AN INTERVENTION MODEL: PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PPLC)

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DEDICATION

My Dedication goes to the circle of people whom I care about the most.

I first want to thank God for blessing me with this leadership and learning opportunity.

My research and hard work is dedicated to my children, Alexis, John Thomas (Jay) and Bradley. I learn so much from all of your successes and also some of your failures. The three of you warm my heart and are the light of my life. While working on this degree during many late nights when I was tired, I would think of you and how we agreed to never give up.

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ABSTRACT

AN INTERVENTION MODEL: PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PPLC)

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The high expectations of the standards movement, the many budgetary constraints, and the societal challenges of living in cities are some of the complexities principals in urban districts face when trying to serve the needs of children in their schools. This research explores an intervention model of principal professional learning communities (PPLCs) that bridges the gap between the districts’ goals and priorities and the ways schools are addressing them. Nine principals using the PPLC model experienced collaboration, support, and collective accountability with their peers. Furthermore, as a result of their collaboration and support, principals examined their own practices in specific areas of observation and feedback, how they used their leadership teams to support next steps, and how they created opportunities for professional development. Qualitative data collection took place through surveys, observations, and interviews.

The study findings indicated that a common learning experience like the PPLC is a valuable tool for principal learning and development. Principals reported that the development of relational trust was an essential reason why principals valued collaboration, and why they supported each other in the PPLC. Principals
also became internally motivated to coach, support, and mentor their peers, and they developed a collective accountability in which they aligned themselves with the goals of the district. In addition, the findings indicated that conducting learning walks together and collaborating about instructional practices in the PPLC helped principals to reflect on their own instructional practices in their own schools. Principals could then use the strategies they learned from observation and feedback, working with their leadership teams and developing professional development to structure the next steps for better implementation of pedagogy.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

My experience in education has totaled almost 24 years in urban, suburban, and rural settings. I began my career as a teacher assistant, and I am now an assistant superintendent. As I reflect upon my work over a 24-year period, I recall that I spent 11 of those years as a school administrator and principal. The principalship was my most rewarding experience by far, but it was also the most challenging. Being in the role of principal allows you to interact with individuals at central office, the community, your staff, and most importantly, the students. It is a job that requires skills in instructional leadership, climate, culture, community, and character development, all with the goal of improving student outcomes. The challenges of this role, particularly in urban settings, are extremely difficult, and the pressures of the standards movement have made it even more complex. Therefore, the ability to develop principals through engagement and powerful professional development is key to supporting their growth as leaders.

The principal of a school in an urban setting has many difficult challenges, and he or she requires a special skillset to be successful. The urban principalship, according to Portin (2000), has characteristics that pose challenges, such as the need for higher per-pupil expenditures, less local revenue, and more students at risk of failing living in impoverished settings with limited English proficiency. Similarly, according to Houle (2006), principals in the lowest performing urban schools in America face challenges, including public scrutiny due to state and federal legislation. Furthermore, Houle stated that the ever-changing societal factors affecting the work of urban principals concern families and community stresses that
affect children, issues outside the school that affect student learning time, and
instructional practices that do not respond to the needs for the success of students.
In addition, Rodriguez, Murakami-Ramalho, and Ruff (2009) stated that urban
schools face challenges connected to urban settings such as diverse social, economic,
and political factors, with highly mobile student bodies, which influences the way
principals lead in these settings.

In addition to the complexities of the urban principalship, the influx of the
standards movement has made this role even more difficult. As a result, according
to Houle (2006), the standards movement has created a tension with the systems in
public schools, and that has created a need for change. It is not possible to tackle
this pressure to meet the needs of educating students in the most challenging school
environments without building the internal capacity of principals. Houle stated that
the shift to meet these demands requires principal professional development,
especially for those in schools that are under pressure to meet state and federal
accountability standards.

Both the urban community setting and pressures and the standards
movement have built a need and a sense of urgency to support and provide
engaging professional development for principals. The National Staff Development
Council (2000) said that principals should engage in long-term, planned, job-
embedded development that focuses on the achievement of students and that
provides opportunities to work in a reflective way, but that also gives time to solve
problems with peers. Furthermore, the National Staff Development Council
emphasized the importance of opportunities for principals to exchange ideas using collaborative approaches both between districts and within their districts.

Reflecting on my own experiences, the facts that I now supervise 20 school principals, and the many challenges of the role – especially in the urban setting with its myriad of challenges – led me to develop this research and professional development for principals in North Philadelphia. This development consisted of principals participating in professional learning communities (PLCs). In this study, I refer to them as principal professional learning communities (PPLCs). I collected the data for this study over 6 months.

The questions for the study were:

- How do principals perceive collaboration, support, and collective accountability within the PPLC?
- How does the implementation of ongoing PPLCs serving principals impact their leadership and practices of observation and feedback, how they utilize leadership teams, and how they create professional development?

The next section gives a brief national and historical background of education, a context for the state of education of the School District of Philadelphia, and emerging solutions that also encompass highlighting my role as an assistant superintendent.

**Background**

According to the Nation’s Report Card (U.S. Department of Education, 2015) for reading in Grade 4, 16% of students who performed at or above the National
Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proficiency level, which was not significantly different from 2009, when it was 15%. The same report stated that 14% of eighth graders performed at or above the proficiency level on the NAEP, which again was not significantly different from that of 2009, when it was 11%.

These examples from the Nation’s Report Card show consistently low levels of student achievement in reading, but they also provide as rationale for developing and answering the question of how to improve student outcomes. The result of turmoil in the School District of Philadelphia, coupled with the inception of federal policies, provides a deep rationale for positive change and the development of a structure to hold a collective accountability and motivation for the district. The significance of this work justifies the rationale, and more importantly, the need for impacting urban district development and progress; hence, the need for action at the school level with principal development and collaboration.

Since the inception of Johnson’s plan for the War on Poverty and equal education for all students, the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has formed the groundwork not only for educating all children, but also for other movements in educational accountability. Moving through the 1980s with The Nation at Risk under Reagan, high standards were required, and federal mandates began regulating schools for the sake of our nation. No Child Left Behind under the Bush administration raised the standards for schools, called for a common curriculum, and looked at the achievements of different groups of children. This standards-based movement continues under the Trump administration, with the support of the last bit of the Race to the Top funding. Last, we have the Every
Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and large movements by billionaires to help to influence educational policy and practice. All of this sets the context for greater accountability for schools and for the performance of children.

Coupled with the efforts of central office and principal leadership, one would think that this alone is an impossible task. But with all aspects of accountability now in central offices and within schools, teams of people must support all this work. Urban school districts bear the brunt of this work of providing equitable access and accountability for all students with limited funding and resources for the neediest children. The turbulence within some of these urban school districts, and particularly the School District of Philadelphia, requires that schools have strong teams of principals to maintain a stable and sustainable atmosphere to do the work.

In addition to the accountability measures and challenges of urban schools, Hill, Campbell, and Harvey (2000) stated that Americans have reason to worry about the children in the nation’s biggest urban public school systems. Furthermore, Hill et al. stated that large cities may have large populations of low-income African American, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic immigrant children. The challenges of student outcomes in these cities are sometimes due to a variety of school failures, or possibly because of the poverty or family instability. For instance, Hill et al. stated that children with low incomes are less likely to perform as well as high-income students at the basic skill level on the NAEP. Furthermore, Hill et al. stated that:

- At Grade 3, urban minority children are only slightly behind national averages, but they fall further behind the longer they remain in school.
- By age 17, average test scores for minority students are no higher than average scores for White 13-year-olds.
- Only half the children who enter big-city high schools stay through graduation 4 years later.
- Minority students educated in city public schools are less than half as likely as other children from low-income groups to enter 4-year colleges.

However, Hill et al. (2000) claimed that there is overwhelming evidence that school quality matters. Cauble, Erwin, Gentry, and Winn (2009) found that urban leadership must manage students from a low socioeconomic status/high minority population, inexperienced teachers, increasing numbers of dropouts, and loss of students to charter schools. Furthermore, Cauble et al. stated that diversity in urban schools means that there are varying languages, religions, customs, and traditions, as well as varying social behavior patterns and attitudes, in addition to inexperienced and undercertified teachers who are more likely to underperform.

**Context – School District of Philadelphia**

In an urban district with ever-changing, complex academic and budgetary concerns, students and communities are the ones who suffer. To support children successfully, there are administrators, teachers, and key staff in the schools, but there are also several departments at central office that support this work. There are thousands of central office support workers siloed into departments headed by chiefs and deputy chiefs. Since 1999, the School District of Philadelphia has had seven superintendents, a state takeover, and nationwide political attention. With all
these changes and this chaos in the organization, coupled with the challenges of an urban setting, students are suffering in schools and their communities. Therefore, I chose to place principals in an intervention model that would be consistent and sustainable for organizational learning within my cohort of 20 schools.

The School District of Philadelphia is the 8th-largest school district in the United States. This district has over 200 schools and over 140,000 students. A five-member school board called the School Reform Commission, which is aligned with the state government, currently manages the schools, but it moved to a nine-member board that aligned with the local government, which now also manages it, starting in July 2018. The current vision of this district is for every child to have a great school close to where he or she lives. The strategic plan puts this vision into action by identifying key anchor goals, namely focusing on early literacy, college readiness, great principals and teachers, and a balanced budget.

Before the current challenges in Philadelphia, there were more drastic historical movements that helped to shape the decline of the district. In 2002, Philadelphia became one of the most aggressive implementers of NCLB by partnering with Edison Inc., a private management firm, to run the schools, in a reform called a diverse provider model. This partnership lasted approximately 4 years, and it turned the district upside down without any significant gains for students. In 2008, the district created a facilities master plan to “accelerate student achievement and to ensure the equitable allocation of district resources through a process to crate, close, reconfigure, replace and renovate schools” (Jack & Sludden 2013, p. 3). The facilities master plan caused the next big challenge for Philadelphia,
which came in 2012 and 2013, with the closure of 30 schools. The plan displaced and moved approximately 15,000 students and families to different schools, with no guarantee of academic performance improving. Amidst these transitions, in 2012 there was a sharp decline in per-pupil revenue from state and federal funding sources, leaving the district in a $300 million deficit and resulting in a 15% reduction in the teaching force and a layoff of nearly 3,800 employees (Caskey & Kuperberg, 2014).

Emerging Solutions

According to Bryk, Smith, and Smith (1998), a strong professional community improves the curriculum pacing in high-poverty schools. This emphasis on community and collaboration raises achievements because of the staff collaboration and support within schools. With this in mind, collaboration among principals in a district should collectively serve and help in the same way for each school, and naturally for the urban district. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) stated that PLC schools include characteristics of a collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all, collective inquiry into best practices, and an action-oriented commitment to continuous improvement. This collaborative culture with a focus on learning requires professional development.

To support the notion of collaboration, Panagos (2011) defined professional development as containing the following elements:

- directly focused on helping to achieve student learning goals;
- supporting student learning needs;
• a collaborative endeavor;
• school-based and job-embedded;
• a long-term commitment;
• differentiated;
• tied to district goals.

Principals in cities like Philadelphia need to be in PLCs so that they can exhibit these characteristics. These challenges in urban settings, combined with accountability stressors, make it clear why this study is necessary. Urban principals who can define their learning experience in a PLC and then connect the experience to their work in schools with teachers should produce positive outcomes for students.

Based on the state of education and the context of the School District of Philadelphia, I was empowered in my role as an assistant superintendent to provide an intervention that supported collaboration and development of principals. In my role as assistant superintendent, I serve as the liaison or broker between the needs and desired outcomes of the schools I support and the communication and mission of the central office. The central office’s role is to support the schools and to assign people to support the different networks of schools across the city. As assistant superintendent, I manage the principals of the schools, and I collaborate with people from different departments supervised by chiefs who are part of the superintendent’s executive team. At the beginning of each month, assistant
superintendents and chiefs meet with the superintendent to discuss the anchor goals of the district and the status of the networks and schools.

The aim of my intervention was to link the anchor goal and work of central office to specific classroom instruction. For instance, Anchor Goal 2 says that all students will read on grade level by the time they are 8 years old. My role was to make that connection and, given the autonomy to manage my schools and provide the best guidance for principal development, I focused the PPLCs on early literacy development. The PPLCs had specific leadership tasks for principals, who observed and gave feedback on early literacy practices in their schools, and they communicated and used the expertise of their leadership teams in assisting with literacy development and providing professional development for their staff. The PPLC encompassed a structured monthly pathway as a solution to the development of principals despite their myriad of challenges.

