approximate annual turnover rate of 13% for all teachers in the U.S. He asserts this phenomenon is a major challenge for schools in the U.S., and his results may also serve to highlight the costly dilemma of recruiting and retaining quality teaching staff in international schools. Later estimates have shown teacher turnover rate in the U.S. has increased slightly to 16% (The National Council on Teacher Quality, 2017).

The phenomenon of teacher turnover has been shown to negatively impact a variety of aspects of team-based school organizational structures (Guin, 2004). At the core of PLCs is teacher collaboration, with a focus on having a shared vision for student learning and trust (Cranston, 2011; Kalkan 2016). When the composition of PLCs is frequently changed, like those within international schools, it raises critical concerns for educators serving in these types of learning organizations (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Stuart, 2016). Teachers' ability to collaborate, share student data, and develop common strategies and problem-solving approaches is compromised when they worked in an environment where their teammates are coming and going on a fairly regular basis (Guin, 2004). These challenges impact teachers' self-efficacy by causing them to question their capabilities to address job-specific tasks with their peers. Frequent shifts in collaboration networks impact teachers' ability to demonstrate relational trust (Guin, 2004; Simon & Johnson, 2015) because it is hard to trust someone you do not know very well. Additionally, international schools typically reflect a very diverse teaching faculty. Their employees come from all corners of the globe. Each person brings her/his own cultural identity and perspectives reflective of the culture from which they come. These cultural norms influence their thoughts on what it means to be a member of a team, and their cultural mores impact how they define collaboration and how that concept manifests itself within the context of a school environment, particularly within a grade-level team or department (Brunton, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to examine how the perceptions of self-efficacy impact teachers' abilities to collaborate in PLCs in international school settings. By exploring the connection between these two constructs, important support is offered to teachers and administrators as they struggle to develop and implement PLCs effectively in international school environments. If the vision of PLCs is to be fully realized and effectively implemented,

structures must be put in place that build cohesion among staff, and strategic focus must be applied in order to sustain the collaborative conditions rooted in trust that characterize PLCs (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015).

Background

Teachers in international schools migrate from school to school frequently, and this turnover has contributed to less stability and consistency in curriculum and instructional programming for these schools (Mancuso, 2010). Each time teachers enter a new school setting, they bring with them their unique perspectives on learning and an assortment of "suitcase curricula" that defines their approaches to teaching (Stuart, 2016). Essentially, like a suitcase, curriculum, lesson plans, and instructional prowess are transitory commodities in international schools. These foundational factors for any school come and leave like a revolving door in international schools, and they threaten the school's ability to offer continuity of learning (Miller, 2017).

With an effort to promote greater focus on student learning, international schools are asking their educators to engage in PLCs. The challenge schools, specifically international schools, must confront is how to develop a sense of shared purpose and belief among groups of educators whose membership is frequently changing (Connors-Krikorian, 2005; Mancuso, 2010; Ritter, 2016).

Feelings of adequacy, competency, and professional self-worth can all be traced to the concept of self-efficacy. These self-perceptions arise in a variety of settings, and collaborative undertakings like PLCs put them on display for colleagues to witness (Schmoker, 2006). It is important to understand how tasks associated with the workings of PLCs may positively or negatively sway one's sense of self-efficacy.

Bandura (1997) framed self-efficacy as being influenced by four major sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. To contextualize self-efficacy for teaching, mastery experiences refer to actual or realized teaching experiences. These are those enactive moments of a teacher's career in which they felt either particularly successful or inadequate regarding actions taken to promote student learning or further their own professional learning and praxis. Vicarious experiences involve teachers having opportunities to observe other practitioners in action. Seeing a colleague enact a task could either have a positive or negative effect on one's self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion entails receiving verbal input from others regarding one's work. Positive feedback served as a motivator to teachers, and it can have buoyancy effects on a teacher's self-efficacy, while receiving negative feedback from others can deflate a teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Lastly, emotional arousal refers to the physiological sensations one feels when executing certain tasks. Feelings of anxiety, fear, happiness, or stress can induce either a positive or negative impact on a teacher's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Each of the four sources of self-efficacy may manifest themselves within the interactions of a PLC. The constitutive PLC practices of shared leadership and the sharing of personal instructional practices provide a rich landscape for teachers to explore their self-efficacy (Tiong, 2016). In fact, teachers' sense of self-efficacy directly impacts how they negotiate the underlying goals of PLCs. Teacher self-efficacy is entwined with the ways in which teachers perceive their abilities to collaborate with peers around tasks associated with teaching (Marx, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). However, some have argued that more research is needed to explicate the relationship between PLCs and teachers' self-efficacy (Stegall, 2011; Tiong, 2016).

PLCs put educators in close instructional proximity with one another and compel them to develop foundations of trust and interdependence (DuFour et al., 2016; Gray & Summers, 2016; Williams, 2013). Given the conditions associated with team-oriented environments, international school educators may struggle with feeling successful and competent within highly collaborative structures, like PLCs. Beyond examining the PLC experiences of educators working in traditional Western, namely North American, schools, there is a lack of research on this topic from an international perspective (Bolam et al., 2005; Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Toole & Louis, 2002). Therefore, an examination of international schoolteachers' perspectives with PLCs may help sustain these organizational structures and practices in their respective schools.

Research Questions

Self-efficacy is a construct that is often examined in tandem with motivation and human agency (Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). When individuals feel more efficacious, they are likely to exhibit behaviors to help them sustain through challenges and obstacles. Seeking to explore teachers' beliefs of self-efficacy within PLCs in international school settings, the following research questions were designed to provide direction and offer voice to the study's participants.

1. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive the value of PLCs?
2. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive self-efficacy?

3. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive their sense of self-efficacy impacts their engagement with PLC colleagues to coordinate instructional programming and decision-making focused on improving student achievement?

Description of Terms

In an effort to establish a common language for the concepts explored throughout this study, the following list of terms serves to clarify key factors related to the foundational constructs of this study, i.e. self-efficacy and PLCs. These definitions are grounded in the literature, and they are designed to explicate the range of conditions that influence the interplay between the self-efficacy of teachers and their participation in PLCs.

Collaborative inquiry. Teachers engage in collaborative inquiry when they systematically come together to analyze and evaluate evidence of student learning, ask questions of each other related to instructional practices, and identify successes and challenges associated with instructional programming (Bolden et al., 2014; Carpenter, 2017)

Collective efficacy. Groups exercise collective efficacy when they employ a shared belief in their combined ability to achieve measures of success with specific tasks or actions (Angelle & Teague, 2014; Bandura, 1997; Goddard & Goddard, 2001).

International school/American international school. An international school is a PK-12 private school that espouses an American-oriented curriculum that operates outside of the geographic boundaries of the United States (Hayden & Thompson, 2011).

Professional development. Professional development refers to in-depth and active learning experiences designed to increase the professional capacities of educators (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

Professional learning community (PLC). PLCs involve educators collaborating in a systematic and regular manner to examine evidence of student learning to improve the performance of students (DuFour, 2004).

Relational trust. Relational trust describes social exchanges that are characterized by conditions of shared obligations and expectations and a level of mutual vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Results orientation. A results orientation is a process in which educators use a variety of assessments to determine the performance of their students (DuFour, 2004).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to the belief in oneself to achieve measures of success with a specific task or action (Bandura, 1997; Maddux, 2013; Pajares, 1996).

Teacher turnover. Teacher turnover refers to the act of a person responsible for classroom teaching ending their employment with a specific school in order to pursue a new opportunity elsewhere (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009).

Significance of the Study

Some researchers believe that the purpose of schooling is to create a learning environment in which schools are held accountable to ensure students achieve prescribed measures of success (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014). Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) acknowledge the range of conceptions associated with student success from the more traditional measures of standardized test scores and grades to more skill-based conceptualizations, such as critical thinking, public speaking, and writing proficiency.

Regardless of the precise definition for student success, many schools have begun to develop PLCs in order to operationalize criteria for ongoing student success. In fact, Vescio et al. (2008) characterize the magnitude of schools' adoption of PLCs as a "paradigm shift

gathering momentum with regard to professional development of teachers" (p. 80). These structures ask teachers to examine evidence of student learning and then make instructional changes based on the information gleaned from their analyses (Owen, 2014; Spillane, Shirrell, & Hopkins, 2016).

Beyond implementation of PLCs, schools have examined how to sustain these organizational systems (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008). International schools, in particular, struggle with fulfilling these practices in the face of having highly mobile staffs (Benson, 2011; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). The significance of this study is grounded in examining how teachers operating in American international schools employ their self-efficacy to influence their behaviors associated with PLCs (e.g., engaging with colleagues to coordinate around instructional programming and decision-making focused on improving student achievement).

By further illuminating teachers' perspectives on self-efficacy, practices and policies regarding PLCs can be implemented by international school administrators and teachers to ensure greater success with these school reform initiatives. Additionally, there may be a tangential benefit associated with developing more effective PLCs. As teachers feel more connected and invested with one another and operate with a deeper sense of shared decision making, there may be a greater likelihood for teachers to remain in their current school settings for a longer period of time (Mancuso et al., 2010). Consequently, when teachers remain at schools for longer periods of time, greater stability with curriculum and expectations arises, and an increased continuity of instructional programming evolves to help mitigate gaps in student learning.

Overview of Research Methods

Much of the research to date on self-efficacy has been grounded in quantitative methodologies (Bryant, 2017; Maddux, 2013). Various iterations of teachers' self-efficacy scales have been developed, and researchers have used them to isolate factors that have both a positive and negative impact on self-efficacy. What is lacking with quantitative research associated with self-efficacy and within PLCs specifically, however, is hearing the teachers' voices (Klassen et al., 2011). Asking teachers to engage in PLC practices that bring them into close professional proximity with others can be a very personal and intimidating experience (Little, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial that efforts are made to explicate the individual thought processes and motivations within the context of PLC work structures. Jackson and Mazzei (2008) posit that voice is inextricably enmeshed within qualitative research by making participants' voices truly heard and understood. Data-collection methods, like semi-structured interviews and observations, serve to illuminate participants' personal insights and understandings in ways that surveys will never be able to capture. Qualitative approaches allow researchers to go deeper into a phenomenon that needs further explanation and investigation (Flick, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, this study seeks to narrow the gap in the literature and address, as Wyatt (2014) argued, a need for more qualitative data focusing on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter represents a review of the literature that explores the role and purpose professional learning communities (PLCs) play within the school setting. It is a role that some see as having the ability to transform the schooling experience for students (DuFour, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). A brief review of the history of PLCs will be explored, and a working definition and an examination of the common characteristics comprising PLCs will be provided.

Acknowledging the central role collaboration plays within PLCs (DuFour et al., 2016), this review of the literature examines the concepts of self and collective efficacy and how these constructs may impact collaborative practices within PLCs (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Social cognitive theory will be examined as the theoretical framework explaining how efficacy influences individuals' behaviors and actions within PLCs. Specifically, the interplay of personal factors, behaviors, and social environmental conditions encompassed within social cognitive theory will be used as an organizing frame for explaining how teachers engage with their peers within a PLC setting.

Rather than looking broadly at schools, this chapter explores how the concepts of PLCs and self-efficacy operate within the unique learning context of schools utilizing an American approach to curricula in international settings. For the purposes of this study, Hayden and Thompson's (2011) definition of international schools is used, framing these PK-12 schools as private educational entities that espouse a decidedly American curriculum outside the geographic boundaries of the United States. American international schools grapple with a changing teacher and student composition that compels some teachers to want to teach in isolation (Stuart, 2016).

Flinders (1988) characterizes teacher isolation as "opportunities, or lack of opportunities, the teacher has for interacting with colleagues" (p. 19). This notion of professional distance and separation teachers sometime feel is precisely the issue PLCs in American international schools seek to address. Therefore, this review explores how PLCs may thrive in a learning environment that must contend with unique challenges associated with teaching within American international schools.

Overview of Professional Learning Communities

With greater emphasis on data-driven decision-making and accountability initiatives at play in the national educational discourse, efforts have been undertaken to reform PK-12 school systems (Hamilton et al., 2009; Mandinach & Gummer, 2016; Marsh & Farrell, 2014; Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006). School leaders have examined practices that have sought to improve organizational capacity to address student achievement. A chief element within this reorganization of learning has been the PLC (DuFour, 2007; DuFour et al., 2016; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Sims & Penny, 2015; Tam, 2015). The origin of PLCs has its roots in Senge's work on learning teams within the business world. Senge (1990) argues that collaboration and a focus on shared learning lead to greater overall capacity of the organization. It is his work that seemed to have attracted educational scholars to examine how learning teams functioned within the school setting and thereby increased the capacity of schools to meet student needs (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004).

PLCs are generally defined by three "big ideas" or critical elements: a focus on the results of students, collaboration and reflection on teacher practices, and the impact on student learning (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2016; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). At the heart of effectively functioning PLCs is a shift in focus from teachers'

practices and behaviors to one that is centered on student and classroom learning (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009; Vescio et al., 2008).

Building upon the three essential elements of PLCs, the notions of a common understanding and a shared enterprise are important to the development of PLCs as well. When individuals translated their common understandings into a foundation of shared vision, they began to develop a clearer sense of how their actions today impact the future of their collective work (Hord, 1997; Senge, 1990). Operating with a shared vision, teachers are better equipped to make changes to their practice and, thus, lead to greater student achievement (DuFour et al., 2016).

The primacy of student learning is a theme that runs through many of the iterative models of PLCs (DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2016; Swanson, Earl Rinehart, & Mills, 2018). A focus on the substance and quality of instruction is integral to school reform efforts like PLCs (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Discourse focusing on what students are learning, how they are being assessed, and what instructional avenues to employ if students are not achieving at expected levels are all paramount to the work of PLCs (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 2005).

Expanding upon the foundational components of collaborative work embedded in PLCs, Haberman (2004) considers how learning communities are built and sustained in both primary and secondary school settings. The table below captures the attributes he considers critical to establishing successful learning communities in schools.

Table 1

Haberman's Attributes for Learning Communities

Attribute	Descriptor
Modeling	Teachers employ strategies to students that are similar to the ones that fostered their own learning and growth
Continual Sharing of Ideas	Teachers frequently share ideas regarding instruction, classroom management, assessment, etc. with their colleagues
Collaboration	Teachers engage in collaborative initiatives, like team teaching, that compel them to work together for program development purposes
Egalitarianism	Teachers operate within a structure that is devoid of positional status. People freely share ideas that flow from one or more sources.
High Productivity	Teachers continually push themselves to achieve high results. Improvement is the focus, and high achievement is a constantly moving target.
Community	Individual teachers place more value on the collective sense of community than on their own status or title.
Practical Applications	Teachers routinely see how the work in which they are engaging improves the educational experiences for their students. A strong emphasis on the efficacy of their efforts for students is the primary lens through which daily work is judged and evaluated.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2013) contend that effective PLCs operate with the following six elements: collaborative teams focused on learning; collective inquiry; action orientation and experimentation; commitment to continuous improvement; a results orientation; and shared mission, vision, values, and goals. To help schools and districts evaluate their success with implementation of PLCs, DuFour et al. (2013) offer an action guide for school organizations to consider as they execute PLC learning structures. Table 2 captures questions they believe schools should contemplate throughout the PLC implementation process.

Table 2

Questions to Consider for Implementation of PLCs

Questions	Ideas to Consider
Question #1	What is the fundamental purpose of your school?
Question #2	If your school adopted learning as its fundamental purpose, what questions would teachers, staff, and administrators ask?
Question #3	How does your school promote learning for the adults who work there?
Question #4	What are some factors that contribute to a school administration or staff's failure to implement what we know will help all students learn at high levels?
Question #5	Assume your school is engaged in implementing the professional learning community concept and a reporter is interviewing you for a story for the local newspaper. How would you respond if the reporter asked the question, "Exactly what is a professional learning community?"
Question #6	How has your district or school approached the task of ensuring that everyone has gained a common understanding and a common vocabulary?
Question #7	Has a detailed assessment of the current reality of the state of student learning levels in your school been undertaken?
Question #8	When listening to the language in your school, how precise is the understanding of important PLC terms?
Question #9	What behaviors would one exhibit if he or she behaved in a professional manner? What behaviors would one exhibit if he or she focused on learning and if he or she conducted his or her work as part of a community?

Realizing schools are elaborate and interdependent organizations (Bidwell, 2001; Clark & Dockweiler, 2019; Hanson, 1996), it is important to consider the freedom teachers in PLCs have to operate within the larger school setting. This concept of freedom is grounded in the notion of teacher professional autonomy and its foundational role in sustaining PLCs (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Linder et al., 2012). Giles and Hargreaves (2006) and Day (2007) argue that

autonomy is an important facet for teachers in PLCs who are asked to operate within larger school reforms demanding greater standardization.

Many scholars have highlighted the frustrations and the reluctance with sharing that some teachers feel during the process of implementing PLCs (Nelson, LeBard, & Waters, 2010). However, a differentiated approach to implementation sees the process as ongoing, with targeted professional development and supports being critical for success (Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Thessin, 2015). Offering a six-pronged model to guide implementation, Thessin (2015) argues that the following are all necessary ingredients to effective implementation: inquiry, analyzing data, looking at student work, examining instruction, assessing student progress, and reflection.

Structuring and Executing Professional Learning Communities

While there seems to be some synergy on the core components that constitute a professional learning community, there are multiple configurations in existence on how PLCs are formed and managed. These configurations vary from school to school and from district to district. In some cases, the ways in which PLCs are organized may vary between the different levels within a single school district, e.g., elementary schools may be operate their PLCs in a manner different from those of the middle or high school teams, etc.

Hord (2009) offers two fundamental ways of organizing PLCs. The first format she shares involves members coming together as either a grade-level team or as a subject-matter team in a weekly meeting to discuss students' needs and matters involving curriculum and instructional programming, while the second format for PLCs involves members meeting as an entire staff monthly to examine school data and to set goals for the school at large and for individual grade-level teams. However, at the crux of each of the models there must be a desire for the school administrator to stratify leadership throughout the learning organization in an

effort to share power and decision-making authority with teachers and support staff (Bolam et al., 2005; Hord, 2009).

Other formats beyond grade-level and whole-school models have emerged. With its 2015 School Transformation Toolkit, Microsoft Partners in Learning suggests PLCs may also meet as vertical teams of multiple grade levels examining the same subject matter, as virtual electronic teams with fellow educators around the globe, as teams committed to outcomes or goals aligned to a specific area of expertise, or as teams linking K-12 educators and university faculty around a particular topic or area of shared interest. Regardless of the constitutive human elements of the team, Microsoft Partners in Learning argues that the structural parameters of time to confer, the existence of collaborative roles, communication structures, and teacher empowerment must be present for successful PLCs to exist.

DuFour (2007) proposes that the structural format parameters of PLCs are not the most compelling issues facing school leaders and teachers engaged in the PLC process. She asserts that, regardless of school role, PLC members must function as a team, and she believes they must adhere to the common principles of effective PLCs.

Furthermore, DuFour (2007) advises that effective PLC teams must meet weekly at a minimum, and she offers the following configurations as possible team structures for PLCs: grade-level teams, course/content teams, vertical teams spanning multiple grade levels, electronic teams with a job-alike status from various schools, interdisciplinary teams comprised of teachers from a variety of course types who are focused on a common foundational goal, district or regional job-alike teams with members from the same content area, or teams with members sharing a similar responsibility with a particular set of students.

Bolam et al. (2005) argue that context and setting are critical factors for executing PLCs successfully, and they contend that focusing on learning processes, optimizing human and social resources, overseeing structural resources, and collaborating with external forces are necessary conditions for creating and developing PLCs.

Additionally, beyond the structural configurations for how PLCs are physically organized, members of PLCs need help deciding what to focus on during recurring PLC sessions. Drawing upon the "big ideas" of PLCs, DuFour (2004) argues that all PLCs must be structured in a way that allows participants to focus on student learning. Questions around what members want students to learn, how members will know if students have learned the material, and how members will respond when students have difficulty with the material are foundational to the functioning of a PLC (DuFour, 2007; DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2016). In fact, DuFour (2004) claims that how members respond when students struggle with learning expectations helps distinguish schools that operate as PLCs from schools characterized as traditional in design.

Thessin and Starr (2011) contend, "Teachers do not magically know how to work with colleagues; districts must support and lead that work if PLCs are to live up to their potential" (p. 49). They assert that districts must ensure the following practices in order to implement PLCs effectively: provide ownership and support to building administrators and teachers; offer robust professional development that models ideal PLC behaviors; explicate how building-level PLC practices align with district-level improvement processes; and deliver differentiated support structures to schools in an ongoing manner.

Whether a school's PLC teams are configured around grade levels or specific content areas, DuFour (2004) warns that PLCs face the threat of becoming a passing fad or a reform

effort that fades if school leaders and teachers are not steadfastly committed to the core principles of PLCs. In fact, DuFour (2004) asserts, "The term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (p. 6). Until the underlying elements of collaboration, reflective practice, and targeted focus on student response to instruction are embedded in the cultural landscape of the school, PLCs risk becoming yet another thing to do or another process to follow instead of helping transform and redesign how schools operate and see themselves as learning organizations for all students.

DuFour and Reeves (2016) refer to this phenomenon of schools failing to embrace the requisite ingredients of PLCs as "PLC Lite" (p. 69). They argue that schools rebranding old practices of inaction and a focus on teaching as opposed to student learning as PLCs will not result in improved student achievement or lead to an increase in professional capacity. They assert, "Too many schools have adopted the label without committing to the substance of the professional learning community processes" (p. 71).

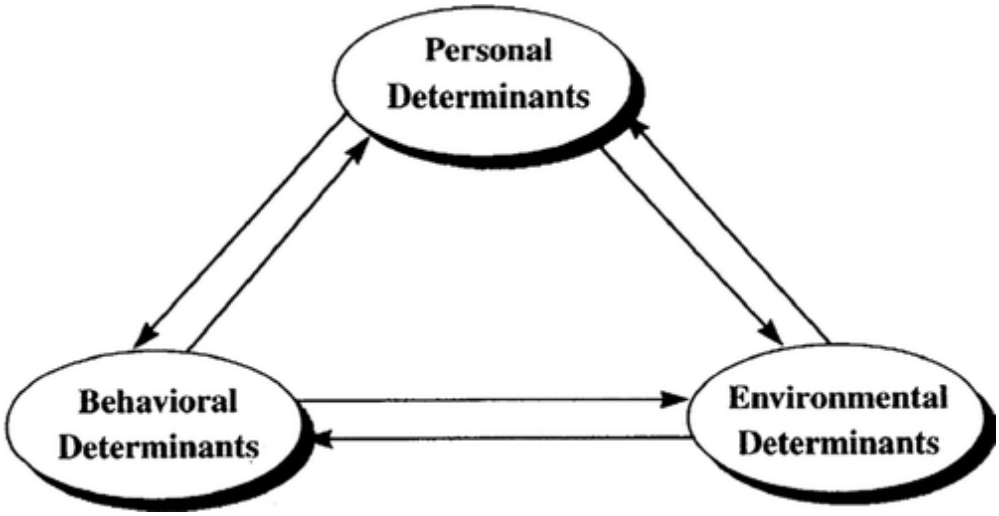
Self-Efficacy and Social Cognitive Theory

Given the fact PLCs are organizational structures that bring individuals together for a shared instructional purpose (DuFour, 2004), examination of what influences individuals' personal levels of commitment to impact a collective PLC goal of improving student achievement is warranted. Albert Bandura is seen as a leader in developing a theoretical framework examining efficacy and its impact on individual performance (Gavora, 2010; Pajares, 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). Known as social cognitive theory, Bandura's (1978) established triadic model of reciprocal determinism is comprised of behavior, cognition, and other personal factors and influences from the larger environment (see Figure 1). This three-pronged model helps explain how individuals' behaviors and actions are influenced by their interactions with

others as well as how a person's behavior impacts and is impacted by both environmental and personal conditions.

Figure 1

Bandura's Triadic Reciprocal Determinism



Note. Schematization of Triadic Reciprocal Determination in the Causal Model of Social Cognitive Theory. From "On the Functional Properties of Perceived Self-Efficacy Revisited," by A. Bandura, 2011, *Journal of Management*, *38*(1), p. 12. Copyright 2012 by SAGE. Reprinted with permission. (See Appendix L)

Bandura (1989) advances a notion of personal agency that is rooted in a "person's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (p. 1175). This concept of human agency informs our understanding of how the concept of self-efficacy is couched within the larger theoretical framework of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1977) refers to efficacy as a belief in oneself being able to accomplish a desired outcome.

It is important to examine how the notion of self-efficacy manifests itself in the lives of teachers working in PLCs (Tiong, 2016). Teacher self-efficacy has been characterized as the perceived belief in one's ability to plan for and execute instruction and achieve desired

objectives aligned with instructional practices (Gavora, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) further explain teacher self-efficacy as judgment on one's ability to achieve intended outcomes related to student engagement and learning. Teacher self-efficacy has had a profound influence on data-driven instructional decision making and the selection of instructional tasks teachers choose to pursue (Dunn, Airola, Lo, & Garrison, 2013).

Beyond developing a notion of self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) promotes a model of efficacy expectations that includes four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Mastery experience refers to individuals achieving success with previous actions, while vicarious experience refers to seeing others accomplish tasks. Verbal persuasion indicates having others express their belief in one's ability to achieve success with the desired task, while emotional arousal is grounded in the idea that anxiety and fear may impact a person's belief in their ability to expect success. Taken together, these sources of efficacy help promote efficacy development in teachers (Babaei & Abednia, 2016; Bernadowski, Perry, & Del Greco, 2013; Bruce & Flynn, 2013; Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013; Mintzes, Marcum, Messerschmidt-Yates, & Mark, 2013).

Of the four sources of self-efficacy, many contend that mastery experiences were the most powerful source of efficacy because they directly involved the person specifically achieving mastery, or not, over a specific skill or task (Chowdhury, Endres, & Lanis, 2002; Goddard, Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015; Shehzad, bin Hamzah, & Rawian, 2018). Ramdass and Zimmerman (2008) advocate a future-oriented disposition to self-efficacy in that it helps predict one's ability to perform certain tasks in instances yet to occur. Additionally, Grant (2006) claims the potency of positive mastery experiences could influence other aspects of life beyond the specific task in question.

It is important to note teachers' beliefs about themselves and their teaching practices are not fixed constructs; they evolve over a teacher's career (Alger, 2009; Boomgard, 2013; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Some have argued that it is important to acknowledge and reflect upon teachers' self-efficacy at the inception of their careers, namely during teacher education programs (Daniels, Mandzuk, Perry, & Moore, 2011). By examining self-efficacy early on, it may be possible to shape more positive and well-grounded conceptions of self-efficacy as teachers begin their entry into the teaching profession (Jamil, Downer, & Pianta, 2012).

Self-efficacy is a somewhat malleable component for pre-service teachers, and educator preparation programs should invest time and effort in developing it within candidates who are about to enter the teaching profession (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). However, some researchers noted that at some point a teacher's sense of self-efficacy stabilizes, and teaching experiences seem to reinforce already held beliefs unless an opportunity of practice arises that compels a teacher to rethink one's construction of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Bandura (1997) extends this idea by expressing that self-efficacy may even become less capable of change over time.

Due to this fluid nature of efficacy, scales have been developed to measure teachers' self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) created a teacher efficacy scale that has now become widely used by others, labeling theirs The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES). Their scale included three factors that they believe are critical for determining a teacher's self-efficacy: efficacy for engagement, efficacy for instructional strategies and efficacy for classroom management. Efficacy for engagement refers to teachers' beliefs in how they promote and sustain student engagement. Efficacy of instructional strategies examines how well teachers believe they can modify approaches and strategies to meet varying

students' needs. Lastly, efficacy for classroom management assesses how well teachers believe they can account for student behavior. Ultimately, these subscales reveal the multi-dimensional nature of teachers' awareness of their own effectiveness and the variance that may exist among the three dimensions (Lee, Cawthon, & Dawson, 2013).

Collaboration and Teacher Efficacy

As a result of recent school reform initiatives, collaboration has become a cornerstone of professional experiences within schools (Goddard et al., 2007; Kelly, Merry, & Gonzalez, 2018). Teachers must daily navigate a complex web of social relationships and networks within schools. Strong collaborative networks may enhance teachers' efficacy and indirectly benefit their students' achievement (Goddard et al., 2007; Moolenaar, 2012; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Furthermore, some educational researchers have argued that school administration should place greater emphasis on collaboration and encourage more positive relationships among teachers to increase team effectiveness (Madrid, 2016; Ning et al., 2015).

Expanding our understanding of how collaboration is embedded within schools' organizational structures, Chong and Kong (2012) refer to "collaborative learning structures" as part of a process in which teams come together on a frequent basis to identify student needs and then pursue new teaching methods and activities. Their findings suggest a recursive cycle in which opportunities for collaborative practice led to greater efficacy for the promotion of new and creative instructional practices (Goddard et al., 2007).

Nexus Between Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy

Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, and Benson (2010) argue that collective efficacy is related to self-efficacy in that both constructs look at how effort and dedication to a task influence one's beliefs of success related to the task. "However, rather than focusing on the

beliefs and efforts of the individual, it focuses on the beliefs and efforts of the group" (p. 227). Moreover, collective efficacy is a group's ability to develop and implement actions to achieve a desired level of success (Bandura, 1986). The concept of organizational agency is rooted within the larger idea of collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000), and it is viewed as a tool for schools to act deliberately in seeking to attain desired outcomes.

Some posit that a group's collective efficacy may be influenced by the individual members' estimations of their own self-efficacy and that each of these separate but related constructs impacts the success and effectiveness of organizations (Kurt, Duyar, & Çalik, 2012). Stronger instructional practices by other teachers in a school may compel individual teachers to develop more rigorous practices and objectives with their students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Many contend that Bandura's (1977) model of sources of self-efficacy, i.e. mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional state applies to collective efficacy as well (Goddard et al., 2000). However, Goddard et al. (2000) expand that model to include two key components: analysis of the teaching task and assessment of teaching competence. They believed that teachers were only able to determine their collective efficacy after calculating the impact of these two critical elements.

Moreover, collective efficacy influences a group's ability to function, and it serves as a future-oriented construct about a group's beliefs of itself (Moolenaar et al., 2012). It is believed that offering teachers opportunities to share information and practices and participate in teacher leadership experiences helps increase the group's collective efficacy and capacity to motivate students and deliver more sound instructional programming (Angelle & Teague, 2014).

Professional Development and Teacher Efficacy

Beyond examining the role and purpose of teacher efficacy, it is important to explore how professional development impacts teachers' sense of efficacy. It is noted that professional development experiences positively impact teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Althauser, 2015; Epstein & Willhite, 2015; Yoo, 2016). Teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy may increase after mentorship opportunities (Edwards, 2009; Moulding, Stewart, & Dunmeyer, 2014; St-Jean, Radu-Lefebvre, & Mathieu, 2018), and, in many cases, teachers find ways to transfer greater self-efficacy onto their students.

Guskey (2002) defines professional development in terms of its capacity to alter teachers' beliefs in their ability to improve student-learning outcomes via improved classroom practices. Furthermore, Bayar (2014) explicates teachers' conceptions of what constitutes sound professional development with the following assertion:

> Any effective professional development activity should consist of the following components: 1) a match to existing teacher needs, 2) a match to existing school needs, 3) teacher involvement in the design/planning of professional development activities, 4) active participation opportunities, 5) long-term engagement, and 6) high-quality instructors. (pp. 324-325)

Professional development has the possibility of integrating Bandura's (1977) model of sources of influence on self-efficacy (Sandholtz & Ringstaff, 2014). Examining science instruction, Sandholtz and Ringstaff (2014) find that teachers' sense of self-efficacy increases over the course of their exposure to professional development experiences that are focused and ongoing.

Furthermore, looking specifically at instructional, engagement, and classroom management efficacies within the mathematics classroom, Ross and Bruce (2007) reveal that professional development experiences improve teachers' self-efficacy most significantly as it relates to student management within the mathematics classroom. They found that exposure to targeted professional development helps teachers feel more confident in their capacity to manage students' behaviors within their classrooms. They further assert that longer exposure to focused professional development will increase the level of impact that professional development has on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs.

Professional development experience may be considered a type of work-integrated learning (WIL). Matoti, Junqueira, and Odora (2011) characterize WIL as a learning experience in which participants have the opportunity to apply newly gained knowledge directly within the context of their work environment. Working with accounting students, Subramaniam and Freudenberg (2007) uncover that work-integrated learning that offers students the opportunity to engage in simulated knowledge and skill-development exercises increases participants' sense of self-efficacy significantly.

Connecting Factors of Teacher Turnover and Relational Trust

The current teacher turnover rate in the U.S. is approximately 16% (The National Council on Teacher Quality, 2017). For their analysis, teacher turnover rate is an aggregate of teachers leaving current positions within the profession and those individuals leaving the teaching force altogether. As teachers leave schools, existing connections and relationships between colleagues suffer (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Trust takes time to build, and all of the effort and time that went into developing relational trust is lost once teaching peers leave a particular school setting. Bryk and Schneider (2002) explore the role of trust in schools,

particularly in the area of how trust enables greater measures of student achievement. They contend that trust establishes an atmosphere of organizational collaboration that leads to improved student achievement (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015).

Lack of trust in schools can also be seen as a major barrier to larger school reform efforts (Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). Reform-oriented structures in schools that require greater collaboration and sharing of practices among educators are built upon foundations of trust, and conditions that damage relational trust also serve to diminish the efficacy of existing reform initiatives. Though they did not examine the concept of collaborative communities in schools, Hsu, Ju, Yen, and Chang (2007) find that trust impacts self-efficacy and the willingness of participants to share knowledge within the context of online virtual communities.

Bryk and Schneider (2003) define relational trust as social exchanges between members of a school community that carry with them perceived obligations and expectations. They offer several key conditions believed to be necessary to build and sustain relational trust in schools. One of their critical factors for trust was maintaining a stable school environment. While they define characteristics of stability regarding the school's student population, stability may also be framed regarding the teaching staff population. When changes in teaching staff occur, i.e. teacher turnover, relational trust is negatively impacted. Ingersoll's (2001) landmark study examined factors contributing to teacher turnover, and he determined that the lack of organizational structures that have been shown to generate trust and collaboration in schools, e.g., shared decision-making and support from colleagues, are more likely to lead to instances of teacher turnover.

Relational trust is not a concept solely relevant to the context of schools; it has been shown to be an important factor in a variety of organizational and institutional settings

(Bachmann, Gillespie, & Priem, 2015; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). Without looking at a specific organizational context, Fulmer and Gelfand (2012) found that the presence of relational trust facilitates greater knowledge sharing among organizational members, and it leads to higher levels of performance outcomes for both individuals and team configurations.

Looking specifically at industrial sector entities, Schilke and Cook (2015) examined how trust influences strategic alliances among organizational members. They found that a healthy organizational culture comprised of clearly defined rules and values plays a critical role in developing and sustaining perceptions of relational trust within the organization. Sinek (2009) also argues the importance of relational trust in organizations. Examining a variety of corporate cultures, he found that trust develops from members having a shared sense of values and beliefs with others, and he contends that trust leads to cooperation and reliance on others in furthering the underlying aims of the organization.

Similar to educational settings, Hastings (2011) contends that lack of trust in business organizations may also lead to higher instances of corporate turnover. She asserts that lack of trust compels individuals to examine whether or not they align with the overall organization, and when trust falters disengagement from the organization may occur. Moreover, Simons (2002) echoes the notion that a loss of trust may lead to employee turnover and a decline in corporate profitability. Looking specifically at a hotel chain in the United States and Canada, he found that the larger umbrella of profitability was depressed in hotel sites in which employees did not hold high levels of trust in others.

International School Contexts

The International Schools Consultancy, in its 2016 Global Report, estimates that 8,500 English-medium international schools operate worldwide, representing a 41% increase in the

number of international schools during the past five years. The United States Department of State's Office of Overseas Schools asserts that it supports schools serving approximately 130,000 students across the globe (United States Department of State, 2017). These numbers represent a substantial increase in international schools over the past decade, an increase that may be attributable to both globalization and the profit-making potential of such schools (Bates, 2010).

The term *international school* is a somewhat elusive term. Hayden (2006) explains that schools call themselves international in part because of the types of student populations they serve and the type of curriculum they promote. However, she concludes that most schools identified as international possess the common characteristics of being private learning organizations that charge fees for students to attend.

Hayden (2006) further describes the types of students that typically attend international schools as expatriates and host country nationals. Coining the term "globally mobile child," she contends these students' relocations to other countries are temporary in nature and result from circumstances associated with their parents' employment. Reid, Collins, and Singh (2014) refer to teachers pursuing careers in international schools as globally mobile as well, and they characterize a teaching certificate as a "passport to global mobility" (p. 65).