My first research question investigated if and how principals built a safety net of support with each other, while the second research question examined the specific tasks in their role as an instructional leader. I felt that both questions captured what was necessary to support the challenges of the role in urban settings, but also in the standards-based movement, which also makes this role even more complex for schools, districts and their leaders.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Based on the research questions in Chapter 1, this literature review helps to explain why this topic is important, and it sets out the literature that guides the work of this research. According to Carl and Ravitch (2016), “the content in this literature review will create a bridge between the context, theory, both formal and tacit in relation to all influences” (p. 35). It also serves as a mechanism for learning from the existing expertise of other influences, as I intend to cultivate and generate knowledge across communities and work that is already in motion (Carl & Ravitch, 2016). I discuss theories of behavior and the human aspects of this work first to ground the research. Next, I discuss contributions that explore the current environment of schooling as it relates to the current isolated environments in schools. I then introduce the desired state of schools, where environments foster collaboration. After exploring the work in those areas, I discuss the role of the principal and the contributions of this leadership role in making and creating an environment that is conducive to collaboration and trust. Finally, I discuss PLCs as the mechanism that principals and schools can use to obtain the collaborative learning environment they want.

Behavior Models and Approaches to Leadership Grounding the PPLC

Before exploring the current and desired state of schools, it is important to signal to the reader the underlying framework of this research. The basis of all the research in this chapter is a framework of behaviors, intentions, and competencies. Building on the component of competencies, McKee (2014) defines competencies as “personal characteristics that impact intention and action: motives, enduring
personal traits, self-concept, knowledge and skills” (p. 27). McKee uses an iceberg as a metaphor to show that knowledge and skills are usually the focus of development programs; however, motives, traits and self-concept are drivers of action that are “below the water line” (p. 27), and they are not easy to develop in leaders. However, leaders must attend to them. Utilizing these competencies and moving below the water line, the PPLC extracts and uses models of behavior theory, and it digs even deeper into the contingency approach to leadership. The contingency approach to leadership, according to McKee, offers models and theories that take into account leader behavior and various aspects of the organizational situation and/or the characteristics of followers.

The contingency approach to leadership has many different approaches for the organization and the leader. The PPLC uses this contingency approach by focusing on relationship building, the situation of assistant superintendents, aspects of motivation around goals, and nontraditional approaches to direct leadership. The names of the two contingency approaches that frame and support the PPLC are the path goal theory and the leader substitute model. According to McKee (2014), path goal theory “is a contingency approach to leadership stating that the leader is [responsible] for [motivating] employees to obtain goals” (p. 48). One style of path goal theory is motivating employees by creating a warm, supportive, and collaborative environment. The leader substitute model is another contingency model that supports the PPLC. According to McKee, leaders substitute models of leadership that state that certain characteristics of people or of the situation can make direct leadership unnecessary.
Current State of Schools – Isolated Environments

The current state of schools as isolated environments continues to represent the concept of the one-room schoolhouse. Now in the era of schools and campuses, there are many one-room schoolhouses glued together with a hallway down the middle. This environment is often composed of teachers working in their rooms with their students, and not collaborating with others to share knowledge while building collective support and accountability. Nameghi Ostovar and Sheikhahmadi (2016) defined teacher isolation as first “a condition where teachers work in isolation based on a lack of opportunities in the work place and without interacting with colleagues.... Teacher isolation is [also] a psychological state as opposed to a condition of the work place” (p. 197). Nameghi Ostovar and Sheikhahmadi also noted the similar condition of professional isolation, which is the unfriendly experience one feels when one’s network of social relations at work does not function properly in some significant way, either quantitatively or qualitatively. Nameghi Ostovar and Sheikhahmadi added that this “internal feeling of professional isolation can be categorized as loneliness[,] and [it] leads to lower expectancies for future social relations and to greater loneliness” (p. 198).

The feelings of isolation and loneliness at work in the classroom and school setting are not new. Nameghi Ostovar and Sheikhahmadi (2016) highlighted the 1975 book from Lortie called the School Teacher. In the book, Lortie described three different types of isolation: egg-crate, psychological, and adaptive. According to Nameghi Ostovar and Sheikhahmadi, Lortie added that egg-crate isolation is
the physical separation of classrooms related to school structure where teachers lack contact with one another. Psychological isolation refers to the response of teachers to the mutual interactions with each other and adaptive isolation refers to the overwhelmed state of mind when struggling with new demands. (pp. 197, 198).

Lortie also discussed the concepts of individualism, conservatism, and presentism within the realm of isolation. In an article reviewing Lortie’s work, Lin (2016) stated that Andy Hargreaves, an educational sociologist, had observed that “individualism is a classroom teacher unwilling to collaborate with colleagues, conservatism is resistance to radical change and presentism is the avoidance of long-term planning and concentration of efforts thought to make a difference” (p. 153). Furthermore, Lin reported that Hargreaves had dissected the work of Lortie and this phenomenon of individualism, saying, “individualism is associated with the qualities of uncertainty and anxiety, which leads teachers to rely on orthodox doctrines and their own past experience as students when forming their styles and strategies of teaching” (p. 153).

Research on Lortie’s work has suggested that teaching characterized by isolation imposes restrictions or limitations on teachers and protects them from judgement. Further, the literature points out that several causes of teacher isolation arise from current school structures and scheduling conflicts. In Lortie’s (1975) egg-crate isolation, compressed timetables of schools make professional collaboration difficult for teachers, which leaves them alone without interaction and without realizing the impact.

Zielinski and Hoy (1983) discussed the concept of isolation and alienation in elementary schools. They defined isolation as “the extent to which one is restricted
from interactions with key individuals in the social system” (p. 29). They also
categorized four groups from which organizational members can be isolated:

• individuals in positions of formal authority;
• individuals with influence in the organization;
• friends in the organization;
• respected co-workers.

Zielinski and Hoy derived these groups from the perspective of objective isolation.
They identified subjective isolation and the evolving concepts of self-estrangement
and powerlessness. They defined self-estrangement as the aspect of self-alienation
that many characterize as the loss of intrinsic meaning or pride in work.
Powerlessness is the expectancy or belief of the individual that his or her own
behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes or reinforcements he or
she seeks. To be more explicit, those who feel powerless feel as though others
control their future, and as they feel the sense of powerlessness, they feel that there
is nothing they can do about it. Furthermore, the concept of organizational
powerlessness evolves and influences the administrative affairs of the school and
classroom activities.

**Desired State of Schools – Collaborative Environments**

After discussing the current state of schools and the concepts of isolation
within the classroom and across schools, it is important to note that schools,
educators and districts have made many efforts to move to the desired state of
collaboration. The most desirable outcome is to have a collaborative school

15
environment that enhances teacher growth and development. Musanti and Pence (2010) pointed out that “grounded in the assumption that teacher growth does not happen in isolation, current professional development seeks to create learning communities where participants engage in meaningful activities and collaborate with peers to co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning” (p. 73).

Extensive research on collaboration is ongoing because of its value to the profession and the contribution it makes to the success of students. At the core of collaboration is the intersection of knowledge and engaging in human interaction. According to Musanti and Pence (2010), “collaborative learning is at the core of communities of practice involving co-construction of meaning and mutual relationships through a shared enterprise” (p. 74). Such communities are extremely important to professional development because they set the conditions for teachers to establish networks and connections to share practice, revisit belief systems on teaching and learning, and construct new knowledge to develop their pedagogy (Musanti & Pence, 2010). The desired state of collaborative practices has implications that lie in the concepts of knowledge that teachers learn and the concept of their identity.

According to Musanti and Pence (2010), “knowledge is produced by social interaction and historically and socially situated. Furthermore, we grow from absolute dependence on others to interdependent relationships that allow the teachers to become autonomous and independent while internalizing different abilities and knowledge” (p. 74). In terms of the concept of self and the teachers’ identity in this collaborative process, Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1994) said that
“teaching expertise may not be mastery of a knowledge base, but rather standing in a different relationship to one’s own knowledge[,] to one’s students as knowers[,] and to the knowledge generation in the field” (as cited in Musanti and Pence, 2010, p. 75).

The concept of collaboration helps teachers to acquire knowledge and to develop their own sense of self in their school. A collaborative leader can set the conditions for this collaboration to happen effectively while embedding it into a school culture. Working on a collaborative school culture is a large part of reform and school transformation efforts. Goddard and Tschannen-Moran (2007) analyzed the effects of teacher collaboration on school improvement and student achievement in elementary schools. They suggested that teachers collaborating about instructional issues would enhance teaching and student learning. Goddard and Tschannen-Moran examined the extent to which teachers made decisions collectively about school improvement, curriculum, instruction, and professional development. They found that teacher collaboration might improve the school’s ability to foster student achievement.

Goddard and Tschannen-Moran (2007) added, “focusing on the process of collaboration has a positive impact [and] improves teacher efficacy, [and it produces] more positive attitudes toward teaching and higher levels of trust within the school environment” (p. 878). In addition, they stated, when educators [who] have unique knowledge of a child operate in isolation, the student’s educational experience and learning becomes fragmented and therefore needs go unmet. But when teachers have the opportunities and conditions to engage in professional discourse ... they can collaborate and
build their own content, pedagogical and experiential knowledge to improve instruction for their students. (p. 880)

Goddard and Tschannen-Moran also stated that student achievement has an indirect correlation with teacher collaboration, and the instructional improvement resulting from teachers working together and not working in isolation impacts teacher learning. Supporting this claim indirectly, Smylie (1996) found that individual teacher autonomy and isolation had negative correlations with student achievement. (as cited in Goddard and Tschannen-Moran, 2007, p2.) However, team influence over resources and accountability for outcomes had positive associations with student success. Results indicated that the shared responsibilities of the team of teachers collaborating may improve instruction and, as a result, may impact student learning.

Transitioning to a desired state of teacher collaboration requires actions by the principal and the leaders of the school. The principal must set the conditions and culture for this type of supportive and engaging learning environment.

Hallinger and Heck’s (2010) research was about collaborative leadership, school improvement, and the impact of student learning. They used a series of quantitative studies across 198 primary schools for a 4-year period that described student and teacher perceptions of collaborative leadership and school improvement capacity. One important assumption of Hallinger and Heck’s study is that leadership contributes to school improvement. Furthermore, Hallinger and Heck conceptualized the term collaborative leadership as synonymous with leadership that is comprised of distributed, shared and collaborative.
Hallinger and Heck (2010) suggested that “Collaborative leadership focuses on school wide actions that are directed towards school improvement but shared among the principals, teachers, administrators and others” (p. 97). Furthermore, such governing structures broaden the decision making in the school between staff, and they provide shared accountability for learning. The findings of Hallinger and Heck’s study support the belief that collaborative leadership, as opposed to leadership from the principal alone, may offer a path toward more sustainable school improvement. In addition, Hallinger and Heck stated that “sustainable school improvement was supported by academic structures, school norms, ongoing organizational processes such as opportunities for staff to participate in decision making, professional learning, transparent communication, resource allocation and team based collaboration create opportunities for leadership” (p. 97).

Dussault and Barnett (1996) brought a lot of this research together regarding the state of isolation versus the desired state of collaboration. This literature review began by giving the current state of schools, with teachers being in isolation. Furthermore, collaborative conditions school leaders set for teachers may assist them in gaining more knowledge, feeling a sense of belonging and collective accountability, and maximizing resources.

Dussault and Barnett’s (1996) study transitioned from isolation of teachers to collaboration between school leaders, which has similarities to the PPLC intervention that is the focus of this study. Dussault and Barnett studied 41 educational leaders from two school districts to examine professional isolation and communication. They placed these 41 school leaders in a peer-assisted leadership
program that involved shadowing each other, reflecting on each other’s work, and giving feedback. The impetus for this study was the need to build leadership in schools, because the researchers valued leadership due to its central role in influencing student outcomes and the view that the leaders of the school are central in creating school cultures and successful learning communities. Accordingly, researchers must take into consideration school leaders’ and managers’ role development.

Dussault and Barnett (1996) added,

training and development of leaders is meant to ensure that educational organizations are led by effective leaders. However educational managers find themselves in isolated situations [that are] barriers to [the] development of their leadership. They face challenges while working in conditions that make success sometimes hard to achieve. One of the[se] conditions is the concept of professional isolation. (p. 5)

The peer-assisted leadership program became their intervention, and their findings showed that the program reduced professional isolation without much more informal communication among the educational leaders. They also found that activities within the PAL program, such as constructing models of instructional leadership, reflection, and shadowing among leaders, were most significant.

**Principal and Leadership Isolation**

The literature highlights the current state of schools, which are mostly isolated, and the desired state of schools, which is collaborative, but the literature also depicts the overall school organization. As I transition to discussing the principalship, the impact of trust, and the PPLC model, it is important to mention the literature about principal and leadership isolation.
Bauer and Brazer (2013) discussed the role of principal isolation, and they stated that the existing literature and the practices of school districts clearly associate better outcomes with less teacher isolation; however, the impact of isolation on principals has received less attention. The assumption, then, is that because there is not much research on this topic, many of the conclusions are based on the effects of teacher isolation in comparison to the role of the principalship. However, to summarize the few systematic research studies on isolation of the principal, Bauer and Brazer (2013) stated that it is a negative factor, and that it has links to the principals’ perceptions of their own effectiveness.