Furthering the use of the term "globally mobile" as it applies to individuals within an international school setting, Barron (2017) contends that global mobility and the transitions associated with it have an impact on an array of academic and social emotional factors for students leaving or entering international schools. Barron (2017) argues the mobility that characterizes international schools should be utilized in a way that "is not traumatic but is a springboard for growth, not an inhibitor to learning but an activator of learning" (p. 63).

Beyond the type of students attending international schools, it is claimed that a chief aim of international schools is to cultivate a sense of global citizenship among its students (Marshall, 2011). It can be argued that citizenship education involves students reflecting upon a variety of geographic and cultural identities within the context of the school curriculum (Banks, 2008). However, the concept of globalization and competing perceptions of identity associated with being international permeate international schools' curriculum and the mindsets of both the students and teachers within these school settings (Hayden, Rancic, & Thompson, 2000). There is no unifying consensus among international school teachers or students of what the term "international" means, nor is there wholesale agreement on how this term appropriately applies to international schools' curriculum (James, 2005).

While international schools seek to establish collaborative teaching practices among staff members similar to stateside schools, international schools struggle with a frequently changing staff (Stuart, 2016). Hayden and Thompson (2011) characterize teachers in international schools as people whose love of travel is coupled with a job that is seemingly transferable. Tenure is rather abbreviated with contracts generally lasting for only two to three years.

International schools can be described as highly complex organizations with varying aims, designs, and visions (Hayden & Thompson, 2013; Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010). Many have contended that international schools must grapple with the changing nature of the teachers and administrators working within these particular school settings (Stuart, 2016). It can be stated that this phenomenon of transience may threaten the stability upon which international schools rest (Mancuso et al., 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009).

Beyond the difficulties associated with the changing composition of teaching staff, Bailey (2015) examines the barriers that exist between expatriate and local teachers in an international

school setting in Malaysia. She frames the barriers as a tool of stratification that bisected the learning community in the building in a way that hindered collaboration and social interaction between the two classifications of teachers.

Hardman (2001) explores some of the origins to the separation between expatriate and local teachers. He asserts that the divisions between the two groups arise from anger and resentment from local teachers toward expatriate teachers because of the differences in their pay and benefits for what they see as doing roughly the same job. Hardman (2001) concludes that these differences may impact the school's ability to create and sustain a positive working environment.

Instructional Challenges for International Schools

International schools exhibit a great deal of diversity on a range of matters (Hayden & Thompson, 2016). Given the mobility with which stakeholders move within the larger international school community, it is difficult for international schools to maintain a common set of expectations among themselves (Hayden, 2006). Odland (2008) echoes this notion of an underlying loose association among international schools on a range of topics. There is no mandated overarching curricular framework or a unifying set of standards to guide individual schools' work with students (Speirs, 2017). One of the biggest challenges for students and families arises when students leave an international school and transfer to another one, or perhaps even return to a school within their country of origin. Since expectations vary and course nomenclature differs among schools, it is difficult for the receiving school to determine what instructional experiences and skills a transferring student possesses. This becomes particularly pronounced for grades 9-12 at the high school level. Since many of the courses in the high school have specific prerequisites, schools are faced with the challenge of interpreting coursework from

another international school. This lack of curricular alignment may force students to repeat coursework or be placed in some classes for which they are not fully prepared. Stuart (2016) captures the lack of a unifying thread with the following statement:

> This lack of national or state accountability and the highly independent teacher population can lead to an inconsistency in instruction and assessment practices. The quality of instruction, feedback, and interventions can depend entirely on the particular teacher who happens to land on the school's doorstep that year. (p. 3)

An additional consideration that international schools must contend with is the high expectations families have for their children enrolled in these types of schools (Hayden, 2006; Westerman, 2012). While enrollment in an international school may be based in part on circumstances related to one or more parents' employment (Hayden & Thompson, 2016), many families want to send their children to an international school because they believe these types of schools will best prepare their children to compete in the global marketplace later in life. Viewing their children's time at an international school as preparation for entrance into the best Western universities (Bunnell, 2019), many parents of students enrolled in international schools become intensely focused on scores and evidence of high academic achievement. While present in many international schools throughout the globe, this intensity with academics is especially prevalent with parents in international schools operating in Asia (Lee, Hallinger, & Walker, 2012). In fact, Seth (2002) calls this preoccupation with grades and academic outcomes "education fever." While he examined educational practices and attitudes specifically within South Korea, many of the families' approaches and beliefs related to education resonate throughout Asia. This focused approach to schooling becomes a major factor for consideration among international school administrators and teachers. Many times, conversations related to

parental expectations become focal points for teachers and administrators as they evaluate programming efficacy and discuss instructional objectives and other decision-making factors within PLCs and during other collaborative staff meetings. International schools are constantly balancing a learning context that affirms instructional strategies that compel students to question and apply their learning while also providing for a robust exam-oriented environment that frequently assesses students' progress with material.

Collaboration and Intercultural Competence in International Schools

In American international schools, the teaching staff is generally comprised of individuals from many different parts of the globe (Brunton, 2016). As a result of this mix, teachers bring with them a variety of cultural differences. In addition to expatriate hires, international schools often fill some of the teaching positions with individuals from the host nation. The resulting composition of staff constitutes a diverse range of nationalities, cultural norms, mores, and expectations (Hayden & Thompson, 2011).

Despite all of the cultural differences, teachers are asked to collaborate with colleagues in organizational configurations like PLCs (Toole & Louis, 2002) and develop a common understanding and consensus around a range of issues facing teachers, like instructional planning, assessment, and teacher-student relationships. The task of finding consensus becomes exponentially more difficult and often leads to dysfunction when constituent members of collaborative teams do not possess a shared understanding or working definition of norms of practice and critical outcomes for students (Weber, 2010).

Additionally, a unique cultural factor facing educators working in American international schools in Asia is the hierarchical structure in which Asian societies generally operate. Hairon and Tan (2017) explain that a hierarchical or top-down approach with organizational structures

pervades many schools in Asia, and this structural orientation may impact collaboration efforts embedded within PLCs. While many Western educators are more familiar and comfortable with an egalitarian-style of school operations that is characterized by a shared or distributive model of school leadership, Asian educators may find dissonance and discomfort with such models (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). Generally speaking, teachers from Asian cultures may feel more comfortable with being provided explicit directions from the school's administrative hierarchy, and they may be uncomfortable debating, questioning, or challenging school administration or fellow teachers on a host of matters related to instructional decision-making that are commonplace in robust PLC settings (Hairon & Tan, 2017).

Hofstede (2011) explains this phenomenon as rooted in the existence of power distance among members of a particular society or culture. He refers to power distances as a dimension of national culture in which members expect and accept that some in the organization wield more power than others. In societies in which large power distances exist, particularly in Asia, members are willing to tolerate a larger degree of power inequality. However, in societies in which smaller power distances are noted, namely Western societies, less willingness for power differentials is realized. For PLC teams comprised of local and expatriate teachers who come from cultures employing differing power distance dynamics, this is a cultural hurdle that may need to be acknowledged and addressed in order for the teams to operate more effectively.

Looking at educational reform in Hong Kong, Carless and Harfitt (2013) examine the impact of cultural differences on educational reform efforts. They conclude that differences in cultural factors impact a variety of circumstances facing educators, with the most notable being the way classrooms are organized, the means by which assessments are conducted, and expectations for students.

Carless and Walker (2006) assert that successful collaboration hinges upon teachers' abilities to reconcile differences in beliefs, culture, and expectations, and, while they acknowledge that differences may arise from educators from the same culture, differences are more likely to stem from individuals coming from disparate cultures.

Highlighting the concept of personal agency, Lai, Li, and Gong (2016) exposed some of the dangers associated with internationalizing education within the context of international schools. In their study, they acknowledge the opportunities for intercultural development of teaching staff that comes with international schools, but they also warn that certain structural and cultural forces at play in international schools tend to affirm people from Western cultures and diminish the agency of others from non-Western cultural backgrounds. They contend schools must be aware of this phenomenon and make strategic and practical changes to organizational operations in a way that affirms individual staff members' sense of personal agency while also optimizing opportunities for staff learning in effective cross-cultural professional development experiences.

The commingling of cultures is often referred to as being intercultural in nature. Lloyd and Härtel (2009) characterize the skills that individuals need in order to negotiate working relationships with people from other cultures as intercultural competencies. They define these specific competencies as "a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are used when interacting with culturally diverse team members" (p. 846).

Given the diverse range of backgrounds and nationalities comprised within the staffs of American international schools, PLCs can certainly be described as being intercultural teams. Schneider and Romberg (2011) assert that intercultural teams will naturally need assistance with the act of collaborating. They argue that conflicts will arise among team members because of

differing expectations regarding how to complete tasks and how to assess the quality of performance. Leung, Ang, and Tan (2014) concur with the idea that culturally diverse teams often experience negative interpersonal interactions, and they suggest that a focus on intercultural competence can help team members mitigate these moments of conflict and thereby improve team effectiveness. In fact, acknowledging the value of understanding cultural factors in the international school context, Budrow and Tarc (2018) argue that intercultural competence is a key asset international school recruiters look for in prospective teacher candidates.

Conclusion

A social movement is afoot that seeks to promote teacher professionalism and professional learning (Day, 2007; Hargreaves, 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). This review of the literature has examined how teachers utilize PLC structures to organize their work with each other.

Realizing the notion of working together in a professional setting is impacted by a host of factors, this review has specifically examined the concept of individual teachers' sense of self-efficacy and its influence on their ability to collaborate with colleagues to promote greater student learning.

To expand the extant literature on self-efficacy and collaboration within PLCs, this review examines the unique professional learning setting international schools represent. As this review has shown, international schools operate with a great deal of autonomy regarding curriculum and expectations for students. This autonomy may initially be characterized as a tremendous positive for individual international schools. Because of the variance between international schools, however, gaps often arise around curricular expectations and students' needs. These gaps may pose challenges for globally mobile students, and the perceived

differences in expectations may present difficulties for teachers, administrators, and support staff as they come together in PLCs and within other venues to collaborate around the design and execution of ongoing schooling experiences for their students.

Given their issues with teacher turnover, the comingling of staff with diverse cultural backgrounds, high parental expectations, and lack of curricular alignment among schools, international schools pose exciting yet challenging opportunities for teachers and administrators operating within a PLC structure.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

Schools across the globe are engaged in a variety of collaborative reform structures designed to build teacher capacity in order to improve student achievement (Rentfro, 2007). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide opportunities for teachers to work with a collective sense of inquiry regarding the impact their instructional decision-making had upon student performance (Nelson & Slavit, 2007). Furthermore, PLCs in American international schools represent a coming together of individuals with varying cultural backgrounds and perspectives to determine meaning derived from data points and to plot the group's instructional "next steps." Consequently, each teacher brings her sense of confidence and comfortability to the process of engaging in rich discourse with colleagues around teaching and student learning.

Additionally, underlying structural forces within the context of international schools present unique challenges for school staff to negotiate. Variability between curriculum and differences regarding expectations for students among teachers and between families and teachers are all very important considerations to take into account as schools determine the optimal course of action for their students.

Therefore, further qualitative examination of how teachers' senses of self-efficacy impacts their ability to negotiate these conversations with colleagues is needed, particularly in international schools where teacher turnover constantly changes the composition of PLCs (Stuart, 2016).

Research Design

The research design utilized in this study was a phenomenological case study approach. Phenomenological stances permit the researcher to uncover unique perspectives and experiences associated with the participants (Henry, Casserly, Coady, & Marshall, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This approach offered the researcher an opportunity to gaze into the window of the participants' lived experiences and helped transform the understanding of practices under investigation (van Manen, 2007).

Phenomenological studies allow researchers to explore and understand existing phenomena (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Heinonen, 2015). By examining the shared experiences of participants and then comparing those sets of shared experiences for both their similarities and differences, the researcher was able to determine the collective essence of the experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). At the core of phenomenology is determining how individuals see, describe, and interpret their involvement with the phenomena being explored.

Seeking to explore and understand teachers' beliefs of self-efficacy within PLCs in American international school settings, the following research questions were designed to provide direction and offer voice to the study's participants.

1. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive the value of PLCs?
2. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive self-efficacy?
3. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive their sense of self-efficacy impacts their engagement with PLC colleagues to coordinate instructional programming and decision-making focused on improving student achievement?

van Manen's phenomenology of practice served as the operant branch of phenomenology for this study. Phenomenology of practice refers to the everyday practices of living and working associated with professional practitioners (van Manen, 2016). For this study, understanding how teachers organized themselves, deliberated with colleagues, and applied common understandings of student data to inform instructional decision-making was of primary importance.

Rather than fixate on the theory of meaning making, this form of phenomenology offers the researcher a window into the inner workings of personal human interaction. Studying in situ how individuals collaborate and negotiate a shared space, phenomenology of practice provides tools and avenues for researchers to explain the complexities and rich fabric of the common and practical experiences of the individuals observed (Adams, Yin, Vargas Madriz, & Mullen, 2014).

While the researcher possessed a firm base of knowledge associated with PLCs before the study, this study helped the researcher gain greater understanding of how American international schoolteachers' sense of self-efficacy impacts their PLC experiences within the unique context of an international school setting. The entirety of the researcher's previous experiences with PLCs existed within the context of American public schools. While there are similarities between both American international school and public school contexts, there are marked differences as well. For instance, the researcher brought to this study an array of experiences associated with bringing teachers together to analyze student work in a PLC context. However, given the PK-12 configuration of international schools and a lack of access to nationalized assessment data, like Smarter Balanced or The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), operationalizing a PLC in an international school context may look different from that in an American school setting.

Given the diverse nature of American international schools, teachers in these types of

contexts inherently come from a multitude of previous work experiences. Many teachers also bring with them a cultural identity and a set of cultural mores that may vary from their colleagues (Hayden & Thompson, 2011). How this complex set of differences coexists within the shared space of a PLC was of critical focus for the study. Examining how individual teachers build and sustain confidence in their abilities to examine data, share ideas, and take critical feedback from others framed the purpose of this study.

A case study approach allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually and from multiple lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008; De Massis & Kotlar, 2014). Additionally, a case study orientation permits the researcher to ask "how" questions and to explore how the context influences the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2003). Zainal (2017) argued that case study is uniquely situated for educational contexts and other settings within the social sciences, and its orientation provides deeper understanding of the behaviors and perspectives of individuals than statistical frameworks grounded in quantitative studies.

Stake (2013) framed a case study as a qualitative methodological endeavor that allows researchers to witness the lived experiences of the case or cases in question, with particular attention paid to the specific context of the individuals involved. With case studies, the context of the study becomes a defining variable for the investigation. Context inevitably shapes participants' interactions and drives subsequent and ongoing interpretations of those interactions. With the focus on unique contexts and other particular conditions of a setting, a case study may provide the researcher with a sense of intimacy that, in turn, limits its generalizability to other contexts (Thomas, 2016; Tsang, 2014).

For this study, a single case study was employed. By focusing on one school, a more in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences with PLCs at that school was achieved. The site of

the case study was an American international school located in Southeast Asia. Schoolwide implementation of PLC structures had been conducted at the school for approximately the past seven years at the time of the study. While individual teachers' levels of experience with PLCs varied, the school site had a relatively long history with utilizing PLC structures among its teaching staff. In addition to the school's history with implementing PLCs, this particular school site was selected because of the researcher's familiarity and collegial connection with some members of its administrative team.

Participants

All participants in the study were active teachers or administrators at an international school located in Southeast Asia. In an intentional effort to illuminate perceived differences among teacher participant groups, purposive sampling was employed (Barbour, 2001; Maxwell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 2005). Once consent from school administration was received for conducting the study, collaboration with building-level administrators was conducted in order to identify volunteers for this particular study. Six teachers from four different PLCs were either solicited directly by elementary school administration or volunteered at the elementary school level, and four teachers from two different PLCs were solicited directly by administration or volunteered at the middle school level. Of the ten teacher participants, six identify their nationality as American, three as Canadian, and one as British.

In addition to including variations in the design and format of each PLC from the two different levels, the study captured how teachers at the different levels viewed collaborative inquiry practices embedded within a PLC structure. Since elementary and middle schoolteachers' content areas have marked differences, there were pronounced variations in how the teachers examined student data. For the elementary-level teachers, other members of their PLC did not

share the same students; however, with the middle school PLC, teachers did share students across content areas. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) refer to this type of purposeful sampling as critical case sampling because these teachers were selected based upon how their specific lived experiences can illuminate particular features of the phenomenon in question.

There was a range of experiences related to PLC implementation with the participants, and there was an even wider range of years of experience working at the school site. Three years was the least years of experience for participants working at the international school, and seventeen years constituted the most years of experience for participants at the international school site. Additionally, some of the teachers had brought with them an array of expectations and understandings from their previous school assignments associated with what PLCs are and how they function within an international school context.

It is important to note this American international school has been engaged in the PLC process since 2011. At this point, it is an understatement to say that PLCs have become engrained in the school culture. The use of collaborative teams to address student achievement is a fundamental precept of how teachers in this American international work with one another. With nearly 400 faculty members responsible for educating nearly 4,000 students from approximately 56 different nationalities, this is quite an undertaking. Within the diverse compilation of nationalities at the school, more than half of the student body is comprised of passport holders from the United States. It is also important to note that few host-country students are permitted to attend international schools within the country itself because of existing governmental regulations.

Making PLCs a part of the school's core fabric has been accomplished via consistency with its communication of expectations and its clarity of purpose related to its implementation of

PLCs. In 2012, the school developed the following collective set of organizational commitments to guide its work with PLCs and other school-wide initiatives: exemplary teaching in every class and for every student; a guaranteed and viable curriculum; use of both formative and summative assessment data to demonstrate evidence of student learning; wide-scale utilization of technology; using collaborative team structures as part of the PLC process; and a commitment to a positive and productive school culture (Stuart, 2016). Additionally, grade-level or content-area PLCs, comprised of all certified general education, special education, and support faculty, are mandated to meet for one hour weekly during the school day to engage in collaborative examination of student achievement.

In an effort to uncover the role experience and knowledge of PLCs plays in the school's hiring and onboarding practices, two semi-structured interviews were conducted in October 2018 with school administration at the research site. Specifically, a divisional principal was interviewed and a member of the school's Human Resources (HR) team was interviewed. Rather than looking directly at practices and behaviors associated with PLCs, these interviews probed the overarching organizational conditions that allow PLCs to thrive. Expectations and purposes for PLCs across divisions and individual grade levels were examined.

Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected in September-November 2018 via online document analysis. Document analysis involves a systematic manner of exploring a range of documents in order to determine meaning and gain greater understanding (Bowen, 2009). The researcher reviewed an array of documents, including PLC meeting agenda notes, PLC-oriented professional development training session PowerPoints, established PLC protocols, and norms of collaboration using a document analysis protocol devised by the researcher. Most of the

documents reviewed were made available to the researcher via published files on the school's website or via materials emailed directly to the researcher from the teachers participating in the study or school administration staff. Documents were reviewed for direct and indirect references to keywords like collaboration, instructional decision-making, or engagement. Additionally, using guidelines established by Bowen (2009) for document analysis, documents were analyzed using both content and thematic approaches. Document analysis provided the researcher with a comparison between how the lived experiences of the participants comported to the expectations and parameters of PLCs established by school administration.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with seven of the teacher participants via Blue Jeans, a video-conferencing tool, in September-October 2018. Three of the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face at the research site. Each interview lasted approximately sixty minutes. Semi-structured interviews were selected because of the flexibility they allow the researcher in terms of the ordering of the questions and because of the freedom they offer to follow up on topics as needed (Marshall, Brereton, & Kitchenham, 2015). While predetermined questions formed the basis of the interviews, the questions were framed in such a way as to allow expanded discourse between the researcher and participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The primary focus of the semi-structured interviews was to gain greater understanding of (a) teachers' perceptions of the value of PLCs, and (b) teachers' perceptions of their own self-efficacy. Participants addressed these topics, but the researcher employed follow-up questions to obtain greater depth of experiences and to facilitate participants in elaborating on other issues that they believed had a nexus to these primary topics. Englander (2012) argued that interviewing is a key data-collection tool for phenomenology because it offers the researcher the

opportunity to explore a phenomenon deeply and explicate the corresponding subjectivity of individual participants.

The researcher requested written and oral feedback regarding the individual teacher interview questions in September 2018 from a group of international schoolteachers at another school site in Asia. Soliciting this feedback on interview questions allowed the researcher to practice utilizing the interview questions with others, and it afforded the researcher the opportunity to get feedback on both the content of the questions and the process of interviewing (Griffee, 2005). The researcher specifically asked international schoolteachers for input on clarity of both the questions asked and the manner in which they were asked. From this preliminary feedback, the researcher was able to refine questions in terms of their phrasing, their length, and the ordering.

In an effort to focus on everyday practical interactions rooted in van Manen's (2007) framework for phenomenology of practice, five observations of PLCs were conducted by the researcher in October 2018 at the American international school site. Each observation lasted approximately sixty minutes, and they took place at a room of each PLC's choosing. As described by Lampe, Mulder, Colins, and Vermeiren (2017), observations were overt in that participants knew they were being observed, and the researcher role was non-participant in nature because the researcher was not actively involved in the activities under observation. Observations were enacted to address the following research question: How do international schoolteachers perceive their sense of self-efficacy impacts their engagement within PLCs? Observation notes were recorded as teachers met within their PLC teams, and the practice of reflecting upon and expanding the field notes was practiced shortly after each observation. The

act of expanding upon field notes adds a degree of richness to the phenomenon being observed (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

Once interviews and observations were completed, audio and, in some cases, video files were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Pseudonyms in the form of ES1, MS1, PLC-ES1, etc. were associated with each of the transcripts generated. The nomenclature employed for pseudonyms was meant to provide only the division level (elementary or middle school) for each transcript. A confidentiality agreement was secured from the transcriptionist prior to being sent any data files.

Analytical Methods

In an effort to triangulate data, qualitative data was collected from three primary data sources (qualitative document analysis, individual teacher interviews, and observations). By incorporating document analysis and observations, the researcher was more fully able to contextualize and understand participants' perceptions that were shared via the interview process.

Data sources were coded manually using a process of open coding. The coding process allows the researcher to align meaning to the descriptive and raw information collected during the research process (Basit, 2003). Individual interviews and observations were professionally transcribed, and transcripts were originally read without any annotating in order to gain greater familiarity with the text. Subsequently, a second reading of transcripts involved highlighting individual words, phrases, and passages that resonated. Saldaña (2016) refers to this process as pre-coding.

Looking specifically at the highlighted text, preliminary codes were generated for all data sources. The preliminary codes were tabulated based upon frequency of occurrence among

individual data sources and then collectively across all data sources. Codes that were mentioned at least on two occasions and across more than one data source were clustered as categories. Categories were then consolidated into larger themes. Saldaña (2016) refers to themes as the ultimate outcome of the coding and categorizing process. Three major themes emerged from the chosen open coding processes (See Appendices M-O).

Hussein (2009) argued for triangulation of data sources as a means for capturing a more comprehensive understanding of complex and less understood phenomena.
Morse (1991) refers to the act of pulling from multiple data methods as methodological triangulation, and she contends this process allows researchers to address research phenomenon more holistically and fully.

Additionally, member-checking practices were enacted to promote credibility with the data collected and the preservation of participants' narrative accounts (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Harper & Cole, 2012). Each of the ten interview participants was separately emailed an overview of the three major themes that emerged from the study. Birt, Scott, and Cavers (2016) argues that member checking is an established vehicle for ensuring both accuracy of recorded accounts and the alignment between that which is documented and the lived realities of the study's participants.

Once observations were completed, the researcher utilized follow-up questions with participants to clarify discrepancies between findings collected during both document analysis and the individual semi-structured interviews. Similar to the initial interviews, follow-up questions were asked via Blue Jeans video conferencing. The researcher used follow-up questions with participants as opportunities to address instances in which the information yielded from different data sources seemed to conflict with one another.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher acknowledged his prior experiences with PLCs influenced his perceptions of how effective PLCs operate. As a practicing school administrator, the researcher has been charged with developing and integrating PLC structures into the school setting for the past six years. Because of school district mandates and his district's partnerships with internationally recognized PLC leaders, the researcher has collaborated with staff from multiple school sites, both domestic and international, to conceive and effectuate a systematic model of PLCs.

The researcher has multiple years of experience as a school administrator with implementing and sustaining PLCs across both elementary and secondary school settings, and these former experiences shaped and impacted how the researcher observed collaboration and engagement of international schoolteacher participants in their PLCs. Additionally, the influences of prior experiences framed how the researcher both collected the qualitative data and thematically analyzed it for underlying meaning.

Throughout the research process, the researcher engaged in self-reflexivity to control his biases with regard to PLCs. Self-reflexivity also permitted the researcher to recognize his status and positionality as a research instrument, and thereby acknowledge the influence this status had both on his perceptions and interpretations of data collected and upon the potential influence his situadedness had on the actual data obtained from participants via the interview and observation processes (Berger, 2015).

Beyond employing self-reflexivity as a means of controlling for bias, the researcher also engaged in ongoing discourse with another school administrator not connected with his current school setting. This colleague helped the researcher review his thematic analysis of data for

assumptions and biases. The colleague served as an invaluable "thought partner" and provided a critical set of eyes to evaluate interpretation of data.

Limitations

Limitations of a study constitute issues with bias associated with either its design or instrumentation that impact the results of the research (Price & Murnan, 2004). Acknowledged and addressed limitations are noted below.

Sample size. Only ten teacher participants (five teachers from the elementary school level and five teachers from the middle school level) were involved in the study. Due to the depth of responses needed from the participants, the scope of the PLCs involved was narrowed. Additionally, given the researcher's previous experiences with elementary and middle school levels, the scope of the study was limited to those divisions. This targeting of specific levels resulted in the exclusion of teachers from the high school level.

Research site. The research study was conducted at one American international school of approximately 4,000 students and 400 faculty members situated in Southeast Asia. The campus sits on approximately 40 acres and exists as a solitary and unified school site. The school site is a highly regarded and well-funded American international school. Its implementation of initiatives and the experiences of the school staff are not representative of all American international schools operating across the globe.

Timeframe of study. The study was conducted over a relatively short period of time. The study took place during the first half of the school year. A more in-depth examination of the phenomenon could have occurred with more time spent collaborating with the school site.

Self-reporting bias. All qualitative data collected throughout the study was derived from self-reported perceptions and understandings from teacher participants.

Researcher bias. The researcher's biases impacted the interpretation and analysis of the qualitative data collected throughout the research study.

Data saturation. The researcher utilized his personal lens to determine when the depth of the data would yield no new substantive and relevant facts, themes, or codes.

Participant selection. The researcher did not directly solicit participants for the study. The researcher relied solely on school administration to contact staff and connect interested teachers with the researcher.

Conclusion

Qualitative methods were employed in this study to uncover how teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy influence their interactions within PLCs. By interviewing teachers, observing them within the context of a PLC meeting, and reviewing documentation associated with teachers' work with PLCs, a greater understanding of how self-efficacy manifests itself within the collaborative practices of teachers was achieved.

The results of this study offer school administrators and teachers working within the context of American international schools a clearer picture of teachers' perceptions related to their participation with PLCs. By shedding greater light on how teachers bring their own sense of self-efficacy to the PLC experience, American international school officials may be able to develop and sustain more effective PLC meetings for their staff members and, in turn, create instructional conditions that foster increased student achievement.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to illuminate perspectives and bring a voice to PK-12 teachers working in an American international school context regarding their experiences with self-efficacy and participation in professional learning communities (PLCs). Furthermore, as a phenomenological case study, the purpose was also to highlight the lived experiences of the participants while also closely considering the context in which the actions under investigation occurred concurrently.

The research site chosen for this study was purposely selected because of its rich history with the implementation of PLCs within the network of international schools. The school site has utilized a PLC structure throughout its PK-12 campus for more than seven years, and it has taken the bold measure of identifying PLCs as an institutional commitment to which all members of the learning community are bound. Data were collected from the following sources: individual semi-structured interviews with ten teachers across both elementary and middle school divisions and two administrators collectively from Human Resources and the middle school division; five observations of PLCs, four of which involved small-group collaborative teams from three different grade levels across two school divisions and one from an entire grade level PLC at the elementary division; and lastly a variety of PLC-related documents across all three divisions (elementary, middle, and high school). While the interviews served as a critical source of data to uncover teachers' perspectives regarding PLC experiences, data collected from observations of PLCs and documents helped to provide further context and understanding of the views and ideas expressed during the in-depth individual interviews.

This chapter involves an analysis of the data collected during the fall of 2018 and an explanation of the major findings and underlying themes related to the research site's implementation of PLCs. Data collected from interviews, observations, and documents were examined to address the following research questions:

1. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive the value of PLCs?
2. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive self-efficacy?
3. How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive their sense of self-efficacy impacts their engagement with PLC colleagues to coordinate instructional programming and decision-making focused on improving student achievement?

This chapter begins with an overview of the major themes and categories evolving from the data collected. The themes serve to illustrate the teacher participants' perceptions of self-efficacy as they relate to working in PLCs within the context of an American international school. The corresponding categories add specificity to the themes by highlighting key components of practices characterized by the themes. Discussion then continues to explicate how the themes and their corresponding categories address the study's research questions. Specific attention is given to how the individual data sources contribute individually and collectively to the understanding of the ideas and concepts under investigation within the research questions.

Results

Major **t**hemes**.** The major findings of this qualitative study are advanced as three interrelated themes. Employing a process of open coding, initial codes were created then

subsequently grouped into themes. In some instances, initial codes were consolidated, renamed, and eventually became categories of one of the overarching themes. The major themes that developed from this study are PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, and the challenges of PLCs in international schools. Figure 2 demonstrates how PLCs serve as a tool for both instructional improvement and teambuilding. It also shows that teacher self-efficacy mediates these two roles of PLCs all while being situated within a larger context of international schools.

PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement. A critical theme to emerge from the data involved PLCs serving as an instrument for instructional decision making. Within the collaborative structure of PLCs, teachers expressed having opportunities to engage in discrete practices grounded in instructional activities designed to improve student achievement. Weekly PLCs were established as requirements across the PK-12 campus to ensure consistent conversations about instruction and student achievement were occurring. Data revealed an iterative cycle of instruction and assessment was at the heart of discourse between PLC participants.

A significant category that emerged from the data involved an examination of assessment practices that is comprised of two key components: common assessments and team calibration of scoring. The use of common formative and summative assessments was paramount to the work of each grade level PLC. In fact, common formative and summative assessments are considered non-negotiable expectations for all grade level teams. PLC teams regularly met to develop new unit assessments or revise existing unit assessments. Beyond the perfunctory matters of deciding when and how to administer assessments to students, PLCs

devoted considerable time to determining the substance of the assessments and the assessments' capacity to gauge student understanding of the content.

Figure 2

Graphical Overview of the Study's Major Themes

Discussion regularly occurred in a manner in which assessment practices could be characterized as driving instructional decisions. Based upon results from assessments, teachers would discuss, as a PLC, the next steps to take regarding instruction. Decisions related to use of lessons and activities, pacing of content, and instructional groupings were influenced by results from the common formative and summative assessments across numerous subject areas.

Beyond traditional formats for assessments, it is important to note the school has been exploring the role of performance-based assessments. These types of assessments differ from traditional assessments in that they ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the

content in a much more engaging and individualized manner (Tung, 2017). At the time of the study, only a few grade levels were actively exploring and using performance-based assessments. However, as a school-wide initiative, all grade levels devoted time to the topic within PLCs, and teachers engaged in discussions on how performance-based assessments could be utilized with their students.

Beyond the development of assessments, data collected during the study showed that calibration of scoring was a vital part of the category of assessment practices. Student response to instruction and assessment was a focal point for PLC teams, and multiple participants discussed processes employed to calibrate scores. Utilizing predetermined content-specific rubrics to align how to impute scores to student work was a critical area of focus. This process involved teachers engaged in reflecting on the verbiage of rubrics to ensure common agreement on how to apply the rubrics' expectations to actual student work.

Though closely aligned with the development and use of common assessments, another category of standards-based practices emerged from the data. Commonly referred to as "power standards" by the teachers because of their prioritized importance for student learning, data revealed that power standards constituted a vital factor of instructional improvement efforts throughout the school. PLC members frequently discussed the role of power standards in influencing a number of instructional aspects, ranging from the design of classroom activities to development of formative and summative assessments. Data showed that teachers routinely considered whether their power standards were reflected appropriately in daily instructional activities and within common formative and summative assessments. Additionally, data showed that PLCs across grade levels reflected on their own power standards and how those standards aligned with the grade levels above and below their own. In one PLC observation, middle

school teachers discussed whether problems on their recent unit assessment adequately addressed the standards identified for their grade level, and, in another instance, a different PLC observation revealed elementary school teachers engaged in rich discourse regarding whether their grade level's SMART goal sufficiently targeted skills associated with their grade's power standards.

An additional category that is intertwined with the previous two categories of assessment practices and standards is the notion of PLC activities being data driven. Ongoing conversations about what data to collect, how to score it, and ways in which to share results with students and their parents were witnessed within PLCs. The notion of capturing quantifiable data that demonstrates student proficiency with subject-specific content was at the core of the site's PLCs, and it reflects one of DuFour's (2004) "big ideas" related to having a results orientation with PLCs. Teachers frequently discussed offering students both qualitative data in the form of narrative feedback and quantitative data in the form of scores on common formative and summative assessments.

Beyond the tabulation of data from teacher-created tasks and assessments, a data focus was observed in how teachers created and monitored goals for their grade levels. These are referred to as SMART goals, with SMART serving as an acronym for goal setting coined by Doran (1981) that stands for goals that are specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-related. Each grade-level PLC was expected to develop one SMART goal for the school year. Teachers were expected to gauge student progress against the goal throughout the school year, and each grade-level PLC within the elementary school was required to make writing the focus for their SMART goal for the 2018-2019 school year. Multiple grade levels framed their goal around an established elementary school writing rubric, known as the Writing Learning

Progression. An example of one grade level's SMART goal was "By the end of the school year, at least 85% of the students will score secure or above on the Writing Rubric or demonstrate at least one grade level of growth."

Teachers would take pre-assessments at the beginning of the year to arrive at a baseline measure for student performance on the goal, and then PLCs would actively work throughout the school year to raise student achievement in terms of the parameters of the grade level's SMART goal. Though not observed in the study, PLCs planned for a post-assessment to occur near the end of the academic school year to measure student performance on the SMART goal.

A final category of the theme of instructional improvement revealed by the data pertains to the teachers' consistent use of four framing questions for PLCs. In many ways, the four questions support and anchor the previous categories, and DuFour and Reeves (2016) consider the use as paramount. The four questions in which highly functioning PLCs engage are:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How will we know if they have learned it?
3. What will we do if they have not learned it?
4. How will we provide extended learning opportunities for students who have mastered the content? (p. 70).

Data showed the study's participants routinely referred to these questions as they evaluated the validity and impact of their instructional efforts.

PLCs as a tool for teambuilding. A second theme revealed in the data relates to the social nature of PLC structures. Data from individual teacher interviews, PLC observations, and PLC-related documents showed that PLCs provided participants a weekly forum to connect with colleagues and engage in professional discourse about teaching practices and ongoing student

achievement. While the primary focus and function of PLC time was devoted to matters of a professional nature, opportunities to connect with colleagues on a personal level would often present themselves as well. By definition, PLCs are a group of educators coming together to examine their instructional practices and the collective impact of said practices on student achievement (DuFour, 2004). Therefore, there is an inherent social context to the function of PLCs.

At the heart of PLC teams' practices was the category of trust. This concept was considered foundational by participants to the formation and sustaining of effective PLC teams. Teachers frequently referred to it in terms of its importance in building both professional and personal connections with colleagues. Data revealed that nearly every teacher participant considered the presence of trust as essential to moving a PLC forward, and many participants regarded a lack of trust as a major barrier to building a highly functioning PLC.

A second category of the larger theme of PLCs as a tool for teambuilding was rooted in the notion of collaboration. Multiple references to collaborative practices manifested themselves in data collected from interviews, observations, and PLC-related documents. Data revealed collaboration took many forms, including sharing of ideas and resources, helping others complete professional tasks, and distributing workload matters. Collaboration was at the core of PLC practices, and teachers prided themselves on having effectively functioning PLCs because of the extent to which collaboration defined their respective team's practices.