Broadening the role of the principal and considering the role of executives and their leadership, a few factors link leadership isolation to the role and the power that the role possesses. According to Waytz (2016), a study by the Stanford Center for Leadership Development and Research found that nearly two thirds of CEOs are relatively isolated. Furthermore, Waytz stated that the power of executives increases loneliness when it involves sole responsibility for exceedingly tough decisions nobody wants to make. For both the executive and the principal in these leadership capacities, isolation can result from increasing opportunities for power, but also from just the role and change of responsibilities. Previously we discussed the desired state of schools. The capacity of the principal to move into that state has increased the opportunities for principals not just to be managers, but also to be better instructional leaders, among other things. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that five instructional leadership behaviors have a potent impact on students’ learning, including promoting and participating in teacher
learning. In the new, desired state, the role of the principal obviously involves more numerous and varied social interactions, and the degree to which principals feel separated from this enhanced interaction may contribute to their feelings of isolation and have adverse effects on them.

According to Bauer and Brazer (2013), the concept of social support helps to affect the isolated state of principals. Bauer and Brazer stated, “research about teachers and professionals in other fields shows that the creation of informal social networks in the workplace that provide support mechanisms can reduce stress for individuals who work in contexts and settings that tend to isolate employees” (p. 157). Bauer and Brazer defined social support as “the mechanism or opportunity in place to promote a sense of connectedness; isolation, in contrast relates to an emotional or affective state” (p. 158).

Principal and leadership isolation as a representation of what currently happens in schools depicts the older era of educational practice. Noting the isolation research, social support from informal networks can assist principals in adjusting to the demands of the job, but it will also establish support that defines more of a desired state of educational practice. Following is more information about the role of the principal and educational trust, and then the concept of PLCs.

**Principalship**

To move schools from their current state to their desired state will require the principal to set the necessary conditions and to build a culture of learning. As noted, isolation, from the one-room schoolhouse to a bunch of schoolhouses glued together with a hallway down the middle, occurs more often than is desirable in
today’s schools. Some of the research has noted that isolation isn’t just a feature of the schoolhouse, but it also lies within many districts and with many school leaders. If school leaders are going to change student outcomes by creating desired states of collaboration, it is necessary to speak about the role of the principalship and the skills that make a difference in moving to this desired state. In addition, research will support the importance of aligning the culture of the school by reducing isolation and by building PLCs, supporting principals by relational trust.

In an era of accountability, the role of the principal has become extremely important, because of its connection to the outcomes of students. Researchers have been exploring the correlation between principal leadership and its impact on students for a long time. Hallinger and Heck (1996) found that principal leadership made a difference in student outcomes, and that the factors that were significant for the principal were internal processes such as norms established for academic expectations, school mission, student learning opportunities, and academic learning time. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) rated principals’ leadership qualities. Their study encompassed a sample size of 2,894 schools and 14,000 teachers. Their findings were that leadership mattered and that there was a correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. Furthermore, the study defined 21 areas of responsibility in which principals could engage for higher levels of student achievement.

In addition, according to Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010), all these studies regarding principal leadership and student outcomes indicate that principals do have an effect, but that other factors within the classroom cause these
effects rather than pure principal actions within the school building. Principals’ leadership actions must be precise and strategic in all school-wide efforts. Supovitz and Poglinco (2001) conducted research on principals, and they found that themes or strategies evolved to improve student outcomes. The themes were that principals organized the school supported by a clear vision of instructional quality, a well-developed community focused on instructional practices shared among teachers, and principals could establish their focus, time, and priorities on improving instruction.

Finding methods or ways as a leader to establish focus, spend time on priorities, and improve instruction is necessary at the teacher level. Principals who make a difference prioritize developing teachers through staff development, because if teachers get smarter, the hope is that student outcomes will improve. Setting conditions for a collaborative culture that is infused in professional development is key to influencing these outcomes. Campo (1993) discussed the role of the principal as the culture leader, and she determined which strategies are most effective for principals to use to build learning cultures of collaboration. Campo highlighted the strategies that attend to the teacher’s needs, motivations, and commitments. According to Campo, “collaborative school cultures make an important contribution to the success of [the] school improvement process and the effectiveness of schools” (p. 119).

Considering collaboration among teachers a priority, Campo (1993) discussed utilizing the framework from Little (1982), in which school leaders create the norms of interactions for successful schools. The norms are teacher talk, joint
planning, teacher observations, and teacher teaching. Campo also utilized the framework from Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), which includes six broad strategies school administrators use to influence school culture: emphasizing shared goals, collaborative decision making, reducing teacher isolation, direct and frequent communication, sharing of power and responsibilities, and using symbols and rituals by celebrating staff and students. Campo found that collaboration is an important and essential part of the work in schools, and that making shared decisions is the most desirable way to build collaborative environments. She also found that the use of symbols and rituals did not play a part in building a collaborative environment. The implications of this work point to what principals need to do to create this desired state.

The implications from Campo’s research are:

• Principals should understand the needs, attitudes, and perceptions of the existing school culture through the eyes of the staff and students.

• Principals need to have a clear vision of the school for themselves, and they should articulate this vision within a set of internal goals.

• Principals should involve teachers in as much shared decision making as possible.

• Principals should reflect on their own behavior and actions. It is imperative for them to be critical of their own sense of effectiveness, but to be able to stimulate teachers’ reflection about their teaching. The
element of trust is an essential component in getting teachers to reflect on their teaching.

- Principals need to make sure that schools have the necessary resources that support collaborative environments.

These implications highlight the need for leaders to be introspective about their work, especially their actions of reflection and setting the vision and goals for the school environment. Those are very important roles for principals as part of the school improvement process. None of these actions are achievable without relational trust within and throughout the school.

**Trust.** A necessary part of collaboration is the relational trust among the teachers and the principal. According to Drago-Severson and Pinto (2006), teaming and mentoring of teachers is a prime method of reducing teacher isolation, creating innovation, and establishing knowledge-based management systems. A leadership decision that supports innovation for this desired state of collaboration is a necessary condition. Drago-Severson and Pinto stated that “collaborative leadership provides access to information and alternative perspectives, fosters dialogue and reflection and develops a culture of supportive learning and progress” (p. 132). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) found that school leaders attempt to build cultures of collaboration that align with practice and research, but that vary from school to school. However, efforts to reduce isolation and to promote teachers’ learning depend on the individual school’s culture, the mission and vision, and the principal’s purpose intentions on collaboration.
According to Tschannen-Moran (2015), teachers’ trust in their principal as well as in each other has links with having a significant impact on student achievement. In 2003, in *Educational Leadership*, Bryk and Schneider referenced a longitudinal study of 400 elementary schools in Chicago, and they noted the role of relational trust in building effective educational communities. Bryk and Schneider referenced Comer’s school development project in Harlem, commenting that building learning communities support[s] the social dimension of school and leadership changes[,] and the analysis of successfully restructuring schools concluded that human resource[s] in terms of openness to improvement, trust[,] and respect and socialization [is] critical to the development of professional communities more [than] structural conditions. (p. 40)

According to Bryk and Schneider (2003), “principals’ actions play a key role in developing and sustaining relational trust” (p. 44). Furthermore, principals establish a respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the vulnerability of others, and [when they] are active listeners. Effective principals couple these behaviors with their school vision and behavior that seeks to advance the vision. This plays out between works [and] actions and affirms [their] integrity as they manage day to day school affairs. (p. 44)

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) also noted the building of this relational trust as the backbone to leadership work in transforming schools:

Education is a complex organization and it isn’t enough to have higher standards, rigorous assessments and accountability in order for students to achieve. There are variables that must work simultaneously within individuals and groups that have to depend on each other within the school and within the school system. This interdependence that has to be present is trust in order to facilitate the consistent innumerable interactions among the people involved in the school and its success. (p. 68)

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis defined trust as “the willingness to make [yourself] vulnerable to someone else in the belief that your interests or something that you care about will not be harmed” (p. 68). They added, “the collective trust between
the many interdependent actors in schools has [been] show[n] to be a significant variable in facilitating the achievement of positive outcomes for students” (p. 68).

The concept of trust conceptualized in the literature, according to Bryk and Schneider (1996), is grounded in the concept of social capital. According to Bryk and Schneider, James Coleman said that “social capital is property of the relational of individuals in a social system and is developed and sustained through relationships” (p. 4). Bryk and Schneider added that

Coleman lists two factors that are indicative of social capital, network closure and trustworthiness. Social network is made up of the concentration of the relationship those individuals within a network or group share in common. The interconnectedness among people allows them to communicate within a network or group. (p, 4)

Furthermore, Bryk and Schneider noted that “the concept of trustworthiness comes from those in a network transmitting communication with desirable norms and undesirable actions, hence the trustworthiness” (p. 4). Bryk and Schneider viewed the work of Coleman and social capital as an

explanation of their views on social trust and the collective property it serves in a social institution. They then transcend their work to how individuals within organizations view the actions of others in the context of a set of mutual obligations which frame their relationships. (p. 4)

Bryk and Schneider (1996) categorized trust in three different forms: organic, contractual, and relational. Organic trust mostly occurs in small institutions or organizations, and it is rooted in faith. Contractual trust usually occurs when parties come together to make legally binding obligations to one another. Last, according to Bryk and Schneider, relational trust, which I believe has value in this study, is where “individuals of institutions form mutual understandings that arise
out of the sustained associations among individuals and institutions and [they] are expected to behave in a normally appropriate manner” (p. 6). Bryk and Schneider distinguish relational trust from the others because the underlying expectations are founded both on beliefs and explicit expectations regarding obligations. However, if desirable outcomes are advanced, but the processes by which they are addressed leave participants uncertain as to the real intentions of others, then trustworthiness may not be achieved. (p. 6)

**Professional Learning Communities.** The mechanism that holds all this research together is the concept of PLCs. This study examines the intervention of PPLCs. Thus far, we have discussed the importance of a desired state of schools in which collaboration is at the forefront of the learning, as opposed to the current state of many schools, which reside in isolation. We then transitioned to the role of the leaders and the strategies, which that are important for building collaborative environments, and the concept of relational trust, which holds the collaboration together. In this section, we introduce the vehicle and mechanism for making sure that collaborative environments are seamless and part of the structure of schools through PLCs.

Richard DuFour (2007) quoted a veteran observer of his work as saying, “One of the most fundamental problems confronting those who would transform schools ... is the problem of persistence of effort” (p. 4). The effort to transform the lives of children in our schools is no small task. The persistence and effort necessary to make schools successful also needs a framework that helps to construct clear guidelines and expectations. The framework for this study is PLCs. A PLC must focus on learning rather than teaching (DuFour, 2007). PLCs begin to evolve due to the learning process of the organization. PLCs are groups of staff members who are
committed to improving practice, often with a facilitator who guides the discussion by focusing on the discourse of the group on critical analysis, while providing a consistent collaborative learning effort (Eberhardt, Koehler, Lundeberg, & McConnell, 2012).

According to Eberhardt et al. (2012), PLCs are based on a social constructivist viewpoint of learning that encompasses interactions between learners as an essential step in the construction of new ideas. Furthermore, researchers have shown in schools that when educators and staff engage in PLC practices consistently, this is the best hope for sustained, substantive, school improvement (DuFour, 2007). Eberhardt et al. cited Richard DuFour, who said that PLCs emphasize three big ideas: an emphasis on learning, developing a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results. Furthermore, Eberhardt et al. stated that there are key components that educators must include in the design of a PLC. They are supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared practice. Spanneut (2010) stated that once schools develop and implement the conditions of a PLC, staff develop deeper understandings about existing conditions, and they form frames of reference that they can revisit, reflect on, and refine based on their instructional beliefs. Spanneut added that if there is shared experience, belief, and knowledge, PLCs can develop, implement, and assess instructional improvement strategies tailored to their schools and to specific needs whereby working together will help schools to achieve more than the sum of their efforts.
If schools form true collaborative teams or PLCs, according to DuFour (2007), they will be able to answer certain questions, such as:

1. Are we clear on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions each student needs to acquire from the course, grade level, and unit we are about to teach?

2. Have we agreed on the criteria we will use in assessing the quality of student work, and can we apply the criteria consistently?

3. Have we developed common formative assessments to monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis?

4. Do we use the formative assessment to identify students who are having difficulty in their learning so that we can provide those students with timely, systematic interventions that guarantee them additional time and support for learning until they become proficient?

5. Do we use data to assess our individual and collective effectiveness? Do assessment results help us to learn from one another in ways that positively affect our classroom practice?

6. Does our team work interdependently to achieve SMART goals that are strategic (linked to school goals) and time-bound (focused on evidence of student learning rather than teaching strategies)?

7. Are continuous improvement processes built into our routine work practice?

8. Do we make decisions by building shared knowledge regarding best practices rather than by simply pooling opinions?
9. Do we demonstrate, through our collective efforts, our determination to help all students to learn at high levels?

10. Do we use our collaborative team time to focus on these critical issues?

Marzano and Dufour (2011) stated that “school improvement means people improvement” (p. 15). Furthermore, they cited that one strategy for district and schoolwide improvement is
to focus improvement efforts on a collective capacity of its educators in order for them to meet the challenges that they face. This collective capacity is designed to create structures for current educators in order for them to continuously improve both their individual and collective professional practice. Improvement strategies like this that build collective capacity of educators as part of the solution to complex issues help [to] build instead of blame or see them as the cause of them. (p. 21)

Marzano and Dufour stated that a collective capacity for an environment occurs where professional learning by the educator is:

- ongoing and sustainable;
- job embedded;
- aligned to school and district goals instead of trendy topics;
- focused on improving outcomes;
- collective and collaborative, instead of individual learning.

Consequently, Marzano and Dufour (2011) provided some assumptions:

- Substantive school improvement requires coordinated, systematic, and collective effort rather than a series of isolated individual efforts, and schools and districts must use professional development strategies to develop the collective capacity of educators.
• The best strategy for improving schools and districts is developing the collective capacity of educators to function as members of a PLC.
• Schools and districts must create conditions to foster high-performing PLCs.

Furthermore, the concept of PLCs helps to develop successful models of school improvement. DuFour (2007) stated that researchers who have studied schools where educators engage in PLC practices have consistently cited these practices as the best hope for sustained, substantive school improvement. Supovitz et al. (2010) noted three factors that influence improvements in teaching and learning by principals, namely “focusing on the mission and vision of the organization, encouraging an environment of collaboration and trust and principal support around instructional improvement” (p. 34). The notion of collaboration and trust within a school building, along with aligning the mission and goals of the organization connect at a macro level within a group of principals within a network of schools.

Furthermore, Supovitz et al. (2010) stated that “trust and collaboration are the cultural shaper of the schools’ culture” (p. 35). Again, keeping this in mind, it raises the question, if principals should provide this for their teachers, then providing this intervention for them will indirectly teach them how support, collaboration, and working with their peers can build relational trust. Supovitz and Christman (2003), in a study about reform in Philadelphia and Cincinnati, noted that
focusing communities around instruction can help with instructional improvements.

They stated,

school and district leaders must create communities that engage in systematic inquiries about their instruction and how it relates to student learning. And leaders can compose an instructional activity such as providing communities with the tools and training to develop structured routines in which they systematically inquire into the relationships between their practice and the learning of their students. (p. 6)

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to explain why this topic is important and to provide the literature that guides and grounds the work of this research. Integrating the literature on the current state of school isolation, the desired state of schools’ collaboration, the role of principals, and their leadership that supports building trust using mechanisms like PLCs helped me to contextualize the area of study. It also provided me with the framework to explain why at a macro level, the experience of principals participating in a PPLC is advantageous, and it can not only benefit the leadership capacity of principals, but also impact the entire district.
Chapter 3: Context of Schools and Principal Participants

Introduction

This research study took place in the context of the School District of Philadelphia, in schools located in North Philadelphia. The context that I am providing is to assist the reader in understanding my principal intervention model. To protect the identity of the principal participants, I have used pseudonyms to describe their types of schools and descriptions of their experience to make sure their identities remain confidential.

There were nine principal participants in this study, and they were a diverse group of African American principals, both men and women, and Latino and White women. Their experience ranged from 10-30 years in the field, principal experience ranging from 3-15 years, and the age range of the principals was from 38-60 years old. Also, of the nine principals, three served as PPLC team leaders for the network. Table 1 gives details of the participants.
Table 1

The Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agnes Johnson (team leader)</td>
<td>William School</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Fernandez</td>
<td>Houy School</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally Michaels (team leader)</td>
<td>McDonald Elementary School</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina Franco</td>
<td>Clay Elementary School</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie Brown (team leader)</td>
<td>Perry School</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Thomas</td>
<td>Barn School</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice Davis</td>
<td>Walter School</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanda Miles</td>
<td>Gladwin School</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Steel</td>
<td>Goldy School</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agnes Johnson (Team Leader) – Principal at William School

Agnes has been a principal at the William School for 10 years. At this particular school, she was originally an elementary school teacher, and she received promotion out of the classroom to be the principal. Agnes’s entire career was in the School District of Philadelphia, approximately 23 years. Agnes became the team leader for her PPLC because of her experience as a principal, but also because of her expertise in navigating through systems, processes, and people at the central office. The William School is a K-8 school that serves approximately 500 students in an urban setting with boarded up homes and poverty-stricken housing developments. The William School serves students of color, and it has a poverty rate in the 90th percentile.
Mary Fernandez – Principal at Houy School

Mary has been a principal at the Houy School for 4 years. All of Mary’s career has been in Philadelphia in both the charter sector and the public sector. Mary has been in education for approximately 18 years. The Houy School is a large K-8 school that serves approximately 850 students. This is a relatively new school in an urban Hispanic neighborhood that is drug and crime ridden. Mary grew up in the neighborhood of her school, and she is very familiar with her families and students.

Sally Michaels (Team Leader) – Principal at McDonald Elementary School

Sally has been a principal at McDonald Elementary School for 4 years. She has been at McDonald Elementary School for a total of 13 years. She was a grade-level teacher and a reading teacher at the school prior to her assignment as principal. Sally’s entire career was in the School District of Philadelphia. Sally became team leader for her PPLC because of her expertise in early literacy and because all the schools in her PPLC were grades K-4 and K-5. McDonald Elementary School is a K-5 school with approximately 450 students in an urban, high-poverty, Spanish-speaking part of the city. The poverty rate resides in the 90th percentile.

Dina Franco – Principal at Clay Elementary School

Dina has been a principal at Clay Elementary School for 11 years. Dina has been an assistant principal in the School District of Philadelphia and a teacher. Dina’s experience in the School District of Philadelphia totals close to 30 years. Clay Elementary School is a K-5 platform with approximately 450 students in an urban, high-poverty, Spanish-speaking part of the city. The poverty rate resides in the 90th percentile. Clay Elementary is a community school supported by the Mayor’s office.
Annie Brown (Team Leader) – Principal at Perry School

Annie has been a principal at Perry School for 7 years. Annie has been a classroom teacher and teacher leader in the School District of Philadelphia for about 20 years. Annie became a team leader for the PPLC intervention because of her knowledge of turnaround and transformation schools. Annie also had great experience in North Philadelphia, and she also grew up in the neighborhood. The Perry School’s enrollment is approximately 400 students in a K-8 setting. This urban area has homes that are boarded up and housing developments with high crime. The school is mostly comprised of African American students with high rates of poverty, exceeding 90%.

Georgia Thomas – Principal at Barn School

Georgia has been at the Barn School for 9 years. Georgia has experience as a teacher and assistant principal in the School District of Philadelphia for about 23 years. Georgia, like Annie, has school turnaround and transformation experience. The Barn School’s enrollment is approximately 450 students in an urban area that has homes that are boarded up and housing developments with high crime. The school is mostly comprised of African American students with high rates of poverty, exceeding 90%.

Janice Davis – Principal at Walter School

Janice has been at the Walter School for 3 years. Janice has experience as a teacher and assistant principal in the North Philadelphia community for about 21 years. Janice had a few principal experiences prior to the Walter School. The Walter School’s enrollment is approximately 400 students in an urban area with a lot of
single homes that are boarded up in a high crime area. The school is mostly comprised of African American students with high rates of poverty, exceeding 90%.

**Shanda Miles – Principal at Gladwin School**

Shanda has been at the Gladwin School for 3 years. Shanda has 22 years’ experience as a teacher, assistant principal, and central office administrator in the School District of Philadelphia. Shanda also had principal experience prior to her tenure at the Gladwin School. The Gladwin School’s enrollment is approximately 300 students, and students live in a high-crime housing development. The school is a community school designated by the Mayor’s office, and the rate of poverty exceeds 90%.

**Jack Steel – Principal at Goldy School**

Jack has been at the Goldy School for 4 years. Jack has experience as a teacher, teacher leader, and assistant principal, all in the School District of Philadelphia for 16 years. Jack has experienced working in transformation schools as a teacher leader, and he has worked with Georgia Thomas as her assistant principal. The Goldy school’s enrollment is approximately 500 students, with a high special education and foster care population. The Goldy School is in an area composed of boarded houses infused with drugs and high crime. The poverty rate at the school exceeds 90%.

**Summary**

All participants were willing, open, and extremely helpful in participating in the PPLC intervention from a learning perspective, but also in giving feedback for
the research study. I am extremely grateful to all the principals who participated in this study.
Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

Developing collaboration between principals in a PPLC in cities like Philadelphia is potentially a powerful intervention for creating the conditions for improving student outcomes. I have found it necessary to understand the needs of principals for professional and organizational growth in relation to the situations in their individual schools. Such an understanding may help me to provide differentiated support and to bring about increased efficacy and accountability. In addition, research on PPLCs and principal leadership has shown a relationship between effective leadership building, enhanced teacher performance, and increased student achievement. Consequently, focusing on capacity building with principals through building collaborative networks and implementing a process of continuous improvement promises over time to impact teaching and learning in positive ways. Thus, this study focused on two research questions:

1. How do principals perceive collaboration, support, and collective accountability within the PPLC?

2. How does the implementation of ongoing PPLCs serving principals impact their leadership and practices of observation and feedback, how they utilize leadership teams, and how they create professional development?

The subquestions I used to help break down the research questions and to assist with my coding of my data were:

- How do PPLCs increase principal collaboration?
• How does a PPLC impact the support principals feel they need and/or experience?
• Does the implementation of a well-structured PPLC increase principals’ sense of collective accountability?
• Does the PPLC structure influence principals’ ability to observe instruction and to offer feedback?
• Does the use of the PPLC influence how principals build and utilize their leadership teams?
• Do PPLCs influence the frequency and/or quality of professional development that principals provide to staff?

Once the interviews were complete and the transcriptions were available, I followed Creswell’s (2014) guided approach to data analysis in qualitative research. Creswell suggested six steps:

• Organize and prepare the data for analysis by transcribing interviews and sorting data.
• Read all data and gain a sense of the information to see what the participants are saying and to form overall impressions.
• Code all the data by bracketing all the chunks by using a word or words to represent a category.
• Utilize the coding descriptions to generate a theme for analysis.
• Decide how you will represent the themes in a qualitative narrative to convey the findings.
• Make an interpretation of the findings and results to determine the lessons to learn.

To inform my professional practice and to answer the research questions, it was imperative to ask the principals to describe their experiences of a PPLC. Knowing how they describe what a PPLC is and how it functions helped me to understand the gap between their perceptions and the design and purpose of the PPLC. Given that a PPLC is a collaborative process, I also wanted principals to be a part of its development, and therefore to buy in to the intervention. By examining how principals see the practice of the PPLC informing their daily work, I could assess which activities helped to change teacher practice.

I examined the leadership of each principal in each of the four PPLCs as a group, but also as individuals. The general themes for the PLC intervention came from district-wide initiatives or the PPLC groupings; for each theme, schools gather observable data and set norms of practice in each of their particular PPLCs. Once this baseline norming and data was in place, each group had its own areas of focus. Next, following through on planning and implementation helped to shape each individual principal’s work. Principals then monitored the implementation of specific school-based interventions and assessed their effectiveness with their school teams. They made modifications as necessary. These steps are part of a cycle of continuous improvement: identifying issues and planning interventions, implementation of interventions, assessment of practices, identifying issues of practice and modifying interventions, and then implementation of modified interventions.
Design of the Study

The overall design of this study included the data-collection instruments and process, e.g., observations and interviews over a 6-month period, with a description of who, where, and when for the observations or interviews. First, providing info on how the PPLC works, the structure and the process, helps to set the foundation for understanding the design.

The overall methodological strategy for this research was qualitative. This qualitative approach used the constructivist worldview, because I, along with the principals participating in the PPLC, sought to understand more of the world in which they work in terms of its social and institutional context. According to Creswell (2014), there are four reasons to use qualitative research to support this study:

1. it provides broad explanations for behaviors and attitudes;
2. it provides an overall orienting lens for the study of questions for issues of marginalized groups;
3. it builds from data to create broad themes to a generalized model or theme; and
4. some studies do not employ any explicit theory.

The aim of achieving a broad understanding of principals’ behaviors and attitudes from observations and interview responses among other data and from the standpoint of working with students from marginalized communities aligns with Creswell’s (2014) rationale for employing a qualitative approach. According to Creswell, case studies are useful in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the
researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, or process of one or more individuals. Since I intended to conduct an in-depth study of PPLCs, I felt a case study would be an appropriate method because the study involves individual interviews in one urban school district, analyzing and coding the recorded interviews allowed for identification of patterns from responses to help to build the theoretical approach for analyzing the data.