A third key category comprised within the theme of PLCs as a vehicle for teambuilding was the notion of mutual respect and the power of relationships between PLC members. Data showed that teachers frequently talked about the nature of their relationships with colleagues. Teachers would routinely share how the interrelated aspect of their professional and personal

relationships with fellow PLC members influenced nearly all aspects of their work. It could be said that the corresponding category of trust is a building block for relationships, and the connected category of collaboration is a key by-product of a strong relationship between colleagues. Data revealed teachers had a variety of relationships with peers over the course of their professional careers. A range of previous experiences with PLCs emerged from the data, from informal and congenial to more formal and distant. However, the majority of teacher participants in this study characterized the relationships within their present PLCs as productive, professional, and, in many instances, personally satisfying.

An important aspect of individual strengths was noted within the category of relationships. Strengths-based work was a school-wide initiative, and all teachers had a strengths profile that was shared among PLC participants. Many teacher participants discussed how leveraging other members' strengths was paramount to teambuilding among PLC members. People would share how knowing fellow PLC members' strengths would often influence the division of labor within the PLC. Tasks were often evaluated and distributed among PLC members based upon who was considered to have greater relative strength regarding specific professional tasks that needed to be completed. PLC members would take pride in acknowledging their identified strengths, and data revealed they would also operate with a sense of deference to others when they perceived another person had a more pronounced relative strength for a given task.

A contextual factor worth noting for the category of relationship building was the nature of working in an international school. Many teacher participants shared how working and living near colleagues helped spur the development of valuable relationships with their colleagues. Data revealed many teachers would connect with coworkers outside of work, and most

participants considered this an asset in forming effective relationships with colleagues within the context of their PLC.

The challenge of PLCs in international schools. Data suggested the context of the research site as an international school setting crystallized as a third major theme of this study. While many of the research site's practices demonstrated within the context of PLCs were indicative of PLCs anywhere in the world, key conditional factors associated with working in an American international school influenced how work was conducted in its PLCs. In one sense, the context of an international school setting seemingly served as an overarching conditional factor for each grade level PLC. Teachers noted how working in an international school would influence the nature of the overall work, and several teachers who had worked in public schools in the United States noted distinct differences between the functioning of PLCs in the United States and those within their current international school setting.

Data indicated the phenomenon of teacher turnover was an underlying category of working in an international school setting. The recurring annual process of gaining and losing members of the PLC was generally regarded as an impediment to the work of the PLC. Teachers noted that their PLC would generally operate in a state of flux because of its changing composition. PLC members noted that the changing make-up of the PLC ebbed and flowed, with some years having multiple members leaving and joining the PLC and other years having little to no change.

Teachers acknowledged that time was needed to build trust and establish relationships with new PLC members. They contended that it is difficult to share ideas, take critical feedback from others, or place yourself in a position of vulnerability with others if you do not know them or if you have not established a sense of connection and investment with them.

Additionally, data demonstrated teachers were concerned with how turnover could impact the PLC's ability to coordinate instructional efforts among team members. Multiple teachers noted how the process of taking on new team members to the PLC would typically cause the PLC to revert back to questions one and two of the four-part framing questions associated with PLCs. Data presented team members' acknowledgement for the need to go back to the basics of what is taught at their respective grade level (question one) and how it is assessed (question two) as a key condition for onboarding teachers new to the PLC.

Given the unique working conditions associated with international schools, the research site took added measures regarding PLCs when considering prospective candidates for employment. While the school cannot control for teachers choosing to leave after their contracts have come to an end, data revealed Human Resources personnel and divisional administration operated very strategically and intentionally when hiring and subsequently placing individuals within grade level PLCs. Reference to fit both within the overall school organization and then more narrowly within grade level PLCs was mentioned often. Extensive onboarding efforts were implemented to help individuals feel connected to their new PLC members, with the hope that this connection would both facilitate individuals' ability to work effectively in their PLCs and increase their desire to stay at the school for an extended period of time.

Research Question One

How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive the value of PLCs? In order to address this question, data were collected via in-depth individual interviews with ten teacher participants across the elementary and middle school divisions of the school, by means of observation of PLCs at both the elementary and middle school divisions, and via documents collected from across all three school divisions. Employing a process of open coding

and thematic analysis, data demonstrated a tremendous amount of commitment and investment from teachers to their work with PLCs at the research site. While all teachers acknowledged the incredible amount of time, energy, and effort that PLCs required them to expend, participants universally recognized the value and importance of PLCs to the overall work of the school organization and to their impact on student achievement.

Interviews. A series of ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews was conducted with ten teacher participants from September-October 2018, either face-to-face or via BlueJeans video conferencing. van Manen (2007) considered interviews as powerful tools for researchers to peer into the lived experiences of participants in order to uncover their unique perspectives on the topic under investigation. Data yielded from the interviews helped formulate the basis for understanding teachers' experiences with PLCs. Interview participants were purposely selected from the elementary and middle school divisions, and then, via a process of collaborating with school administration, teacher participants volunteered to be a part of the study.

DuFour (2007) asserts the importance of educators coming together within PLCs for a shared purpose of improving student achievement. This process of bringing educators together to meet in PLCs for a common purpose has become a schoolwide focus with PLC implementation rising to the level of being codified as an institutional commitment. Speaking to the universality of PLCs, Participant Admin2 states, "It's in our DNA here."

Interview data reveled teacher participants' commitment to working together and its central role in shaping and sustaining their work with PLCs. One participant stated, "It's work off my plate when we have a team working together. Having the same goal has been great" (Participant ES2). Another educator echoed a general appreciation for the positive impact of PLCs with, "These meetings are not things you go to do things. This is who we are. This is what

we believe, which is why it became one of the institutional commitments when you sign your contract" (Participant ES6).

PLCs operate with a degree of intentionality focused on improving student learning (DuFour, 2004). With instructional planning in mind, this fundamental organizing principle was reflected by a participant with the following statement:

> I've learned in the past two years just based on being able to sit around a table and talk about what planning should look like, talk about what targeted instruction for certain students might look like, talk about groupings and how that might look, talking about strong, real interventions for those high tier three and low tier three kids and how that might look throughout the day. (Participant ES2)

Pulling from the overarching theme of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, another participant echoed this intentional focus on sharing ideas related to instructional practices, saying,

> You can find students that are challenging across, you know, the PLC. You can get them together; you can work in some flexible groupings; you can share ideas. Sometimes, we don't move kids, you know, for the sake of moving them. Sometimes, it just means that we need to have different tools to be able to share those struggles and the highs and lows together as a group really helps. (Participant ES3)

Interviews revealed assessment-based practices to be at the core of what teachers valued with their PLC work. Associated with the key theme of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, one middle-school educator noted the primacy of assessment and its nexus to both the four PLC framing questions and the agreed-upon grade level standards with,

> We're refining our assessments to make sure we're actually targeting the standards and benchmarks we want. So one of our things as a PLC is we look at our assessments, and we talk about, like, are they actually assessing what we want to assess, or are we assessing things outside of our scope? We can try adding rigor and accidentally start stealing standards that aren't our standards. So always just asking whether we are assessing what we need to assess and then are we assessing it properly is important to ask. (Participant MS1)

Adding to the notion of common assessments and the four PLC questions, another participant stated, "This is how we create consistency" (Participant ES5). Data revealed the four questions were a key category of the larger theme of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement. One teacher noted,

> It's because I never forget those four questions. Those four questions ground me in what I'm doing, and even with our school changing, going to competency-based learning, it doesn't matter. It's always those four questions. We could add two more, but it's always those four questions. (Participant ES5)

Highlighting the value of PLCs as providing a forum for addressing the four PLC questions, another participant shared,

> So, PLCs work through the four questions of, you know, what it is we want students to know or do, how do we know that they're going to be able to know or do it, what do we do when they don't get it, and what do we do when they've already got it. So that's the kind of framework that our PLCs use as they build units, resources, and assessments and when they look at the data. (Participant MS3)

Connecting to the theme of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, interview participants noted the centrality of data to the entire PLC process. Many teachers commonly referred to PLCs as being data driven, and the focus on data certainly impacted the previously mentioned aspects of assessments, the four PLC-framing questions, and the examination of standards that teachers said they valued as part of the PLC process. One teacher noted the interconnectedness of data to assessment and the standards with the following statement:

> We're a very data-driven school, but with a purpose. It's not just looking at data as a summative, but as a formative, too. And so, as an example, last year we had writing as a goal as well, and we sat down early on in the year and discussed what are you noticing, not just in spreadsheets about your students' writing, but anecdotally. What are you noticing about their writing styles, narratives for fantasies and for non-fiction? And we all came to the conclusion that, wow, our kids really need to work on their craft. So okay, now, what does that look like? Let's go back and look at the power standards. So, I think the real success in that was that we took a step back away from the data, looked at the whole child, and said here's what we are noticing. (Participant ES2)

Coupled with the notion that PLCs add value to the organization in terms of their ability to focus teachers on a variety of factors associated with instruction and assessment, interview data expressed the power of PLCs to build collaborative interactions between teachers. One participant shared, "So shifting people's mindset to being more collaborative than just cooperative within their small PLC I think is something that's happening, but there's still room for improvement there" (Participant ES3). This teacher's perspective affirms one of the study's key themes of PLCs as a tool for teambuilding. Interview data showed that participants believed PLCs offered them numerous opportunities to develop professional and personal relationships

that benefitted the overall work of the team. Speaking to the critical category of relationships and its nexus to the work of PLCs, a teacher voiced,

> Your PLC is a group of three people who you sit with and talk with every day. You kind of, I think, understand that proximity creates closeness. The fact is that you're with these two or with these three people every day doing things together, and we do look, when we hire, for matching personalities. (Participant MS1)

Leveraging the power of PLCs to promote relationships and accentuate one of the categories found with the larger theme of teambuilding, a teacher offered the following:

> I think when you better understand each of the personalities around the table, the more you can appreciate what they bring to the table. I know in the past I've had some issues with people; I've been frustrated in different situations. When I understand what their strengths are, I understand more of why they're asking the questions they're asking or behaving the way they're behaving. (Participant MS4)

Similarly, one educator shared appreciation for how PLCs afforded teachers time to see each other as human beings. PLCs allow us to, "take into consideration the human side of our job and how we really need to connect with one another and have a positive relationship" (Participant MS2).

Central to notion that PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to build relationships, cultivate collaborative practices, and leverage the strengths of fellow team members, interview data revealed a belief in the importance of trust in developing and sustaining high-functioning PLCs. Bryk and Schneider (2003) speak to the power of relational trust in school communities, and multiple teacher participants from this study argued that PLCs provided a context for trust-building, while also noting that trust was something that needed to be actively monitored in order

to move the PLC forward. One participant shared about the critical nature of trust with the following, “If you don’t have the trust, you’re not going to be willing to share student data; you’re not going to be as forthcoming; you’re not even going to be willing to share your ideas” (Participant ES4). Highlighting the connection between trust and vulnerability within a PLC, one educator stated, “You need a level of trust to open up and admit that you don’t have all of the answers” (Participant MS1). Another participant added that PLC members need to “build trust before they pull out their data” (Participant MS3).

Speaking to the unique nature of international schools and the tendency to overlap professional and personal lives, one participant noted the notion that trust forms in and outside of the context of the school day. “Trust is number one; you’ve got to develop it, and that means even having happy hours together” (Participant MS4).

Connected to the concept of trust was the notion of it taking time to establish and solidify. Several participants shared how time is a finite commodity in international schools because of the level of teacher turnover the schools experience. Referencing the unique landscape of international schools highlights a key theme of the study related to the challenges associated with establishing PLCs in international schools. One teacher shared that they need to build trust, but “you need time to do this, and, as an international school, some teachers come for just two to three years and then move on” (Participant ES5).

Interview data showed that many of the practices and experiences teachers valued within PLCs were mediated by some of the unique conditions of working in an international school setting. Moving beyond the idea that just the concept of trust is impacted by teacher turnover, others noted some different ways that turnover in international schools influenced the overall value and efficacy of their PLCs. One teacher explained that “things do change, things get lost,

and that continuity can be a little bit more difficult" in international schools (Participant ES1). Speaking to how international schools struggle to address the negative impact of teacher turnover on PLCs, another teacher noted, "It does impact, I think, the performance and the effectiveness of the PLC if there is a significant turnover, and I think what we don't do really well is give PLCs that time to gel when they have significant turnover" (Participant ES4). Another participant further explained how turnover impacts the PLC's work both negatively and positively. "It's almost like every year or so we have to go back and reteach and go through the process because of the transient nature" of international schools. However, turnover also "brings diversity, so that's a positive thing" (Participant ES5). Echoing the sense of transience at work in PLCs of international schools, a participant shared, "Our PLC has struggled with people coming and going in terms of the team and not knowing if some have come from a culture where they've never had a PLC meeting" (Participant ES6).

Interview data highlighted how this phenomenological study was dually situated within the structure of a case study. The case or context of international schools and the theme of situational challenges at play with PLCs in international schools certainly influenced teachers' perceptions of experiences promoted within the study's other two themes. Though interview data documented generally positive valuation and appreciation for PLCs, data showed that participants never lost sight of how the themes of instructional practices and interpersonal team dynamics of PLCs were impacted by the variety of challenges that come from working in an international school.

Observations. A series of five observations of PLCs was conducted at the school site during October 2018. Two observations were held with entire grade level PLCs, both of which were at the elementary level, and three observations were with small-group PLCs, two at the

middle school level and one at the elementary level. van Manen (2007) contends that observation provides the researcher a window into the everyday reality of participants. Non-participant engagement was practiced with each of the five observations, and every effort was made to let the PLCs function as normally as possible while the observations were taking place. Field notes were collected during each observation using an observation protocol, and audio recordings of observations were collected as well. Transcripts from the audio recordings of the observations were used to corroborate and clarify data captured on the observation protocol.

Hord (1997) offers the following goals for PLCs: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. These five aspects served as the framework for the characteristics to look for while conducting each of the five observations. In addition to highlighting the occurrence of these attributes of PLCs, the observation protocol was developed in such a way as to accommodate both real-time descriptive notes and reflective notes to be added later.

Observation data helped shed important additional light on research question one. Through teachers either allotting specific time to certain PLC practices or by making direct references to key PLC tasks, observation data further illuminated how participants perceived the value of their work with PLCs. Data collected during observations contributed to the development of the study's three underlying themes of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, and the challenges of PLCs in an international school.

One of the categories aligned with the theme of instructional improvement was the use of the four PLC framing questions. Similar to the data collected during interviews, observation data showed an adherence to the four questions as an organizing framework. During the

observations, teachers would reference the individual questions by number and share how they were using the question to process their thoughts in the moment. One teacher asked the following question of PLC team members, "Are we actually teaching what we're supposed to be teaching, or have we drifted" (PLC-MS2). Conversation then went on to discuss how effectively they believed they were addressing their power standards, and they discussed how the grade level above had previously expressed concerns they may not be touching on these standards as thoroughly as they need to be doing.

Continuing to examine PLCs in terms of their capacity for instructional improvement, observational data showed participants valued the opportunity to examine student data during their time together. When exploring the focus and wording for the grade-level SMART goal, one PLC struggled with the exact percentage to align with the goal. They had discussed previous data results in terms of student growth, and a teacher commented, "It's more about what we are really going to do to have students grow in craft and punctuation. That's what I would focus on more; I wouldn't get too caught up in the number" (PLC-ES3).

Related to the development of the SMART goal, PLCs discussed how their assessments were meeting the aims of the SMART goal and the tenets of the first PLC framing question of what we want students to know or do. During an entire grade level PLC, PLC members took time to examine learner outcomes for an upcoming unit on migration. One participant shared,

> We talked about this overarching, enduring understanding and what we want the kids to really glean from the whole unit. So essentially, migrations are responses to human circumstances and lead to multiple consequences. Super broad, super general! More specifically, we want the learners to know by the end of this unit that individuals and groups migrate for a variety of reasons, both positive and negative. (PLC-ES2)

One of the observations offered a glimpse of instructional improvement in the form of both assessment and data-collection, using a rubric to calibrate scores on students' personal narrative writing. Teachers were engaged rich discourse as they collectively examined a student exemplar. They expressed how they valued PLCs for offering them time to get together to share their thinking around assessment. The following passage reveals how this collaborative enterprise transpired for a student's work.

> Thinking about teaching points with this kid, what would be some of the conversations that you would have with this kid? What are the biggest issues that need to be addressed? Maybe helping him plan it ahead of time so that he knows where he needs to go. So letting the flashback happen, but then taking it back. Figuring out what's really important and what's not. We could ask him whether he is using the rubric as he writes. (PLC-MS1)

Data collected during observations of PLCs also exhibited opportunities for teachers to practice teambuilding to accomplish specific instructional tasks. In occupying their shared space, teachers demonstrated a willingness to use the PLC time to connect with each other on both professional and personal levels. Teachers would often use humor or share anecdotes from their personal lives to build connections with each other. In one instance during a middle school PLC observation, a teacher explained how trust is such an important part of their PLC experience. "I trust that if I don't get my way this time I might get it another time." Later, the same teacher shared with team members, "We benefit from each other's strengths here" (PLC-MS2). It was evident from the data collected that teachers saw PLCs as a way to build

relationships with one another and engage in collaboration in order to bring about greater student achievement.

The power of connecting within teams was made evident in one small-group PLC in which a teacher was new to the international school. It was clear the other teachers had been at the school for several years, and they worked in a coordinated manner to help him feel more confident with how to teach an upcoming unit in math. Several of the teachers seemed eager to help the teacher new to the PLC get acquainted with the upcoming unit. This instance in team dynamics also highlighted the unique context in which PLCs in international schools generally operate. Changes to the compositions of grade level PLCs occur rather frequently because of instances of teacher turnover.

Documents. A variety of documents were collected across all three divisions of the school (elementary, middle, and high school). Multiple teacher participants from a range of grade levels electronically shared documents with the researcher. In some instances, documents were emailed as stand-alone items; on a number of occasions, however, other documents were shared as Google Docs. The range of documents was collected from September-November 2018, including PLC agendas, PLC norms, and PowerPoints from school-wide PLC professional development sessions.

A document protocol was utilized to analyze all documents, and elements of each document collected were examined for evidence in the following categories: participant engagement, instructional decision-making, and shared decision-making. A systematic process of reviewing each document for either direct reference or indirect mentioning of any number of the three key categories was conducted. Each document was also assessed for its general purpose. In some instances, the purpose was explicitly stated, while in numerous cases the

researcher applied inferencing techniques to ascertain the document's overall purpose. In many instances, the documents reviewed help address research question one's focus on understanding how teachers value aspects of the overall PLC process.