Site and Participant Selection

I chose one network of schools in a North Philadelphia neighborhood, and I collected data for nine principals, although there are 19 schools in this network with approximately 11,000 students. There are three high schools, eight Kindergarten through eighth grade schools, and eight Kindergarten through fourth, fifth, and sixth grade schools. There are no brand new principals in this neighborhood network, but seven of the principals have served 3 years or less in this position, while 11 are in the middle of their careers as principals and one is eligible for retirement. However, all the principals have been in the School District of Philadelphia for over 10 years in various positions, and they began their career as teachers.

The Principal Professional Learning Community (Intervention and Purpose)

Before describing the data I collected for the study, it is important to understand why the PPLC intervention was formulated in the 2016-17 school year and refined in the 2017-18 school year to support principals in the regional network.

I formulated the PPLC intervention because I had several principals in my network of schools who were not able to connect leadership practices collectively to
the goals of the district. There was a clear disconnect. Furthermore, there was no consistent support for principals to do this hard work. After getting to know the principals in the network and their individually strong skillsets, I thought that if we have limited resources, we could benefit from learning and growing from each other based on the strengths of the individuals in the network.

The intervention had several components that allowed principals to gather and conduct walkthroughs at schools, discuss data points, discuss best practices for early literacy, collaborate about how they use leadership teams, engage in observation and feedback, and develop teachers through professional development. Through this collective experience and structure, my intent was to create a supportive and collaborative structure that would build leadership, and through accountability, provide better outcomes for students.

The structure of the intervention for principals in the network was to operate in sub-communities that meet every week to focus on key elements of leadership and support. In August 2016, to lay the foundation for the PPLC, principals participated in team-building activities. One of the first activities was to allow principals to gather in random groups to figure out how they would organize and group themselves based on a school commonality. At first, principals gravitated to one another by relationships, and while that was important, I had to guide them to group not only by comfort of relationship, but also by school commonality, since their intervention cycle for the PPLC would use components of early literacy as defined by the goals of the district. With some guidance, groups formed.
We then participated in group norm activities to establish what groups would allow and tolerate, as well as establishing respect in each group. For instance, many groups had a norm of respecting one another and listening to one another, while also agreeing that it was OK to disagree. After each PPLC established group norms, we participated in team-building activities. One team-building activity was called the personal sculpture. This activity allowed principals to discuss their pathways to education and their experience of this work. While telling their stories, they sculpted and collaborated with their team members, and they provided role play in which each team member became a support as he or she was growing and developing. This activity became emotional for team members, because in all leadership and growth endeavors, we have had tough times to work through.

Principals discussed their leadership stories, reflecting on high- and low-performing teams of which they had been a part. They also matched their personal experiences of teaming with literature that supported their concept of teamwork. They had discussions about their own areas of expertise as principals, and how that built their social identities and opened the door to support each other and to collaborate to build on each other’s knowledge and talents. In all these activities, I observed, and at times I asked principals to write reflections on their activity or experience. Through this observation, I decided who would be a team leader for each group. I then had individual meetings with the team leaders to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their teams, and how they would use all this information to support their PPLCs. Finally, I framed the intervention based on the team leader chats and the needs of principals within the networks.
This work with the principals led to the development of the PPLC intervention model. As shown in the first row of Table 2, each month consists of a cycle. In the first week of the month, a representative of each school got together with me, and we developed a monthly agenda for the PPLC. In the second week, I co-facilitated the PPLC meeting with the team leader. The second week meeting was where we as a PPLC reviewed the agenda and the goals of the network, and we aligned the school data for the hosting school for which we prepared to conduct the walkthrough. The leadership activity involved an act that connected to Research Question 2 to support the way we conducted observations and gave feedback, how we utilized our leadership teams, and how we provided professional development. Following that meeting, or in some cases the next week, whichever school was hosting for that month, we conducted a learning walk that focused on some aspect of early literacy. Moving into the 4th week of the month, I conducted a follow-up meeting with the principal who had hosted the learning walk for that particular PPLC. We then discussed the feedback that principal had received from his or her peers and what steps he or she would take next to improve instruction in early literacy. We set up and refined this monthly intervention, as stated above, blending into two school years. The final activity in Table 2 represents interviewing nine of the principals who participated in the PPLC intervention.
Table 2

**PPLC Intervention and Data Collection Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PPLC Team Leader Meetings (1st week of month)</th>
<th>PPLC Meetings (2nd week)</th>
<th>PPLC Walkthrough/Activity (3rd and 4th week)</th>
<th>Culminating Leadership Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Agenda Creation</td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Agenda Implementation and Planning: PLC Goals</td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Walkthrough, reflection, and/or Leadership Activity based on qualitative “look-fors” for the quarter and connected to the goals</td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Research Question 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> PLC Goals</td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> School Goals</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Research Question 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> School Goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this time each PLC is responsible for creating a Leadership activity for the month.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collection (1)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data Collection (2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data Collection (4)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data Collection Component Summary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I do –</strong></td>
<td><strong>I do –</strong></td>
<td><strong>I do –</strong></td>
<td>Component 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record each team leader</td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Split agenda in half for notes side and bottom questions</td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Record entire PPLC Meeting</td>
<td>Record each team leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect final agenda</td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Give exit survey to all</td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Principal follow up for host principal of the PPLC and walkthrough</td>
<td>Component 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They do –</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Record entire meeting</td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Record</td>
<td>Collect team leader agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write preplan ideas for agenda</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>They do –</strong></td>
<td>Component 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss agenda</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Five questions following up from the walkthrough</td>
<td>Exit survey for each PLC meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write and submit postplan agenda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Component 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collection (3)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data Collection (5)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Data Collection (6)</strong></td>
<td>Record each PLC meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I do –</strong></td>
<td><strong>I do –</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Component 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit survey and collect</td>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Record principal follow-up from walkthrough discussion</td>
<td>Record principal follow-up from walkthrough discussion</td>
<td>Component 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>They do –</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Record</td>
<td></td>
<td>Record leadership interviews for each principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Collection Component Summary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

The aim of the data collection was to graft onto the monthly structure of the PPLC intervention. Row 2 of Table 2 shows the data I collected during each phase of the monthly PPLC cycle. In Week 1, the data-collection cycle began when the five PPLC team leaders created the agenda for the second part of the cycle. I recorded
the agenda creation for each team leader, and there was a maximum time limit of 10 minutes for each team leader, totaling five recordings per month.

The second part of the data collection was the actual PPLC meeting, which happened the week after the team leader meeting. The participants adjusted the agenda to take notes and to learn from principals whether their experiences and sharing created any new approaches, what went well, what did not go well, and items that struck me about the meeting. These notes covered the revised agenda. In addition, I recorded each PPLC. I gave an exit survey at the end of the PPLC to each PPLC participant. Last, during this meeting, the participants in the PPLC determined the scope and focus for the walkthrough and/or leadership activity.

The third part of the data collection was a walkthrough at one of the schools in each of the five PPLC groups. After each walkthrough, I recorded a reflection of the walkthrough. There were five recordings each month for each walkthrough.

The fourth part of the data collection was a follow up from the walkthrough. I asked each principal whose school hosted the walkthrough a series of six questions, and I recorded the answers.

I used interviews to collect data along with researcher- and participant-recorded reflections. According to Creswell (2014), the advantages of interviewing are that the researcher has firsthand experience with the participants, the researcher can record the session, the researcher can note unusual aspects during observations, and the researcher can explore topics that may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss. In addition to the interview, secondary sources of data included survey responses and agendas from the meetings of the PPLC intervention.
Data collection ran from September 2017 through June 2018. Figure 1 gives a graphic representation of some of the data.

Figure 1. A graphic representation of some of the data.
Data Analysis

I collected recordings and notes from the nine principals, including semi-structured interviews, observational data, and professional learning meeting agendas. I analyzed and coded all the data sources, and I looked within and across sources to find patterns and trends that impacted principals’ leadership and instructional practices, as well as those that supported collaboration among colleagues.

Table 2 shows the six data components I listed in the summary. Here, I describe my data analysis of each of these components.

Components 1 (recording of each team leader) and 2 (team leader agenda). I summarized the key points of the recording and the agendas the team leaders created.

Component 3 (exit survey for participants in PPLC). I asked each principal to complete a Google survey after the PPLC meeting. A copy of the open-ended survey is in Appendix A. The open-ended survey contains general information about what they learned, how it impacted their experience, and what could be better. After collecting all the surveys, I looked for trends in responses over the course of the year. To look for trends in the responses, I captured all the responses in the Google sheet, and I pasted them by month across a large spreadsheet. I compared responses across the months, also considering that meetings focused on different topics depending on the month in the areas of observation and feedback, utilizing leadership teams, and professional development.
**Component 4.** I recorded the principal follow-up meeting and connected it to both research questions. I looked for evidence of effective PLCs and the shared experience of the principals; collaboration, support and collective accountability, observation and feedback, utilizing leadership teams, and professional development.

**Component 5 (follow-up meeting with host principal).** This recording was a discussion with the principal who hosted the PPLC meeting, and it covered the walkthrough. I asked open-ended questions, which are in Appendix B. This connected to Research Questions 1 and 2, and I coded according to the categories in the questions.

**Component 6 (principal interviews for those who participated in the PPLC).** I recorded the leadership interviews for each principal. The questions are in Appendix C. This component ties to Research Questions 1 and 2 to determine whether principals learned from the PPLC intervention experience and whether the process helped to improve their leadership.

I made the recordings for the meetings, interviews, and reflection with the Recorder App on a mini iPad, and I then downloaded them to the DropBox app. I coded the data using an open coding system to identify themes and patterns. First, I printed each interview out and placed them all in a large notebook. I formulated my coding sheet based on my interview questions, which are in Appendix D.

Next, I read through the interviews over and over until I could locate sentences and narratives that connected to the codes. When I located this evidence in the data set, I highlighted the sentence and data piece, marked the code, and
jotted down notes next to it. After this process, I created a Google shared Excel doc. I listed the codes across the top, and I then extracted the quote as evidence and pasted it onto the code. This allowed me to see the entire set of interviews on one large screen aligned with the codes. When I was ready to write the findings section, I printed out each column that correlated to the code, and I jotted notes and looked for themes. This three-part process allowed me to review each interview thoroughly.

**Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity**

The researcher’s role is to compile a comparative source of information depicting evidence of practice and to analyze the collected data. The researcher’s role is to transcribe, code, and analyze the principal interviews, PPLC meetings, reflection meetings, and survey results. Once this is finished, the researcher triangulates the data in a methodological way.

Triangulation is important, as it provides a strategy and process for validating the data. According to Carl and Ravitch (2016), triangulation is a set of processes that researchers use to enhance and address issues of validity. Carl and Ravitch also stated that triangulation entails seeking convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study. Methodological triangulation is the appropriate form of triangulation for this study, given the use of observations and field notes as well as in-depth interviews.

**Positionality**

As the researcher, to maximize the objectivity of this study, I asked my executive assistant to interview the principal participants to honor the self-fulfilling
examination of the principals’ practice. Together with the principals, we are co-
constructing an intervention model and structure for how to do their work, and a
process for developing in more specific areas within the role of the principal using
the PPLC as the path.

I considered my position and status as an assistant superintendent, my
gender and ethnicity, and my years of experience as a teacher, principal, and central
office leader. These attributes could affect relationships with principals in this
study, considering I am the evaluation officer. There is a fine line between being an
evaluator and coaching on an intervention such as this. The front-loading of the
activities for principals to develop relational trust with each other within the teams
was a focus and dynamic that I made sure was at the forefront of this intervention.
Also, the dynamics of this intervention were an explicit part of the evaluation of the
principals for their role in the school district. I did not ask any questions about this
intervention; nor did I collect evidence that directly related to this research.
However, I intended the intervention to help to develop better leaders, and I believe
that the principals understood that the aim of this journey of learning was to help,
grow, and develop them.

Although it seemed as though the group and individual dynamics involved
trusting and professional relationships, I clearly identified the purpose of this PPLC
model as a strategy for this year to build knowledge about collective efficacy and
accountability concerning the ways principals conduct their work in an urban
setting. The researcher must be cognizant of the beliefs, value collaboration, and
organizational learning that connect to positive student outcomes. I believe that as
principals learn and get smarter with their work, they in turn influence the work of teachers.
Chapter 5: Findings

The analysis of the data has allowed me to identify characteristics indicative of the PPLC intervention model I administered to nine principals in North Philadelphia. The research questions that this study addressed were:

1. How do principals perceive collaboration, support, and collective accountability within the PPLC?

2. How does the implementation of ongoing PPLCs serving principals impact their leadership and practices of observation and feedback, how they utilize leadership teams, and how they create professional development?

Below are the results from the coded areas based the PPLC intervention and these research questions. The findings represent the coded areas of collaboration, support, collective accountability, observation and feedback, leadership teams, and professional development.

Collaboration Findings

Introduction. Research Question 1 asked how principals perceive and experience collaboration while being a part of the PPLC. After a thorough review of the data, I concluded that principals experienced collaboration in two different ways: by spending time with peers learning and growing together and by reflecting on their experience with the current intervention of PPLCs and PPLCs from the past.

Spending time learning and growing. It was clear that principals experienced collaboration during this monthly intervention each month. Principals spent time with each other learning and growing. Several comments were made about how they experienced collaboration. One principal stated,
I remember there being a team member who would bring articles to the table and have us dive deeper into literacy. We would do walkthroughs in each other’s schools and provide feedback on how to improve. And [make] sure we are all on the same page around the early literacy framework.

In this instance, the principal was assisting the PPLC group by providing articles, but the principal also reported that they experienced learning through learning walkthroughs and through giving feedback on how to get better.

Another principal said,

I guess the first thing that sticks out is working with colleagues. I really got to know other people, learn some other ideas. So just learning and growing with someone else, and probably the second thing that sticks out is that we really got a little project going, and we really got the two schools connected, since we were a small group.

This principal clearly stated the value of collaboration and how principals are growing and learning together. The next principal said,

When they would visit our school, it kind of felt good to just know ... for them to actually see, and point out, and actually just say... A lot of them would say, “How do you do this?” And, I’m like, “How do you do what?” “You don’t have kids running around and you don’t have kids tearing up your bulletin boards.” That just doesn’t happen at our school.

The collaboration and learning from one another happened while principals were visiting schools together, but they also asked questions as a part of their learning. A third principal said,

I don’t think anyone is uncomfortable with it. It’s just a chance to collaborate, a chance to talk; it’s a chance to ask questions. I love asking questions. Anytime you go into someone’s building, you learn something, or you pick something up.

Again, principals asked question to learn and to grow together. In this theme, a principal reported about being friends and about honesty, before moving on to principals giving each other feedback about instruction. She stated,
The whole concept of PLC, I think, should be more like a credible friend; we’re being honest with each other, of course we’re being honest. We’re giving each other real feedback; we’re doing that sort of a thing. I sometimes, I still feel like, in ours particular that it’s a little bit forced, and I don’t want it to be.

In this comment, all though this principal referenced critical friends and honesty, according to her, there is more to do on collaboration.

Finally, a principal shared,

[Growing together and developing trust are] not designed to get anyone, they’re designed to make each of us better at what we do, and I appreciate the fresh eye, because sometimes you’re so immersed and you’re so accustomed to doing things the way you do it that you can easily overlook [things].

This comment is about growing together, but also appreciating that there is some sort of trust developing because of the reference to getting someone in addition to being open to feedback and the fresh eye.

**Reflecting on their experience in PPLCs.** The second way in which principals experienced collaboration was by reflecting on the PPLC experience both in its current state for this intervention and in the past in an experience earlier in their career. One principal said, “I guess [it was different] because we didn’t have a PPLC. It was a lot of going outside of my school and district to find opportunities to collaborate with like-minded individuals.” This principal had to find ways to experience collaboration, even if it was not available in her district at the time. Another principal really wanted to take the PPLC seriously by establishing set norms to make sure the PPLC experience was professional. This principal said, “I remember early on, bringing in community building activities so that we could break the ice, but ... utilizing norms and some of the literature around PLCs to
maintain a sense of professionalism.” This principal drew from previous experience with another supervisor, adding, “I've actually had a few assistant superintendents and a few attempts at PLC, and this is the most successful. I really feel connected to the other three principals in our PPLC. So, it’s very positive.” In this comment by the principal, the experience of the PPLC did not always go well. This principal said,

No, I’m glad I had a good experience. I had a poor one when the district tried years ago. Like literally, we were in the school auditorium, they say we’re gonna have PLCs, they put they schools together, in the auditorium they ask who’s gonna be the PLC leader? It consisted of basically the number of schools that are in the network, and we maybe talked about the PLC model three times during the entire school year. That was the only other experience I had with what was called a PLC.

The final theme to support a reflection on the PPLC experience is that principals discussed the structure of network meetings that focused on overall goals. One principal shared,

It’s different because, for me at least, I’m with schools that are similar and have similar student populations. As a principal [I'm] always saying that it's important to collaborate with and get ideas from people who are in similar situations than you. In previous years we would have what we just call our network meetings, and so we would just go and do some team building and updates from the district or the network, and then usually we would do things that are focused around goal setting or action planning.

**Summary.** Spending time collaborating is part of principals’ experience as participants in the network. They must attend to the tasks as part of the PPLC, and a large part of the experience is to be able to share and collaborate with peers who are in similar settings. In each of these examples, principals discussed reflections on their experience with the current intervention of PPLCs in addition to PPLCs from that they had experienced in the past as principals. Thus, principals must
collaborate by spending time learning and growing, and this experience made them reflect on their current and past PPLCs.

Support Findings

**Introduction.** Research Question 1 asked how principals perceive and experience support while being a part of the PPLC. After reviewing the data, I concluded that principals experienced support in three different ways: by taking on the role of coach, by becoming a resource for knowledge and guidance, and by affirming practice through feedback.

**Taking on the role of coach.** The findings showed that taking on the role of the coach for peers in their PPLC in order for them to be successful was more of a priority as opposed to simply receiving coaching for their own growth and development. For example, one principal stated in reflection,

I think you were sensitive to how you framed your feedback to your principal colleague. You contextualize that, and you helped them think about, in spite of the resources, this is what you’ve been able to do and if you had more [you could do more].

In this example, the principal had intentions of giving feedback that was positive and she was also mindful of people’s perceptions of the feedback and aware that different schools have a variety of different resources.

Another principal stated,

I feel like when I dedicate myself to coach people, that they will [rise] to the occasion, they honor my expectation, where he’s the opposite of that. He is the person who’s up front talking all the time. You’re not gonna get that buy in. His concern is not buy in. He could actually do it, he’s smart. He’s able to talk all the jargon and all that better than me. But it’s the implementation. He’ll want to learn, but his implementation is not effective, where Jack, he’ll want to learn, but he cannot implement, or he doesn’t implement.
In this example, the principal self-identified as a coach and owned that role, but she also seemed frustrated about a fellow principal where she could not do more to help him who apparently was not working to potential despite the expectation. This same principal also said, “I think the focus is how can I support people to move forward or move in a direction where they’re growing.” Still in coaching mode, this principal asked questions and reflected on how to maintain a focus to make sure that principals in the PPLC have positive outcomes and grow as leaders. This principal was acknowledging goals that I represent as the district leader.

In this next instance, the principal taking on the role of the coach is exemplified by being strategy-based, through developing support during learning walkthroughs. This principal said,

Actually, that’s what I want to happen in our PLCs this year. That’s why I wanted to set it up where it [is] just three teachers in every classroom. I want to develop the principles and show them the process and how to move people on a low, medium, and high. How do you move a low, medium, high teacher? Show them what is needed. If they can do that, they’ll move instruction, they’ll move it.

It seems as though the principals was reflecting on her own practice about what works, and then sharing that with their PPLCs from a coaching perspective.

The last example of a principal taking on the role of being a coach happened when one principal was supporting instructional monitoring of a fellow principal in the PPLC. Some of her questions were apparently to check for understanding. Her comment was,

So, one of the things that I saw is the way he presented questions about common facts that he noticed. So, one time he was like, I realize Jamal was working on X. Last week he was doing Y. What was your progression? What was your thought around that? So, just connecting it to smaller things, to get
somebody to open up to a bigger thing. And he did that a couple times when he was.... So, that was kind of ... his practice.

**Becoming a resource for knowledge and guidance.** The second way that principals experienced support from one another was by being resources for knowledge and guidance. Principals often referred to communication with their peers in efforts to help them to solve problems of practice, technical matters of the job, and communication for comfort and stability. One principal said, “I think I spent time searching for literature, improving my own knowledge around the work, so that it was connected to everyone else’s experiences.” In this instance, the principal was looking for text to share about early literacy practices connected to the PPLC that could align to her differentiated experiences.

Another principal reported,

Not necessarily a professional thing, but it gave a feeling of support. That somebody would be there to help me with the everyday things. And also, an opportunity for an honest glimpse at what was going on. Since I’m here every day, it looks different to me. But when people would come through, or when people would do their walk throughs, [they would] get a chance to see ... the things I identify as our reality, and [how we meet] our goals.

This principal felt supported by daily, everyday things, and this acted as a resource for guidance and or knowledge. She looked at support as a resource to help to build capacity for teachers’ learning. She stated,

I think it gave us an opportunity to see on the other hand what some other schools were doing, as well as getting feedback from other teachers, administration, what have you on what’s happening in our own building, and also, making the connection between staff and the two schools was really fun to see. So, like some of my teachers would then visit other teachers even outside of the PPLC meeting.
Another principal felt that a working relationship was developing, commenting,

I think it definitely makes you closer to your peers, because you have a different bond and a different interaction. It might be a forced interaction at first, but then over time you develop. Again, we were small, so now we are at the point where Marissa will text me or ask me questions, and we are not even in the same PLC anymore. But it’s definitely formed a professional working relationship that I would not have had otherwise, and it also takes you out of your little comfort zone.

The resource for knowledge and guidance because of the working relationship extended outside of the PPLC, although it seemed that it took some time to get to that point, as trust needed to develop. Continuing to be a resource for knowledge and support, this principal felt the need and comfort to call after hours, and she reported,

I think that I could say stuff. I can remember Evelyn calling me at like seven o’clock at night, practically between mad and tears at the same time over ... like hold up, hold up. You can do this. You can try this. That has a lot of value to it, and all of that comes in the PLC piece.

Another principal reported more support as a resource of technical knowledge, sharing,

Having a PLC, I felt like I had somebody that I can literally go to and just discuss goals. Like, “How do I fill out this goal setting sheet? And, let’s bounce some ideas off of each other.” Or, just listening to Mary just give me some ideas, to me, I prefer that.

The final pieces of data came from one particular PPLC that used a group chat application as a resource for knowledge and guidance. Two of the principals in that PPLC stated,

I think we also, I don’t know if the other PPLC’s do this, but we use GroupMe. It’s an app. It’s like a chat app. So, we’re constantly on there as well with
each other, like hey, don’t forget about this, or does anyone have this, or I need to order this.

And

I don’t know; I guess, I mean the GroupMe is a good piece of evidence in terms of people reaching out, asking questions, people texting. Here, I’ll get you one. You know, their comments about, I guess, thanking me or whatever it might be that I did for them or helped them with. I don’t know, I think people think that I have answers sometimes.

**Affirming practice through feedback.** The third way principals experienced support was affirmation about practice through feedback. In this area of support, principals seemed to appreciate the comments from others as they visited each others’ schools. The peer-to-peer interaction around practice followed by feedback seemed to be of value to the principals. One principal said,

> We aren’t judgmental as a PPLC. We ask questions about where we think we are, how to assist the school ... we are walking through, and we give suggestions. Now they’ve seen ... I think they saw that we were trying to help, not necessarily saying, “We know it all, you guys should be at this point,” it is more of a support. It was genuine support.

In this situation, the principal seemed to take a leadership stance, and she claimed that as a PPLC, the principals are not judgmental, and they help to support each other through suggestive feedback.

In another instance, a principal said,

> Now you get to come in my classroom and my classroom doesn’t look like what you guys have. Yeah. I think in Jack’s, I didn’t think they came over that much, but I liked his team he had. They were very smart and really wanted to learn. I like giving feedback and supporting them around systems, around what they could be doing better.

This principal, again, took a leadership role to make sure that there was affirmation and feedback about systems in each other’s schools. Another principal seemed
hesitant to have feedback and affirmation, however, stating, “that’s fine, because I trusted who was coming in, so it went from fear to just a little apprehension, to nervous, to feeling like I could work with what they were bringing back to me.” Once the trust developed, peer feedback apparently was not an issue. This principal needed affirmation about a particular teacher about whom she had concerns. That principal stated,

It felt great to hear that. It was also good to hear feedback when they looked at individual teachers, and it reaffirmed what I thought of that same teacher. So, that teacher was horrible even when.... We went through a 2nd grade teacher, and he was horrible, and I kept saying that. I’m like, “Nobody’s listening to me.” And, then you’re like, “Why is he still here?” I’m like, “Exactly. Why is he still here?”

The principal even questioned why this teacher was still in the school. Maybe affirmation and feedback was what she needed to take corrective action, despite any doubts.

Last, a principal shared enjoyment and affirmation about work without others evaluating or judging it by sharing,

It’s nice to have people come in and see the work that you’re doing. Do you sometimes feel like you’re being judged? Yes, but it’s not meant to be evaluative. It’s meant to just really get feedback, and I know that. Sometimes, even as a teacher and as a leader, when someone comes in and sees fifteen minutes of something, but it’s an all-star teacher, but someone’s not doing what they’re supposed to be doing, or she’s off point, or whatever, then you almost have a regret, like I wish they would’ve seen so-and-so at their best.