Data collected from documents in the form of PLC agendas (See Figure 3) revealed the very format of the agendas was designed to highlight the four PLC-framing questions and the SMART goal the PLC was using. Notes from the agendas showed discussion around one or more of the four questions and how the answers to those questions were in the process of aligning the PLC's annual SMART goal. PLC agendas followed a set template with minor modifications, thus space was made visible for both the framing questions and progress on the SMART goal on a weekly basis.

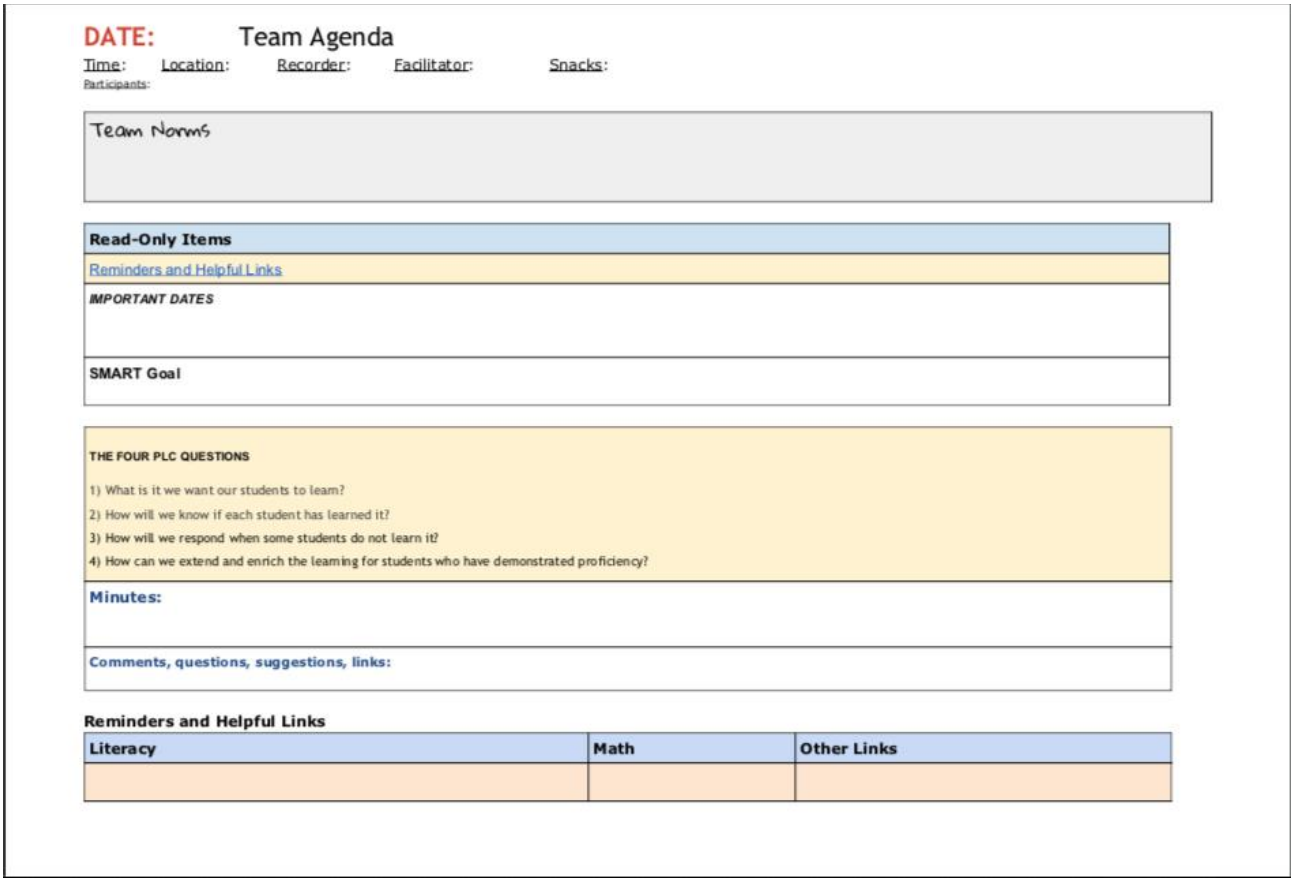
Another document showed commitment to instructional improvement in the form of a PowerPoint on understanding the grade level's power standards. The PLC leaders of that particular grade level created this PowerPoint in order to foster greater understanding and agreement within the entire PLC. Elements of the document demonstrated a desire of the grade level to build consensus around both the purpose of the power standards and how work with the power standards should manifest itself within both the entire grade level PLC and the small-group PLC.

Similarly, other documents reflected a strong nexus between the study's themes of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement and PLCs as a tool for teambuilding. PLC agendas collected across multiple grade levels showed time given to conduct reflections on the ongoing work of the PLC. Elements of the PLC reflection included the following key indicators: norms, power standards, SMART goal, common assessments, interventions and extensions, and collaboration. For each indicator, PLCs rated their progress on a predetermined scale. Notes for

celebrations of successes and action plans for areas of growth were recorded. PLC minutes on the shared agenda documents expressed members' appreciation for the progress their PLC was making. The PLC reflection rubric was created by school administration, and it was established as an expectation for each PLC to utilize the rubric periodically throughout the school year.

Figure 3

Sample PLC Agenda Template



DATE: Team Agenda

Time: Location: Recorder: Facilitator: Snacks:

Participants:

Team Norms

Read-Only Items
Reminders and Helpful Links
IMPORTANT DATES
SMART Goal

THE FOUR PLC QUESTIONS

1) What is it we want our students to learn?
2) How will we know if each student has learned it?
3) How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4) How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

Minutes:
Comments, questions, suggestions, links:

Reminders and Helpful Links

Literacy	Math	Other Links

Note. This template shows the key features that framed each of the grade level's PLC meetings. Some of the core attributes are team norms, the four PLC questions, and the SMART goal for the grade level.

Given the changing composition of the teaching staff, the school site was intentional with ensuring all staff members understood the role and importance of PLCs at the school. Data from some of the documents constituted statements about the fundamental precepts of PLCs.

One document, in the form of the statement of belief of PLCs, was designed to help all staff members appreciate the underlying value of PLCs. Within the document, reference was made to DuFour's (2004) "big ideas" of PLCs. Another document, in the form of a PowerPoint, was utilized at the beginning of the school year as a tool for onboarding new staff members, to remind returning staff about the purpose of PLCs, and to reinforce school-wide expectations regarding common assessments. Each of the analyzed documents served as an artifact showcasing what the school community valued with its implementation of PLCs.

Research Questions Two and Three

How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive self-efficacy? And, how do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive their sense of self-efficacy impacts their engagement with PLC colleagues to coordinate instructional programming and decision-making focused on improving student achievement? At the center of each of these questions is the concept of teacher sense of self-efficacy, therefore, discussion of the study's results regarding these two research questions has been consolidated.

Self-efficacy refers to the belief in oneself to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). For purposes of this study, examination of how self-efficacy specifically manifested itself within the context of PLCs in an international school setting was undertaken. To further characterize self-efficacy within this study, the concept was narrowed to examine teacher belief in their abilities to successfully perform job-related tasks associated with PLCs. Data collected from semi-structured interviews, PLC observations, and document analysis helped address research question two and revealed that most participants had high degrees of belief in themselves as capable educators outside of the context of PLCs. Many teachers also shared that participation in PLCs served as an instrument for continuing to develop their sense of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy expectations are generally characterized as having four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). As the data showed, there were opportunities for these sources to exist within the school's PLC structure. Given the collaborative nature of PLCs, opportunities for teachers to learn from colleagues and share thinking about instructional practices aligned in numerous and distinct ways with their participation in PLCs.

Many of the study's participants spoke of the rigorous and demanding nature of working in the school, and they alluded to the caliber of teachers the school hired. Whether originating from expectations of administration or within the midst of the teachers themselves, there was a general consensus that teachers will bring their "A-game every day" (Participant Admin1).

Interviews. Data collected from semi-structured individual interviews from teachers at the elementary and middle school levels revealed participants had strong conceptions of their generalized self-efficacy. They believed they were highly capable teachers who had a great deal to offer the school and their fellow teachers. Many participants alluded to the Rath's (2007) *StrengthsFinder* work the school was engaged in; thus, the culture of the school was one in which teachers were asked to reflect on the strengths they bring to the table and to celebrate those strengths with others. Additionally, they were then expected to apply those identified strengths specifically to their work with PLCs. This recognition and celebration of strengths may have contributed to perceptions of high degrees of self-efficacy among the teacher participants.

Participant ES2 explained teachers are generally "professional and prepared" and that their norms for professionalism compel teachers to come to PLCs ready to contribute in demonstrable ways. Other teachers shared that the fast-paced and demanding nature of the school environment inspired them to envision themselves as capable and confident educators.

In addition to demonstrating that teacher participants generally perceived themselves as highly efficacious teachers capable of meeting the demands placed upon them, interview data also revealed teachers were eager to leverage their own capabilities to the work of PLCs. In addressing research question three, data showed a recursive cycle of self-efficacy associated with the school's PLC initiative. While teachers typically entered PLCs with high degrees of self-efficacy, they also perceived the PLC structure itself served as a vehicle for increasing their own confidence and capacity as educators. As a result of their ongoing participation in PLCs, teachers believed they were able to develop their own self-efficacy further. Participant MS3 shared the nature of PLCs helps teachers feel "smarter together than any one of us alone," and that an increasing sense of self-efficacy is "predicated on trust that had been built" among the PLC members. Another educator added how participation in PLCs promoted greater efficacy for both the team and the individual members of the team with the following statement:

> Definitely because of the PLC collective efficacy has gone out. As a result of collective efficacy, my individual efficacy has also come up, and my motivation is driving me. So, with those two, as we know, whenever it's choice and voice, and you've got motivation, I can reach my goal and reach a common purpose much faster. So, because of the PLC process, there's better alignment between grade levels, vertical and horizontal alignment. (Participant ES5)

Reflective of the themes of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement and PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, one elementary school teacher shared how PLCs helped improve her sense of self-efficacy, particularly around the efficacy source of mastery experiences, in order to impact student achievement.

> It has significantly helped me to improve my effectiveness as a teacher because I see success in student learning. So I'll try to teach something, and either it won't go well or it will. If it doesn't go well, that's such a great growth opportunity. I'll talk to some of my peers or other PLC members. I'll get ideas and strategies from them. I'll try a different way. Often, it will go well the second time or the third time, and so that again builds confidence as a teacher Success builds success, right? (Participant ES4)

Addressing another source of self-efficacy, namely verbal persuasion, another educator offered how PLCs add to his confidence as an educator with the following,

> I am more confident because I know exactly how my cohort operates; we know each other's personalities; we know where we're all growing; we've been honest with that. Coming out with all of our secrets has really built my confidence because now I know that my cohort is being honest with me, and I've been honest with them. And just the validation we get for our work is a big thing, too. Hearing someone tell me they truly appreciate me taking on the huge project of trying to figure out what kind of rubric we're going to use to measure writing in science validates you and, of course, it builds your confidence. (Participant ES2)

Echoing the power of verbal persuasion from PLC peers, another participant added, "It always feels good when one of your PLC members says you did really well on this, and then asks about how you did it. It raises your confidence" (Participant MS1).

Looking further at the nexus between self-efficacy and instructional decision-making within PLCs, teachers shared that as their confidence increased they were willing to share more ideas with PLC colleagues, and they were willing to think in new and innovative ways in order to promote greater student achievement. Deeply embedded in the school's PLC model is an

expectation of flexible groupings for students. This differentiated or tiered approach to instruction asks teachers to level students based on skill performance and then move students between teachers. Teacher participants shared that mixing students adds a degree of pressure, but it also compels teachers to feel more capable in how they are delivering instruction to another teacher's students.

Efficacy is enhanced when strong collaborative networks are in place (Goddard et al., 2007; Moolenaar, 2012; Moolenaar et al., 2012). One of the themes emerging from this study explains how PLCs serve as a tool for teambuilding, and data showed that collaboration was a key category comprised within that theme. Interview data showed that because PLCs were grounded in a spirit of collaboration, teachers felt a greater sense of self-efficacy, particularly when it came to the sharing of ideas or in participating in a process of shared decision-making. In many ways they considered the process generative and similar to a form of professional development.

> Usually you're in your classroom, and you're teaching in a silo, and so what the PLC has done is that it has enabled us. It's just constant professional growth. You're constantly sharing ideas; you're constantly asking other professionals for their opinion. You're getting this as a group, and you're generating and building off of each other. For instance, we share with someone that they had a great idea, but we ask them what they think plus this. (Participant ES4)

Interview data also indicated that teacher self-efficacy and its connection to instructional decision-making in PLCs were impacted by the key theme of challenges at play in an international school context. As previously discussed, international schools experience a higher rate of teacher turnover than domestic schools. Teachers shared that the rate of teacher turnover

in international schools sometimes made it difficult for them to feel a greater sense of confidence related to the four PLC-framing questions. Welcoming new members to the PLC presents some challenges for teachers. One educator shared,

> Because of the transitory nature of the beast, you're going to have to sometimes spend more time on questions one and two; you're going to spend time onboarding people. You're going to spend some time walking them through things, and it may slow you down from making some other progress. (Participant MS4)

Another teacher offered that, while international schools benefit from the richness and diversity of its teachers who come from all over the globe, self-efficacy dips sometimes because of the diversity and wide span of ideas. This same educator shared that the time involved in bringing together the range of insights and experiences of teachers in the PLC can be exhausting, and this process takes precious time from being able to address questions three and four, or, as Participant MS2 referred to these questions, as the "deeper level of PLCs."

Observations. Given the fact that self-efficacy is recognized as a belief in one's ability to achieve a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977), it was difficult to identify how this internal belief around personal capacity manifested itself during observations of PLCs. However, opportunities to observe participants' practice discrete behaviors and tasks in the context of their PLCs did reflect a spirit of personal confidence and agency typically associated with self-efficacy.

Data revealed during observations helped address key aspects of research question three, namely centered on instructional programming and decision-making. Each of the five PLCs observed reflected one or more of the following characteristics of PLCs: shared values and vision, shared personal practice, supportive and shared leadership, collective learning and application, and supportive conditions (Hord, 1997). Additionally, data showed that each PLC

that was observed had both an implicit and explicit focus on student achievement. It was evident that PLC participants were utilizing their PLC as a tool for instructional improvement and teambuilding, major themes of this study. In the case of PLC-MS2, PLC members frequently employed humor and personal relationships while accomplishing the task of reviewing a recent assessment's alignment to their content area's power standards. It was clear that each member felt a degree of personal capacity and confidence in what they were contributing to the PLC, while also leveraging those personal beliefs to successfully accomplish tasks required of the team.

Data collected during the observation of PLC-ES3 seemed to demonstrate teachers exercising self-efficacy in order to work through some discussion and disagreement over the construction of the grade level's SMART goal. Teachers clearly believed they had a firm grasp on what their students were capable of accomplishing as writers, and they periodically challenged each other to think about different aspects of the goal, ranging from the key writing skills it would measure to the percentage of students it would require to show proficiency for the annual goal.

Related to the theme of PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, data from observations suggested participants had a strong degree of trust in both their own capabilities and in the capabilities of fellow PLC members. Participants would occasionally reference the identified strengths from the *StrengthsFinder* profile as tool for dividing up tasks best aligned with another person's strengths. All of observed PLCs demonstrated a high degree of collaboration, and the coordination among PLC members was used to achieve shared aims for the meeting. During PLC-MS1, observational data indicated teachers practiced self-efficacy in the context of calibrating writing rubric scores. PLC members discussed and debated how to score particular

students' writing on different components of the rubric. In the observed exchanges, it was evident teachers believed in their own capacity to score dimensions of student writing, yet they also valued the perspectives of their colleagues. Teachers engaged with each other in an exchange of ideas in order to reach consensus on how specific students' papers would be scored. While they appeared to be highly self-efficacious in their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a student's writing, they recognized they were part of a team and other people's perspectives needed to be considered. Ultimately, participants came to a common agreement, and they were unified in what the instructional next steps would be for each of the individual students whose writing was scored.

Documents. Data derived from some of the analyzed documents show teachers engaged in a variety of PLC tasks associated with instructional programming and shared decision-making, key factors of research question three. Again, while self-efficacy is a construct of one's internal beliefs, elements of the documents reviewed suggested teachers operate in highly efficacious manners. Several of the analyzed documents were PLC agendas. Given the litany of tasks associated with instructional programming associated with PLCs, tasks were distributed among various team members. PLC agendas reflected numerous teachers volunteering to lead specific initiatives for the PLC. This willingness to engage in certain tasks for the PLC suggests those members' possess a degree of self-efficacy to accomplish those tasks successfully.

One of the documents reviewed was the norms for one of the elementary school PLCs for the 2018-2019 school year. The language embedded in the norms revealed a high expectation of self-efficacy for its PLC members. Terminology, like "preparedness" and "participate professionally" were used throughout the document, and prescriptions for how to structure PLC time using distributed leadership were an integral part of the document. The use of this type of

vocabulary implied an expectation that members consider each other highly capable, and a conjoint belief in the shared capacity of the team to accomplish its tasks effectively is inferred.

Summary

Employing a process of manual open-coding of semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, three major themes emerged from this phenomenological case study of an American international school. The major themes that emerged from this study were PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, and the challenges of PLCs in international schools. Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of the major themes. Taken together, the themes help explicate the major findings from the study, and they help shed important light on the lived experiences of PK-12 teachers working in PLCs in the context of an American international school.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to shed greater light on the perspectives and insights of educators participating in professional learning communities (PLCs) in an American international school setting. This phenomenological case study examined teachers' lived experiences associated with working in PLCs, while also acknowledging how the context of the school site played an integral role in shaping teachers' understandings of instruction, assessment, and overall student achievement. The school site was specifically chosen because of its rich history and success with implementing PLCs in an international school context. This study identified three key themes associated with teachers' experiences with PLCs: PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, and the challenges of PLCs in international schools.

Qualitative data was collected from a variety of sources, including 12 semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators across the elementary and middle school divisions, five observations from both the elementary and middle school settings, and analysis of a range of documents associated with the school's ongoing PLC work.

Chapter V outlines the key findings from the study, and it explains how the information gleaned from this study contributes to the overall body of knowledge associated with PLCs, while also situating the study's findings within the larger context of international schools. Prior to this study, little literature regarding PLCs had been associated with international schools (Gray & Summers, 2016). This study sought to examine how the organizational structure of PLCs impacted the work of educators exclusively in an international school context.

Summary of the Results

The research questions used to guide this study examined the nexus between teachers' experiences within PLCs and their sense of self-efficacy as educators. Exploration of what teachers valued most about their participation in PLCs was undertaken, and focus was given to how teachers perceive their own sense of self-efficacy impacts their work within PLCs. Synopses of the findings for the study's three research questions follow.

Research Question One

How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive the value of PLCs? Qualitative data was collected from semi-structured interviews with individual teachers, observations of PLCs at both the elementary and middle school divisions, and analysis of multiple documents associated with the work of PLCs. Findings suggest teachers placed considerable value on their ongoing participation in PLCs. Given the fact this particular school site has made PLCs an institutional commitment for every employee within the school structure, a great deal of time, energy, and material and human resources have been invested in the work of PLCs. Though many participants acknowledged the amount of time and effort PLCs require of them, they shared they were committed to engaging in the hard work associated with this initiative. Data showed that participants viewed PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement, thereby affirming DuFour et al.'s (2016) belief in the purpose of PLCs as an agent for improving student learning. Participants believed the opportunity to have dedicated time to examine student work and to discuss the results of formative and summative assessments was invaluable to both their professional growth and student achievement.

Central to the tasks associated with PLCs was the opportunity to participate in calibration of scores for student assessments. Many teacher participants shared how the time

spent calibrating scores on student work was invaluable to their individual and collective understanding of how students were performing within their respective content areas. Data showed that teachers believed the discussions regarding how to score formative and summative assessments helped improve their overall instructional praxis. The practice of calibration was critical to the study's key theme of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement.

Directly connected with the calibration of student assessments was the concept of "power standards." Data revealed teachers would regularly evaluate how these standards were driving both their instructional practices and student performance on formative and summative assessments. Data from observations and document analysis was particularly telling regarding the fundamental role "power standards" play in framing instructional decision making for the school. Teachers discussed how their grade level's standards aligned with the grade levels above and below their own, and they reflected on the efficacy of their ongoing assessments to target and evaluate student performance on the selected "power standards." Data showed that teachers would reflect in an ongoing manner on the degree to which their assessments' questions targeted the standards, and they would discuss how the "power standards" were aligned with daily instructional tasks. In fact, the role of "power standards" was so foundational to the execution of PLC practices that they are embedded in the reflection rubric (see Appendix P) all PLCs are asked to utilize throughout the school year. With the reflection rubric, PLCs are asked to rate their progress with employing a standards-based orientation to their overall work with students.

Findings also revealed an underlying focus of PLCs being data-driven. Teachers continuously engaged in conversations around data, and this strategic emphasis on data is what DuFour (2015) considered fundamental to leading to greater student learning. Deciding on what data to collect, how to collect it, and how to report student progress to students and parents

frequently occupied time within PLCs. This emphasis on data played a critical role in influencing the previous two categories of calibration of student work and the implementation of "power standards." Teachers frequently valued the influence of data on decision-making, and data was used to demonstrate evidence of student learning or, as DuFour (2004) suggests, data provided a results orientation for the underlying work of PLCs.

The creation of an annual SMART goal was an expectation for every PLC. The development and progress monitoring associated with student achievement on the SMART goal was directly aligned with the data-driven nature of PLCs. Teachers shared how powerful having a SMART goal was for their work. They believed having a goal orientation helped frame the purpose of the work, and the goal helped the PLC members maintain focus. Data revealed frequent and ongoing conversations about whether students' assessment results demonstrated substantive progress with the SMART goal. Though the goal was written in such a way as to gauge student progress for the year, teachers used formative assessment results to track student progress on the goal throughout the academic year.

Connected to one of the study's central themes of PLCs serving as a tool for instructional improvement was the practice of using the four PLC-framing questions. DuFour and Reeves (2016) pose the following framing questions: what do we want students to learn, how will we know if they have learned it, what will we do if they have not learned it, and how will we provide extension for those students who already know the material. Data revealed teachers saw these four questions as an invaluable tool for directing the work of the PLC. Embedded in the questions is consideration of what to teach, how to assess, and what actions to take in response to student assessment results. Teachers believed using the four questions helped make their PLCs very responsive to students' emerging and ongoing needs. Additionally, the

four questions provided the scaffolding upon which PLCs built their Response to Intervention (RtI) efforts. Teachers utilized assessment results to make instructional decisions on how to group students among the team in terms of students who needed either additional instruction in the form of intervention or, for those students who demonstrated mastery of the content, access to enrichment instructional experiences.

Data revealed teachers valued aspects of PLCs beyond the practices and actions associated with instructional decision-making and improvement efforts. Teachers also viewed PLCs as a vehicle for connecting with colleagues in substantive personal and professional ways. Participants shared that coming together as PLCs on a weekly basis provided them with the opportunity to build relationships rooted in collaboration and trust. Their acknowledgement of the role trust played in the success of PLCs seemingly aligns with the critical influence Bryk and Schneider (2002) attributed to trust in schools. The link between PLCs and the connections between PLC members constituted the second critical theme of the study as a tool for teambuilding.

The impact of these relationships seemed to extend beyond the context of the professional environment. Teachers shared that the unique context of an international school setting often allowed for the blending of teachers' personal and professional spheres. Because international schoolteachers often live near one another, their levels of interaction outside of the work setting are often high. Teachers appreciated the fact that the people they collaborated with at school would also become some of the people they would associate with away from the school environment. Teachers explained they would often leverage the respect and trust they had developed within the PLC to make personal links with each other away from school.

However, it is important to acknowledge this interplay between personal and professional lives does present some challenges for international schoolteachers. Participants conceded that it is sometimes difficult to challenge another's ideas if you know you are going to interact with that person in a non-professional setting. Some participants shared that this apparent duality, when a person plays the roles of both a colleague and a friend, does add a layer of consideration before responding in some situations.

The unique context of the international school setting characterized the third key theme of the study. While international schools do present many opportunities for teachers to grow and develop, participants shared there are some challenges for PLCs associated with an international school context. Beyond the fusion between the personal and professional, data revealed teachers acknowledged that, while they valued the relationships PLCs helped foment, they also understood that the more transitory nature of staffing for international schools did make it more challenging to build the foundations of trust needed for establishing high-functioning relationships with others. Teachers expressed the amount of time it takes to build meaningful relationships combined with staffing changes did not afford some teams the requisite time to cultivate these important connections with others.

Research Questions Two and Three

How do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive self-efficacy? And, how do PK-12 teachers working in an American international school perceive their sense of self-efficacy impacts their engagement with PLC colleagues to coordinate instructional programming and decision-making focused on improving student achievement? Given the focus of self-efficacy for these two questions, discussion of the study's results for these questions was combined into one section.

Bandura (1977) contends that self-efficacy is defined by a person's expectations to arrive at a desired outcome. People with low self-efficacy have little belief in their capacity to achieve the desired outcome, while people with high levels of self-efficacy believe they will be able to accomplish the intended aim. Self-efficacy is typically viewed as specific to a given context or task (Pajares, 1997), and this study chose to examine teachers' generalized sense of self-efficacy as it related to tasks specific to the structure of PLCs.

Data revealed that the study's participants operated with a high sense of self-efficacy. Many acknowledged they brought this solid foundation of self-efficacy with them to the work of PLCs. They shared that they believed they successfully performed many of the tasks associated with PLCs, like developing formative and summative assessments, executing standards-based instruction, and creating and monitoring goals for student achievement. Additionally, teachers shared that PLCs placed them in situations where they continued to grow as professionals. Participants loosely regarded PLCs as job-embedded professional development that allowed them to add to their skillsets as teachers. In essence, they perceived PLCs as mutually beneficial to their sense of self-efficacy. Their strong senses of self-efficacy pushed the overall PLC to achieve its rigorous aims, while the act of coming together to collaborate regularly regarding instructional practices also empowered teachers to feel more capable and aware of their capacity to affect greater student achievement. This notion that PLCs serve as ongoing professional development reinforces the theme of PLCs as a tool for instructional improvement. With this theme in mind, PLCs serve as an instrument for increasing teacher agency related to perceptions of the efficacy of their instructional practices.

Looking at the second theme of PLCs as a tool for teambuilding, teachers referred to the power of PLCs to provide them with authentic and timely opportunities to share professional

practices and experiences and receive subsequent feedback on the effectiveness of the experiences they shared with their colleagues. The act of offering experiences and getting feedback from others relates to Bandura's (1977) four sources of self-efficacy, particularly to the sources of vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion. With vicarious experiences, individuals engage in acts of watching others successfully achieve desired outcomes. Data showed that teachers would frequently come back to PLC sessions and share the effectiveness of certain lessons or instructional activities, particularly if the lesson went well and students demonstrated achievement. Others would see what worked with the lesson and express a willingness to try the lesson or activity. Additionally, teachers would offer colleagues sentiments of support regarding the activities being shared. Opportunities to share practices and engage in discourse around those practices helped reinforce meaningful relationships among PLC members.

The context of an international school setting did present challenges to the self-efficacy development of some teacher participants. Emblematic of the study's third theme of challenges related to international schools, teachers expressed that ongoing teacher turnover associated with working in an international school setting would occasionally negatively impact tasks associated with their PLCs (Guin, 2004), particularly with the use of the four PLC-framing questions. Teachers explained that whenever new members entered a PLC they would need to return attention to questions one and two, namely, what do we want students to learn and how will we know if they have learned it. Time would need to be given to build consensus with new PLC members around these two fundamental questions before moving back to questions three and four associated with how to respond to students who are either struggling to learn material or who have already shown proficiency with the content.

The school's decision to employ the use of *StrengthsFinder* helped reinforce teachers' understandings of their own instructional strengths and how those strengths coexisted among strengths of their PLC members. Data yielded from this instrument seemed to help promote teachers' self-efficacy, and data from this study revealed teachers would leverage the PLC's collective strengths information to make targeted and strategic decisions regarding instructional practices.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers working in PLCs in an American international school. The hope for the study was that it would offer deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of instructional practices associated with PLCs, while also considering how teachers' senses of self-efficacy influenced the contributions they made to their respective PLC.

A qualitative methodological approach rooted in a phenomenological case study was conducted for this particular study. At the heart of phenomenology is a focus on understanding practitioner perspectivity (van Manen, 2016), and this study sought to give voice to international schoolteachers on a topic where their voice is largely missing from the extant body of PLC research (Gray & Summers, 2016). Emphasis on how teachers perceived the value of PLCs was made, and self-efficacy was examined to see how this concept influenced individual teachers' capacity to come together collectively in order to carry out the work of a PLC. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews, observations of PLCs, and document analysis. Ultimately, analysis of the study's findings demonstrates the underlying purpose for the study was achieved.

Participants of this study offered a very positive impression of PLCs. Findings from the data suggested teachers valued the overall work of PLCs, and they saw PLCs as a tool for both ongoing instructional improvement and teambuilding. Separate from their work in PLCs, participants believed they functioned with a high sense of generalized self-efficacy. They expressed feeling very positive about their capacity to execute the functions typically associated with PLCs, like creating and utilizing effective assessments, developing goals and monitoring student progress on goals, collaborating with others, using data to inform decision-making, and having clear understandings of how standards inform instructional practices. However, data also showed that teachers perceived PLCs as a structure that supported their continued growth as an educator. Data suggested that PLCs not only benefited from teachers' individual self-efficacy, but PLCs also served as a mechanism for contributing to the self-efficacy of each of its individual participants.

In many ways, the participants in this study affirmed the existing literature associated with best practices of PLCs, specifically demonstrating the six key characteristics of highly effective PLCs according to DuFour et al. (2013). Teachers showed a commitment to a shared mission, vision, values, and goals; they worked in collaborative teams focused on learning; they exercised collective inquiry; they operated with an action orientation; they had continuous improvement as a focus; and they employed a results-orientation approach to their work.

Where this study added to the literature, however, centered on how teachers in PLCs function given the unique context of international schools. While participants were committed to the prevailing ideals of effective PLCs, they acknowledged some structural forces and challenges representative of working in an international school setting. Given the turnover that generally exists with staff in international schools, teachers shared the challenges involved in

building the level of relational trust and respect that is needed to form effective relationships with members of their PLC. They recognized the difficulties in establishing a sense of community when members of the community are regularly changing. However, despite these challenges, participants managed to leverage the assets of PLCs in order to mitigate some of the difficulties that working in PLCs in an American international school presented.

Findings from this study also supported existing research on the influence of self-efficacy within collaborative networks. Organizational structures marked by strong collaboration may support teachers' efficacy beliefs and indirectly improve student achievement (Goddard et al., 2007; Moolenaar, 2012; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Participants shared that being a part of an effective PLC improved their beliefs about their own capacities to execute their jobs successfully, and they perceived their work in PLCs lead to greater student achievement.

While this study contributed to the literature around the elements of effective PLCs and the research associated with the impact of self-efficacy in collaborative structures, particularly because of its international school context, its overall reliability is moderated by some key limitations. Given the study employed a single case study format at one American international school, its generalizability is limited. Conditions and circumstances at other American international schools may not be representative of what was observed at this research site. With over 4,000 students, the research site is considered one of the largest American international schools in the world, and the school benefits from a vast network of resources and funding. Teachers working in PLCs in smaller American international schools or in less-resourced schools may have differing experiences of working in PLCs from the participants of this study.

Additionally, while participants mentioned teacher turnover as a challenge to establishing effective PLCs in an international school setting, Participant Admin2 shared the

annual teacher turnover figure is approximately 7% for the research site. This figure is comparatively lower than what Odland and Ruzicka's (2009) study found for international schools. Though participants perceived teacher turnover as a major obstacle to building and sustaining high-functioning PLCs, international schools with higher rates of teacher turnover may experience different difficulties or challenges to a greater degree than those demonstrated with this study.

Participants revealed that the diversity of staff comprised within an international school setting positively contributed to the character and global mindset of the school organization and to PLCs specifically. However, some teachers also shared that because of the wide range of experiences and cultural backgrounds among PLC members, careful time and attention was applied to negotiating these differences. With a finite amount of time to execute the work, some participants offered the deliberate attention to acknowledging and affirming the cultural variations leads to less time for focusing on some of the foundational tasks associated with PLCs. It is important to acknowledge that cultural factors are vital characteristics of international schools. However, because all teacher participants for this study came from Western nationalities (American, Canadian, and British, specifically), perceptions regarding cultural awareness and cultural competency may have varied with a wider range of cultural backgrounds of participants.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study, there are several suggestions for further study. This study provided important attention to the nexus between self-efficacy and PLC experiences of teachers working in an international school context. However, there are

opportunities to mitigate some of the study's limitations and further contribute to the body of knowledge associated with PLC implementation in the international school setting.

In an effort to expand the findings' generalizability, more international schools should be a part of a future study. While the single case study employed for this study yielded some compelling insights into the lived experiences of international schoolteachers, incorporating more schools would add to the both the validity and reliability of the study's findings. Additionally, this study's research site was an American international school in Southeast Asia. Including American international schools from various regions of the globe would offer a more comprehensive view of teachers' PLC experiences within the international school context. Furthermore, utilizing multiple sites would afford the researcher the opportunity to make comparisons across school contexts. In selecting school sites, efforts to include schools with varying demographic compositions would be ideal. For instance, including schools with variations in terms of overall size, teacher and student population composition (local and expatriate), and level of resources available would allow the researcher to examine whether conditions for effective implementation of PLCs varied among these factors.

This study was purposefully designed with a qualitative approach in mind. Prior to this study, much of the literature examining self-efficacy employed a quantitative methodology (Bryant, 2017; Maddux, 2013). However, it is suggested that a mixed-methods approach be pursued to examine teachers' beliefs of self-efficacy within the context of PLCs in an international school setting. Mixed-methods research has the capacity to provide rich qualitative explanations of teachers' experiences with PLCs, while also incorporating quantitative data associated with self-efficacy. Employing the use of one of the many available scales designed to measure teachers' sense of self-efficacy would add greater understanding of how self-efficacy

influences teachers' actions within the context of PLCs. This study's qualitative approach gave international schoolteachers greater voice regarding their perspectives on PLCs, but a mixed-methods approach could potentially add greater clarity around the degree to which self-efficacy impacts some of the various tasks associated with the implementation of PLCs. Additionally, depending on how the scale is used, a self-efficacy scale has the potential to isolate which PLCs practices participants believe most directly connect to higher senses of self-efficacy.

Given the fact this particular study took place over the course of a few months, a longer study would provide a deeper understanding of international schoolteachers' perspectives on PLC participation and their perceptions of how self-efficacy affects their PLC practices. As the data showed, the development and implementation of SMART goals was a highly valued aspect of PLC participation. However, given the time constraints of this study, little data had been collected by participants on their students' performance with the expectations enumerated in each PLC's SMART goal. It is not certain how the collection and analysis of ongoing assessment data would have influenced teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, nor is it understood how PLC participants would have responded to the results from data collected of student achievement associated with each grade level's SMART goal. SMART goals are written on an annual basis, and they are designed to measure student progress with particular skills over the course of an academic year. Conducting a study of PLC implementation that covers the course of at least one academic year would afford the researcher the opportunity to examine teachers' reflections and insights more comprehensively. With this scenario, participants would have the benefit of knowing how their students performed with the established goal, and they could make judgments on the efficacy of their ongoing instructional decision making.

Although the international schoolteachers in this study offered compelling insights into how they perceived the nexus between self-efficacy and participation in PLCs, there was little substantive variation in the amount of previous experience the participants had with PLCs. All of the teachers participating in this study were rather familiar and experienced with working in PLCs. Future research should consider making experience with PLCs a conditional factor for participant selection. Ensuring variation in previous experience with PLCs could explicate a dimension of self-efficacy associated with working in PLCs that was unexplored with this study. Comparisons between teachers with varying years of PLC experience could potentially offer the researcher insight into whether teachers' senses of self-efficacy differ among participants with variable amounts of PLC experience.

Implications for Professional Practice

PLCs have become an important vehicle for teacher collaboration (DuFour et al., 2016) in schools throughout the world. Regardless of the particular type of school in which the PLC exists, PLCs ask teachers to come together to examine student data and to make instructional decisions based upon analysis of student achievement (DuFour, 2004; Gray et al., 2016; Watson, 2014). However, the perspectives and perceptions revealed in this study suggest that teachers in international schools contend with some unique challenges that need to be acknowledged and addressed if PLCs are going to continue to attain the goals established for them.