This principal even reflected on an earlier experience as a teacher when someone came to visit her and gave feedback and affirmation.

**Summary.** Principals are always in a role of support to help student, teachers staff and community. At times, you have to wonder who supports them in their time
of need. As an example in this study of the PPLC intervention, principals continued
to be great support for each other by taking on the role as the coach, becoming
resources for knowledge and guidance, and affirming practice through feedback to
each other.

Collective Accountability Findings

**Introduction.** Research Question 1 asked how principals perceive and
experience a sense of collective accountability by participating in the PPLC. After
thoroughly reviewing the data, I concluded that principals experienced collective
accountability in three ways. First, principals had much discussion about shared
goals and the desire to align them to their leadership actions. Second, principals
experienced collective accountability through leadership activities that created like-
mindedness and shared accountability. Last, principals engaged in collective
accountability through suggestions for planning based on their leadership actions of
the principals in the PPLC.

**Shared goals.** As this intervention was part of the network expectation,
principals seemed very willing to collaborate and support each other. In the data
there are several examples of principals showing desires for shared goals for their
schools and the connection to the network.

An example of a principal showing a desire for shared goals is as follows:

The goals being that you want to be going in the right direction with your
PPLC. I think it was a good compass in support of staying focused on the
vision at our work. I think the more intentional we became about the look
fors and the walkthrough, I think the sharper we were about feedback for the
host principal, but also thinking about how it was happening at our schools.
Also in this example, the principal wanted to make sure that the host principal was getting good feedback. If everyone in the PPLC was giving good feedback to one another, then they were growing together towards the shared network and district goals.

Another principal stated,

I think that’s one of the things…. Because during our PPLCs, we try to focus and talk about data. And then we try to talk about data related to the literacy block. But in turn, bigger picture, we were trying to connect that to the stuff that we did in our data programming, and standardized testing.

This second principal was asking for shared, direct goals because as a PPLC and network we have been working diligently across the district on literacy practices and then connecting our school data to the network data and ultimately the district anchor goal data. Principals talked about data relating to the literacy block, but they wanted to connect them to their partnership with the instructional coaches for the data programming group. The desire to be aligned is again there.

This comment by the principal about being by oneself in a school resonated with the current state of education, which tends to be isolationist. She said,

you just don’t get a chance … being in the school by yourself the majority of the time. I like that it gave a chance for us to reach out to each other when we knew what to focus on together.

Maybe the desire to share goals helps to prevent the notion of isolation, or, in the next example, to avoid being isolated, but principals are more concerned about bringing knowledge and resources together to share, because they are stronger together than alone. One principal stated,

Yeah. I guess because I hear the off conversations, you know when you hear your colleagues, like the off conversations? And it’s just like, you’re going to
this and you’re going to that, but you’re not coming back and sharing your newfound knowledge? So how can we pull everything that we’re learning and our resources together?

**Shared practice and like-mindedness.** This second subset of collective accountability is somewhat similar to the principals’ desire for shared goals, but it differs in that they have already had shared experiences that have created a like-mindedness. I also address the shared experience or common experience in the observation and feedback session. However, in this section, the level of expectation the intervention provided placed principals together, but it did not make them participate independently of one another. There are several examples of this in the data.

One principal stated,

I remember us coming as a team and knowing our purpose. We were all together because we took the formative assessments, so we were able to come together and have the same systems and goals around getting to know where children were and being able to help them [to] meet standards.

The alignment and sharing of practice and like-mindedness, which is good for children, is clearly the focus here. Being on the same page as each other to build capacity and to have better student outcomes is always the goal. This principal placed this together by saying,

I remember there being a team member who would bring articles to the table and have us dive deeper into literacy. We would do walkthroughs in each other’s schools and provide feedback on how to improve. And [make] sure we are all on the same page around the early literacy framework.

Another principal explained how the intervention had worked: “We spent time talking about our monthly goals in relationship to our annual goals. Other than that, resources were shared. And that’s it.”

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The last principal who discussed shared practice and like-mindedness said,

If anything, I would say it just helped us to become more like-minded and/or goal oriented with similar things. So, if we learned something out of a walkthrough that we wanted to focus on or we needed more support with, we might have, in a separate way, gone and sought that support or helped each other out in another way, in terms of the best practice and the visits and things like that.

Despite the efforts to share in all aspects, some principals stated that they wanted to share, but to have some differentiation or choice in how they did things. One principal said,

Then, share the ideas with other principals. So, if we’re working on the same goal, we should then be working on the same goal in the same way. Or, being able to differentiate it, depending on our school. I think that would be helpful.

This principal states the reality where each school is different and deserves some sort of differentiation although goals can be the same. The path to get there and the actions to get there may be different.

**Planning.** The last subset of findings of collective accountability connected the next steps or action steps for planning for the future. The sense of togetherness, and the willingness to continue the process of supporting each other seemed to be meaningful and seemed to lead up to a planning process. One principal stated, “So wanting to have courageous conversations about our next steps across our schools, I think was important. Celebrating, of course, but also strategizing around how we make it better.” The sense of being truthful and honest with the other members of the PPLC, creating that synergy across the schools, and celebrating success while making it better seem to depict the thoughts of this principal.
To dig even further, another principal brought to the surface the need to look at the different perspectives of stakeholders and to find trends across schools for planning. This method of planning overlaps with what principals should be doing at their schools, but from a collective, macro perspective it makes sense. This principal shared,

It was good to have people to talk [to] that speak the same language, or have the same focus. One of the things we were looking at is, how was our data growing, or what was the trend that we could find in our data. Looking from a teacher perspective, and a student perspective. That was something that I knew when we came together, that was the thing we would talk about for the majority of the times.

This principal also concluded that this is possible because of the consistency among the PPLC with its shared language and shared focus.

One principle used the early literacy process from a reading initiative in each of the schools to mirror the strategy of the PPLC:

I felt like with this total process that we were going through with the reading initiative, we would focus on [the] culture of learning or whatever and that would refocus on guided reading. We were trying to close the loop on the culture of learning, and to be able to move forward from that and say we’re shifting to guided reading, and now we’re shifting to writing, was helpful.

This principal believed that the PPLC should be using this process to move from setting up the environment to guided reading and then to writing.

The last planning aspect came from a principal who needed more detail on action steps and communication. She asked,

Do you have a system for tracking the action steps? Do you have a way of communicating? There’s five of us, six of us, and we all have to, like I need to know what Sally is putting in as an action step for Bill, so that when we go to do an informal, I’m following up on that action step, and then developing it further.
On this point, to plan the next steps, some method of capturing the work is important, and the ways principals communicate in the PPLC can support this sense of collectiveness.

**Summary.** Placing the principals in a common place with a structure that supports collaboration and support helped them to have shared goals, to have similar, shared leadership practices, and to figure out ways to plan. Developing the conditions for placing principals together in a PPLC, I was unable to predict what would evolve from this process, although I knew I had to try to monitor their improvements, provide support resources across the network, and assist in supporting their development and growth as leaders.

**Observation and Feedback Findings**

**Introduction.** The second research question asked how the implementation of the PPLC serving principals impacted their leadership practices of observation and feedback. The practice of observation and feedback is a strategy and best practice in our district that we use to monitor instruction. For the purposes of the PPLC intervention, we used the practice of observation and feedback as a way to provide a common learning experience that would norm our work for literacy instruction. The distinction between the two leadership actions of conducting an observation of instruction and giving feedback on what was observed is often a leadership practice that is combined, as you have to have both in order for practice to improve. The implementation of doing the observation even raised questions for principals regarding their follow up and method for conducting the feedback in terms of how effective they were in its delivery. In the data set, the principals
reported both of their actions; however, reporting them separately provides the reader with a better understanding of the principals’ experience. Therefore, these findings report principals’ perceptions of the observation experience and the feedback experience and how conducting this practice informed their leadership style.

**Observation.** I broke down principals’ perceptions of the observation experience during the PPLC intervention into subsets that captured what principals reported during their interviews. The first subset regarding principal expectations for instruction centered on the District’s Anchor Goal 2, which says that all students will be reading on grade level by 8 years old. The intervention focused on K-3 early literacy practices, including climate and culture pieces relevant to implementing the literacy requirement effectively. One principal reported,

> There were certain things, like objectives not at guided reading tables, where I didn’t necessarily stress that. So, it was like, yes, that was the feedback from the walkthrough team, but since I didn’t say, ‘Teachers, you need to do that,’ I didn’t feel like that feedback needed to happen, because I didn’t share with them the importance of that happening. I was okay with it being on the board or not necessarily at the table. Some of their walkthrough stuff I didn’t want to give to the teachers because I didn’t say, ‘This is what should be happening.’

In this instance, the principal had expectations but not objectives for the guided reading area and therefore did not want to give direct feedback to the teachers based on this observation since the feedback would have been based on the observation of peers in the PPLC. Furthermore, the principal may not have even observed this about her teachers since it wasn’t the expectation at her school. She
reflected and realized that the other principals had varying expectations depending on the situations in their own schools.

Another principal noted the classroom environment for instruction and said,

So that was my takeaway. Although we’re looking at classroom environment and instruction, with our informal observations and looking at all this other stuff, even though on the walkthroughs, it made me go back and focus on one thing ... to give that immediate feedback to the teachers. So, I did.

The take away for this principal has helped to refocus and make a connection between objectives and feedback delivery, and although in this section of observation, distinguishing between the two where both are necessary can be difficult. But, whether effective or ineffective, but both comments in this section by the principals begin with the strategy of the observation. This particular principal was thinking about the objectives in the classroom by stating, “I might [have] seen something then said, ‘Oh wow. Look how they did that objective.’ And then I may look for that and provide that feedback to help my teachers better when I am in my own building.”

After watching a guided reading group at a host school, one principal drew connections to developing her kindergarten teachers. She said,

When I went to Dina’s school and visited her guided reading, then I went back to my kindergarten classroom, I’m like ... it doesn’t line up. There’s no alignment. I knew what my teachers were not doing. So, then I was able to say to them, “You guys need to work together, and you need to do this together.” And, then take them with me to Dina’s school so that they can see.

This principal also noticed the need to make some curriculum and instruction adjustments based on observations of other schools, particularly in kindergarten.
The second subset for observations was the common experience of the principals in the PPLC. What is compelling about the common experience is placing a group of principals in a room to observe instruction. Upon inception of the observation, despite the venue, they come with different experiences, and they are looking for different things, even if the observation is specifically on early literacy. For instance, during an observation on early literacy, someone may focus on the delivery of instruction during guided reading groups, while someone else may look at the students’ role in guided reading. Their interpretation of the observations based on common experience is ultimately what they make of it, and the way they create meaning after spending time discussing it.

The shared experiences of the principals in this PPLC were the result of observing the classroom, watching video, and reviewing work samples in writing. During a classroom observation, a principal noted that she was “Just going into classrooms for observation to see where time is being dropped or not utilized properly. That ... then transitions.... Tidying up systems, are the teachers actually looking at data to then do something with it.” An example of this common experience after watching a video was,

I do know that when I’m sitting down with you and we’re talking it out or we’re looking at a video and saying, “How can your work look like this?” And then actually doing it together, we’re on the same page.

One principal explained a common experience example using work samples:

I forget what school it was. Was it Georgia or was it Shanda? I can’t remember, it was one of them, brought in the teachers of, when we did the writing samples, when we do the writing sample pieces, they brought in the teachers so that they could actually hear the feedback. I thought that was awesome. I would love to see more of that. That I think helps bridge the
disconnect between we’re doing a walkthrough, and you know, how awesome would it be if principals were giving you feedback? That’s awesome.

Both principals shared common learning experiences that came from their observations. Whether it was sharing a video and discussing pedagogy or whether it was including teachers and looking at the instruction and studying the work samples of that observation, either way helped to norm practice which could lead to more constructive feedback.

The last subset for observation regarded the tool used to capture observations. During an observation, principals should note their expectations in some form to capture thoughts for planning feedback. One principal referenced this tool after the PPLC intervention, saying, “So, I really used that. I was able to use the walkthrough form at my school, because we didn’t really have an established form for walkthrough. So, we were able to do that.” This seems to have solved a concern for that principal, because the school adopted that tool.

**Feedback.** I broke the principals’ perceptions of the feedback experience during the PPLC intervention down into subsets that captured what they reported during interviews. The subsets report the timeline and method of principals giving feedback, how principals norm with others, and what they do with the feedback once they get it.

In the first subset of data regarding feedback, principals reported giving feedback in a timely manner, and they discussed different methods of how it was delivered. One principal said that
Just closing the loop as soon as possible [is important]. So, not waiting to go back and look at some notes, sit down. Just really, this is what we believe, this is what our eyes say, and this is what the data says. This is a feedback that we’re gonna give, and then we’ll check back up on that.