While this study's findings affirmed existing literature on the power of PLCs to serve as a catalyst for both instructional improvement and teambuilding, data showed that international schools do present some unique challenges for teachers participating in PLCs. Concerns over teacher turnover are evident throughout international schools (Gillies, 2001; Hardman, 2001;

Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Mancuso et al., 2010; Murakami-Ramalho & Benham, 2010; Odland & Ruzicka, 2009; Tkachyk, 2017; Weston, 2014), and the variability in PLC composition can act as an obstacle to greater student achievement. While international school administrators have limited control over individual teachers' decisions to leave a particular school, this study demonstrates the impact of turnover does weigh in teachers' minds, and administrators should operate with an ongoing awareness of the challenges turnover presents not only for the overall school but for the individual PLCs as well. When developing initiatives and outlining expectations for PLCs, international school administrators should be aware of how PLCs will respond to these efforts, particularly those PLCs that have experienced recent degrees of turnover. Furthermore, turnover should not only be characterized as teachers leaving a school for a new workplace. Turnover also occurs within school contexts when staffing changes shift teachers to new roles within the learning organization. To mitigate some of the difficulties associated with internal turnover, international school administrators should act carefully and strategically when deciding to move teachers within the school to new PLC configurations. Changing teachers' grade level or content-area assignments can have a substantial impact on PLC members' abilities to connect with one another, and it may have a profound impact on the relational trust that exists within the PLC. International school administrators need to act with a sense of deliberation and careful planning when making staffing decisions within their particular school context.

Additionally, because international schools bring together a diverse group of teachers from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and experiences, these differences sometimes lead to teachers having varying beliefs about student achievement and best instructional practices. Therefore, teachers in PLCs need time and training on how to negotiate these cultural and

experiential differences and to have access to teamwork protocols for collective decision-making effectively. When left unexamined, these differences may present obstacles to building a sense of cohesion within a PLC. This study showed that the cultural and experiential diversity present in international schools is an asset to the overall organization; however, school leaders must be aware of the wide range of backgrounds and experience present among the teaching staff and purposefully plan to leverage those differences as assets within the PLC structure.

Beyond this study adding to the literature regarding the distinct influence of the international school context on PLCs, the findings from this study also reiterate best practices that teachers value within PLCs. Research holds that PLCs must be focused on collaboration aimed at increasing student achievement (DuFour, 2004; Linder et al., 2012; Ning et al., 2015). This study's findings demonstrated that teachers were committed to collaborating around a multitude of practices in order to effect improved student performance. Whether serving in public or private school settings or within domestic or international contexts, school leaders must maintain conditions that allow for authentic teacher collaboration, and they must continue to reinforce expectations of best practices aligned with highly effective PLCs.

Participants from this study seem to suggest PLCs and their sense of self-efficacy coexist in mutually beneficial relationships. Though the participants shared they generally entered the PLC context with high senses of teacher self-efficacy, they believed the nature of recurring interactions and experiences within the PLC sustained their self-efficacy. They contended that their capacity to continue to meet students' needs was augmented in an ongoing manner by collaborating with colleagues in their respective PLCs. School leaders should be mindful of Bandura's (1977) four sources of self-efficacy known as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Operating with these sources in mind,

leaders should embed within PLCs purposeful opportunities for teachers to engage in these experiences on a regular basis. Ultimately, teachers from this study seemed to have regarded their PLC work as a form of job-embedded professional development, and Epstein and Willhite (2015) hold that professional development can have a positive impact on self-efficacy. Understanding the nexus between these two constructs has the potential to have a positive impact on both individual teachers and, collectively, upon the PLCs in which they serve.

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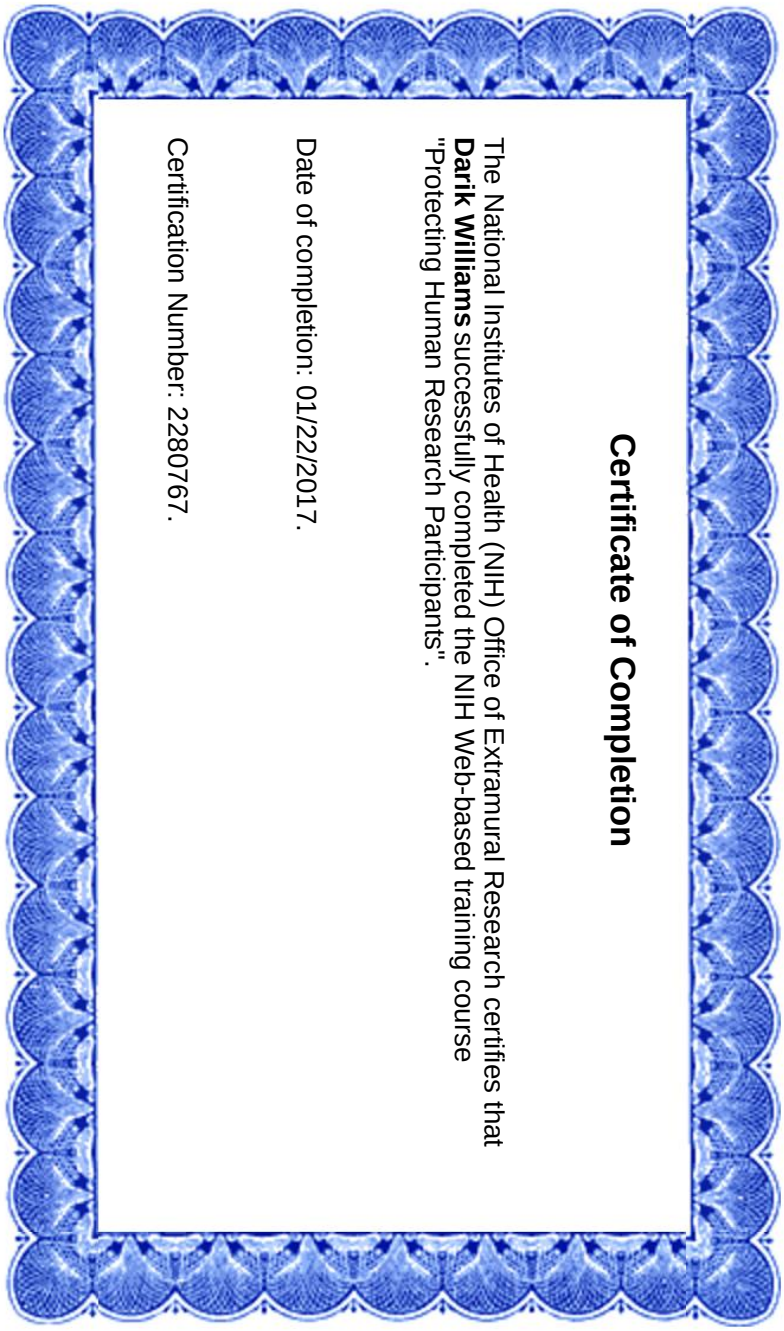
Appendix A



Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Darik Williams** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 01/22/2017.

Certification Number: 2280767.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

DARIK WILLIAMS, a doctoral student in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to self-efficacy and professional learning communities (PLCs) within an international school setting. The impact of teacher sense of self-efficacy on the PLC process will be reviewed. I appreciate your involvement in helping me investigate how to maximize PLC processes within international schools.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

1. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.

2. You will answer a set of interview questions and engage in a discussion on your perception of the impact of self-efficacy on the PLC process. This discussion will be audiotaped/video recorded and is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. Your responses will help illuminate the PLC experience for other international school educators.

3. You will be asked to read a debriefing statement at the conclusion of the interview.

4. You will be observed for 30 minutes within a PLC near the end of the study.

5. You will be asked to reply to an email at the conclusion of the study asking you to confirm the data that was gathered during the research process.

These procedures will be completed on the campus of the international school at a location mutually decided upon by the participant and principal investigator and will take a total time of about 90 minutes.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

1. Some of the discussion questions may make you uncomfortable or upset, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. The researcher will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. However, if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, you may leave them blank.

3. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audiotapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet, password-protected computer or in password protected files. In compliance with the Federalwide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

4. Only the primary researcher and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help international school educators to better understand how self-efficacy influences their participation in PLC structures.

E. PAYMENTS
There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS
If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. DARIK WILLIAMS can be contacted via email at darikwilliams@nnu.edu, via telephone at (650) 483-0460. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Hill, Doctoral Committee Chair at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at jjhill@nnu.edu, via telephone at (208) 467-8871 or by writing: 623 University Drive, Nampa, ID 83686

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future employment status at your international school.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

I give my consent for the interview and discussion to be audiotaped in this study:

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent **Date**

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) COMMITTE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
OBSERVATION ONLY

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

DARIK WILLIAMS, a doctoral student in the Department of Graduate Education at Northwest Nazarene University is conducting a research study related to self-efficacy and professional learning communities (PLCs) within an international school setting. The impact of teacher sense of self-efficacy on the PLC process will be reviewed. I appreciate your involvement in helping me investigate how to maximize PLC processes within international schools.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a healthy volunteer, over the age of 18.

B. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in the study, the following will occur:

6. You will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.

7. I will be utilizing a professional transcription service to transcribe audiotaped observations. More details regarding the transcription services can be provided upon request.

8. You will be observed for approximately 50 minutes within a PLC near the end of the study.

The observation procedures will be completed on the campus of the international school at a location mutually decided upon by the participant and principal investigator.

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

5. You are free to stop my participation at any time.

6. For this research project, the researchers are requesting demographic information. The researcher will make every effort to protect your confidentiality.

7. Confidentiality: Participation in research may involve a loss of privacy; however, your records will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audiotapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet, password-protected computer or in password protected files. In compliance with the Federalwide Assurance Code, data from this study will be kept for three years, after which all data from the study will be destroyed (45 CFR 46.117).

8. Only the primary researcher, the research assistant, and the research supervisor will be privy to data from this study. As researchers, both parties are bound to keep data as secure and confidential as possible.

D. BENEFITS
There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information you provide may help international school educators to better understand how self-efficacy influences their participation in PLC structures.

E. PAYMENTS
There are no payments for participating in this study.

F. QUESTIONS
If you have questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator. DARIK WILLIAMS can be contacted via email at darikwilliams@nnu.edu, via telephone at +55 (61) 98273-1661. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Hill, Doctoral Committee Chair at Northwest Nazarene University, via email at jjhill@nnu.edu, via telephone at (208) 467-8871 or by writing: 623 University Drive, Nampa, ID 83686

Should you feel distressed due to participation in this, you should contact your own health care provider.

G. CONSENT
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Your decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on your present or future employment status at your international school.

I give my consent to participate in this study:

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

I give my consent for the discussion to be audiotaped in this study:

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

I give my consent for direct quotes to be used in this study:

Signature of Study Participant	**Date**
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	**Date**

THE NORTHWEST NAZARENE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) COMMITTEE HAS REVIEWED THIS PROJECT FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH.

Appendix D

[redacted]

OFFICE OF LEARNING

[redacted]

Monday, March 05, 2018

Northwest Nazarene University
Attention: Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Helstrom Business Center 1st Floor
623 S. University Boulevard
Nampa, ID 83686

RE: Research Proposal Site Access for Mr. Darik Williams

Dear IRB Members:

This letter is to inform the IRB that Administration at [redacted] has reviewed the proposed dissertation research plan, including subjects and assessment procedures, proposed data and collection procedures, data analysis, and the purpose of the study. Mr. Darik Williams has permission to collaborate with us in order to conduct his research study with staff members at [redacted] The authorization dates for this research are July 01, 2018 to March 31, 2019.

Respectfully,

[redacted]
Executive Director of Professional Learning
Singapore American School

[redacted]

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
Title: Perceptions of PLCs from an International School Educator

Purpose of Interview: The focus of this interview is to gain the participant's perceptions of experiences with PLCs at one's current school. Questions will be asked to see how one perceives the level of collaboration and engagement within the PLC context.

Q1. How long have you been employed at your current school?

Q2. What is your role in the school?

Q3. What are some of the tasks in which your PLC engages?

Q4. How would you describe the effectiveness of your PLC?

Q5. What would you identify as the major successes of your PLC?

Q6. What would you identify as the major challenges for your PLC?

Q7. What would you say are the critical characteristics of educators who participate effectively in a PLC context?

Q8. What impact do you believe your PLC has had on your ability to collaborate with others?

Q9. What impact do you believe participation in your PLC has had on your confidence in your ability to do your overall job?

Q10. What impact do you believe your PLC has had on student achievement?

Q11. Are there any other aspects of PLCs not discussed in this interview that you would like to share with me now?

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
Title: Perceptions of A School Site Administrator Regarding Hiring and Training Practices Related to PLCs

Purpose of Interview: The focus of this interview is to gain the participant's insights into hiring and training practices for teaching staff related to PLCs at the research site.

Please know your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You are free to opt out from answering any question, and you may end the interview at any time. Your responses will be handled as confidentially as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications that may result from this study. All data from notes, audiotapes, and disks will be kept in a locked file cabinet, password-protected computer or in password protected files.

Q1. What is your role related to the hiring of teaching staff?

Q2. How does a prospective teaching candidate's experience with PLCs factor into one's candidacy for employment?

Q3. Once hired, how does the school orient teachers to the existing work with PLCs at the school site?

Q4. How does the school ensure teachers continue to grow in their capacity to participate in PLCs?

Q5. How does the school ensure considerations for hiring and training practices related to PLCs are consistent across school levels (elementary, middle, and high school)?

Q6. What other considerations does the school consider regarding hiring and/or training practices related to PLCs?

Appendix G

VERBATIM INSTRUCTIONS

Hello, _____!

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Semi-Structured, Audio and Video-Recorded Interviews
A semi-structured, audio and video-recorded interview will be conducted with each participant. These procedures will be completed at a public location mutually decided upon by the participant and the investigator and will take a total of about 60 minutes.

I would like to conduct the interview within the next month (October 2018). This process is completely voluntary, and you may select to suspend your involvement at any time. You may select to answer questions that are of comfort to you, and you are not obligated to answer all of the questions. Please review the attached interview questions.

If you any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at (650) 483-0460 or contact me via email at darikwilliams@nnu.edu. I look forward to our interview and learning about your experiences with PLCs.

Thank you for your participation.

Darik Williams
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University

Appendix H

PLC Observation Protocol

Team Name: Date: Location:

Time: Observer:

Observed Characteristics of PLCs:

Shared Values and Vision ____ Collective Learning and Application ____

Shared Personal Practice ____ Supportive Conditions ____

Supportive and Shared Leadership ____

Observed Activity Log	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

Appendix I

Document Protocol

Title of Document:
Type of Document:
Date of Document:
Purpose of the Document:
Reference to PLC Characteristics:

Participant Engagement	Instructional Decision-making	Shared Decision-making

Appendix J

Member Checking Email

Date
Dear _____:

Greetings! I hope your school year continues to go well for both the students and you. Allow me to begin by thanking you again for your participation in my study entitled *Going Global: A Phenomenological Case Study of Self-Efficacy in an International School's PLCs.*

As promised previously, I wanted to provide you with the themes (please see below) that emerged from the interviews conducted for this study. Please take some time to review the themes outlined below, and let me know if the themes and their corresponding explanations align with the insights you shared during our prior conversation.

After reviewing the thematic information provided, should you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please share those with me via email at darikwilliams@nnu.edu by February 18, 2019.

Theme #1:
PLCs as a Tool for Instructional Improvement
Educators leverage PLCs as a vehicle for reflecting on and improving their instruction in an ongoing manner in order to increase student achievement.

Theme #2:
PLCs as a Tool for Teambuilding
Educators leverage PLCs as a vehicle for building and sustaining meaningful relationships among PLC team members.

Theme #3:
Challenges of PLCs in an International School Setting
Educators in international schools contend with a variety of unique challenges, including teacher turnover and the bringing together of educators from a multitude of cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

Graphical Representation of the Study's Themes:

Thank you again for participating in this study!

Darik Williams
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University

Appendix K

Debrief Statement

Thank you for participating in this study.

Once data is reviewed and analyzed, I will send you an email sharing overall thematic results and solicit your feedback. The purpose of the forthcoming email is to verify I identified with accuracy the major themes from our conversation together. This study will be completed by March 1, 2019.

However, should you have any questions or concerns prior to that time, I can be contacted either via email at darikwilliams@nnu.edu or via telephone at (650) 483-0460.

Thank you for lending your voice and insights to this study!

Darik Williams
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University

Appendix L

permissions (US) Feb 11, 2019, 2:29 PM (1 day ago)
to me

Dear Darik Williams,

Thank you for your request. I am pleased to report we can grant your request without a fee as part of your thesis or dissertation.

Please accept this email as permission for your request as you've detailed below. Permission is granted for the life of the edition on a non-exclusive basis, in the English language, throughout the world in all formats provided full citation is made to the original SAGE publication. Permission does not include any third-party material found within the work.

If you have any questions, or if we may be of further assistance, please let us know.

Kind Regards,

Mary Ann Price
Rights Coordinator
SAGE Publishing
2600 Virginia Ave NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20037
USA

T: 202-729-1403
www.sagepublishing.com

Los Angeles I London I New Delhi
Singapore I Washington DC I Melbourne

Darik Williams <darikwilliams@nnu.edu> Mon, Feb 11, 11:23 AM (1 day ago)
to permissions

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to request an official letter/note of permission for use of a figure (figure title: *Schematization of Triadic Reciprocal Determination in the Causal Model of Social Cognitive Theory*) from the following article for my dissertation:

Title:	On the Functional Properties of Perceived Self-Efficacy Revisited
Author:	Albert Bandura
Publication:	Journal of Management
Publisher:	SAGE Publications
Date:	01/01/2012

Via my *rightslink* account, I was able to secure gratis reuse (see attached), but my university would prefer I obtain official permission. I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at Northwest Nazarene University, and I will be defending my dissertation in April 2019. I have included a figure from the article listed above in my literature review (chapter 2 of the dissertation).

Thank you for your assistance with this matter. Please let me know if there is any further information that I can provide.

Best regards,
Darik Williams
Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership
Northwest Nazarene University

Appendix M

Teacher/Administrator Interviews
Textual Coding Analysis

Code/Phrases/Key Words	Frequency	Quotes Associated with Code

Appendix N

PLC Observations

Textual Coding Analysis and Observational Protocol Notes

Code/Phrases/Key Words	**Frequency**	**Quotes Associated with Code**

Appendix O

Document Analysis

Textual Coding Analysis

Participant Engagement	**Instructional Decision-Making**	**Shared Decision-Making**

Appendix P

[redacted]