What is interesting is that within the feedback statement, the principal speaks about what he or she believes and what the data say. Closing the loop would support the principal’s beliefs, sense of urgency, and immediacy. A similar comment, “I guess the biggest one, or the best one, was just closing that loop as soon as possible. So, do the observation, within an hour, hour and a half, was able to give the teacher some type of feedback.” This immediacy for this principal defined a period, which supported her belief about what is important. Another principal stated,

Oh, personal leadership style with more, again, I’m not good with giving instant feedback and that’s something that I would see someone else and be like, “Oh. I need to do that.” It took an extra second to just tell them X, where I would normally wait to do that and then if I forget I forget or if I don’t…. I think it’s more about my personal style than the instructional kind of thing.

The personal leadership style is useful, but as the first principal said, what you value, you will monitor. The second principal, unlike the first, noticed that the need for immediate feedback must have arisen during a PPLC meeting.

Many principals discussed their methods of giving feedback. For instance, if the school is working on shared reading strategies, then the feedback and observation should be about shared reading components. One method, one principal stated,

I think, yeah, I think there was a little. I saw a lot when we do walk throughs. Lots of check offs and little comments to give to teachers around feedback. I’ve always felt like that wasn’t effective. I always feel like having a conversation with the teacher was more effective than giving them a piece of paper based off of a checklist.
The method in this example was more proactive than a checklist on a paper, but it was more personal and face to face. The principal thought the delivery would have more of an impact and would be more personal and if this helps change practice and builds a better relationship with the teacher then it is a success.

Another principal also thought about leadership, and the method of communication in terms of giving feedback. Principals must understand that how they give feedback will determine what the teacher does next. The same principal said,

I saw that [there] was a difference where I think my feedback.... I’m more strategic around what feedback I’m giving. Even though I see all this, I just focus, so that I know how to take someone from one step to the next step. I don’t know if all leaders know how to do that, where they might just say, “Just fix all of this.” Then the teachers just don’t know how to do it.

When referencing norming with others while giving feedback, I recalled an instance where I observed a feedback session at a school as part of the PPLC, and I would like to share that story. The host principal shared some of the data prior to the PPLC walkthrough. She discussed that school staff were working on components of writing and building out the writers’ workshop methods for their third-grade students. The host principal asked us to go into the third-grade classrooms, and she gave us a checklist of expectations. After we observed the writers’ workshop, she asked us to come back to the meeting area. She then asked if it was OK to get the teachers into the meeting with us. She found coverage for the four teachers, and within minutes, they came to the room. The principals of the PPLC shared their feedback based on the expectation checklist, and the teachers asked clarifying questions. They also provided work samples for the students we
observed. We scoured their work together, continued to ask clarifying questions, and had an open and transparent conversation about student learning. This expansion of the PPLC to norming with other educators, in this case, teachers, was probably the most effective feedback session I had ever attended.

A principal also made a reference to it, saying,

I forget what school it was. Was it Georgia or was it Shanda? I can’t remember, it was one of them, brought in the teachers of, when we did the writing samples, when we do the writing sample pieces, they brought in the teachers so that they could actually hear the feedback. I thought that was awesome. I would love to see more of that. That I think helps bridge the disconnect between we’re doing a walkthrough, and you know, how awesome would it be if principals were giving you feedback? That’s awesome!

When people give feedback, they want to know that some sort of cyclical process takes place. For instance what is the follow up, support and data that supports them once they get the feedback. As I noted earlier, some principals’ methods have taken into consideration how they give feedback, because they realize that it can generate movement and improvement based on what they say and how they say it. A few principals commented on trends and next steps based on feedback from their feedback sessions. For instance, one principal said,

Yeah, so the teachers hear it from them, they get their feedback, and then they hear it individually from me as well, and what are your next steps, what are you going to make sure. They came in today, what would they see that would be different, that would change that from not visible, not evident.

Additionally, and in a similar vein, another principal said,

So I talked to the teachers individually, I just met with them very shortly, max 10 minutes, and we sit there and we listen to information and then the leadership team, they saw this certainly, the first two people to see it were mistakes and Mrs. C., and they talked, and they came up with an action plan based on the results of this, what next steps were for individual teachers.
This last principal’s process for feedback was looking for trends across schools and giving feedback that is inclusive of next steps. When teachers own the process, it is probably very helpful in developing teachers who will continue to improve. Also including the leadership team in the conversation helps with the cyclical process, in that staff can look at data, observe teachers, and come up with ways to develop for better student outcomes.

**Leadership styles.** Within the second research question, principals’ perceptions of both their observation and feedback experience also caused them to reflect on their leadership style based on their PPLC experience. As I mentioned before, the common experience of the principals yielded many discussions about instructional look fors and strategies.

One principal brought the perceived leadership style in the realm of observation and feedback to my attention:

So, I think one thing with Annie’s team, the teacher leaders were more active in providing feedback. There was a line to, I think, some of my beliefs about what feedback should look like, right? So, they were more active, but then in the same, I think that Annie wasn’t always as actively involved in challenging some of the feedback that they may have given. You made me always think about the balance between the two, so I wanted to reflect on that in terms of leadership capacity.

These beliefs about feedback played a part, as did the perceptions of the relationship the one principal had with her leadership team, and the perception of what feedback should look like. In addition, this principal reflected on her own leadership capacity based on the expectations of principals in the network.

Another perceived leadership style example came from a principal who was interacting with a teacher, but also sharing feedback and getting confirmation. The
principal perceived that her style of leadership was not good enough to give feedback to teachers. She also perceived that the other leaders’ view of the situation meant that she needed some sort of confirmation for teachers at her school. This principal shared,

I used the feedback from the walkthroughs and shared that feedback with the teachers. Then, I would go back into their classroom to see if they changed up anything or…. Because it was coming from other principals, I think that they took it…. They didn’t feel like it was me coming at them for any reason. It wasn’t like I was targeting them or picking on them, because I would share it as the group of principals. “We all saw this in your room. This is what you have to work on.” Because, they knew it was informal…. It was a conversation starter. At that point, they didn’t take it as I was targeting them. But, then I would say to them, “I’m going to come back in two weeks and see what changes you’ve made with whatever, planning or your classroom environment.” Then, it became a different conversation after that, if nothing changed.

One principal commented on the reality of certain principals’ leadership styles in observation and feedback, stating,

I don’t think it has [changed]. But, only because I didn’t see where what they were doing fit in to improve my practice. It was interesting for observation and feedback, but I didn’t see where I needed to transplant anything or might find anything.

In this example, the principal did not believe that the practice of working within the PPLC with others in a learning and supportive environment had impacted this practice. I wonder if this principal would maintain this position after returning to school and continuing to see the leadership styles of others during walkthroughs.

Summary. Principals were in groups in the PPLC, and they conducted learning walkthroughs together to impact their instructional leadership. A portion of Research Question 2 explored whether the observation and feedback portion of the PPLC impacted principals’ instructional leadership skills. Reviewing the data set
helped me to understand the principals’ perceptions of observation, the principals’ perceptions of giving feedback, and the impact of leadership styles.

**Leadership Team Findings**

**Introduction.** As part of the PPLC intervention, principals placed an emphasis on a cycle of improvement that encompassed observation and feedback, how they use their leadership teams, and how they provide professional development. Principals seeing and observing instruction in their schools and monitoring both in a quantitative and qualitative way tend to have a lot of data. Sharing this information with their leadership teams is essential to make sure that leaders recognize trends, and that teachers perform to drive student achievement. The membership of leadership teams for the principals varies; however, most include early literacy specialists or reading specialists, guidance and/or climate personnel, the assistant principal, if there is one, and lead teachers who help to support instruction in the building.

The expectation in the cycle of improvement for principals is to share and communicate with their leadership teams and to value their levels of expertise based on what they observe in the building. This helps with the planning process for professional development. In this area, principals participating in a PPLC undergo influence in the ways they utilize their leadership teams at their schools.

The next portion of the findings focuses on sharing feedback, and owning the accountability with the leadership team, and owning aspects of planning. It also covers the ways that working with the leadership team has helped principals to self-
reflect on their leadership, and how it has impacted how they build other leaders and provide coaching.

**Shared feedback and owning the accountability and planning.**

Participating in the PPLC and visiting other schools or even hosting a visit from other principals should spark some thought about the work in one’s own school. Principals should be communicating with their leadership teams about the findings and feedback of the observations they have received or that they have noticed in other schools. One principal reported,

> Though the walk, we were pointing out differences in the programs and what each individual school needed to do in order to balance it. I just remember in my conversation at our next PPLC speaking about how do we do that for math? Then with my leadership team, figuring out explicitly how we provide that balance in those programs. In that type of way, we were able to refine our actions in our schools.

This principal was sharing feedback from the PPLC and through her experience reflected on math programming. This led to the discussion with the leadership team in order to look at at different programming options with the leadership team.

Another principal stated,

> I won’t have that experience unless I go to another school. So, the idea [was] that I could see better practice, I could see worse, I could sometimes, it’s a sign. Like we went to visit the school for the PPLC, the whole idea around changing my breakfast time was because of the admittance sign that I saw with Joe. And I was like, well how does this work for you and go? And he told me about it, he gave me a sign, I talked to my leadership team, I was able to bring that, or make it work for me, ’cause it’s not exactly how his is. But I would not know that if I wasn’t going to another school.

In this instance, the principal was addressing a climate issue at her school; however, communication with the leadership team was key, as were the next steps to work through a different system the school needed. She valued seeing something
different through that PPLC meeting. The next principal commented on the need to loop from PPLC to the leadership team and back to the teachers. Once the feedback was shared and discussed then the accountability necessary is to share with the teachers.

I went to the leadership team and brought back the comments and concerns, because we didn’t visit every classroom. So, what we did see? I wanted to get a little bit broader view on, like what other people saw or thought. Then I went back to those teachers, and whatever it is that was told is what I communicated.

Through deliberation and strategic intent to share and get what the leadership team thought about that observed instruction, the next step was to get with the teachers to be able to coach or change practice. Importantly, the thoughts and communication of the leadership team mattered to this principal.

Sharing the accountability from the principal to the leadership team, some principals viewed this as an opportunity to do some cross collaboration within schools by having teachers see one another, and through this planning next steps. An example of this is when one principal stated,

I would come back and bring to my leadership team or to Sherry that then would make a shift in here and other things would be more specific like, “Did you see how that literacy teacher did X? We need so and so to go over there and see that literacy teacher, so they can actually see it in action.”

This principal wanted to cross collaborate with the leadership and even the teachers to share and observe literacy practices at other schools.

**Leadership self-reflection, and then what?** Principals participating in the PPLC and visiting other schools with the expectation of communicating with their leadership teams became part of a PPLC best practice and strategy for principals.
They had to reflect on their own practices and actions in their schools, and to try to figure out not only how to make changes, but also, through this communication, how to build additional capacity in the school. Building capacity in the school and being able to coach others is important in leading a school. It also allows all staff to take ownership in the development of the school. One principal shared a reflection prior to communicating with the leadership team:

I think I’m always kind of trying to learn from different experiences. Yeah, it always had me refining how I interact with my leadership team. I definitely feel like I did learn from one of the principals in my PPLC, looking at ways to delegate more and to have a different level of ownership there. Even not just with the leadership team, and when I think about it I think with the teachers, like hey, everyone sees themselves as leaders in their own different spaces, and [they] take on different initiatives in their classrooms.

Another principal also had a self-reflective moment relating to the leadership team, and how to collaborate and build capacity. She reflected on

The time that [it] came back to the way that I did the work. More, say, than the way I thought about addressing some of the stuff than the work. So, if I talk about the trust aspect. Being able to put my reading specialist in charge of formatting a plan. Putting it together, rolling out, water testing it. And then, present it to me, so that we can do the final say on what’s going on. And, in turn…. It was the reverse before that. I would create the plan, and then do the check and balance with them. And we look at some of the things that our PPLC team leader did…. Just the way she was very precise about the things that she talked about when she was in her leadership meetings.

The last example of principals self-reflecting about their leadership teams and thinking about capacity and coaching came when a principal stated that she valued

the leadership teams piece, seeing different leadership teams, and then how people use that leadership team, because I don’t think anyone taught me how to use my leadership team. Like I just think it will happen the way that it happened, and I just assumed that everyone else would have that or try that,
and I don’t, even with Marissa too, even trying to push, it’s hard to push, mold, create, other adults.

The value for each principal besides the self-reflection and the capacity building touches on areas of accountability, communication and trust. Sharing best practices from other schools during PPLC visits and coaching and supporting your leadership team and the value of their work is critical to planning and next steps.

**Summary.** Principals grouped in the PPLC had the opportunity to see other schools and their practices as part of the intervention. A component of Research Question 2 was the effect of utilizing leadership teams to see if this impacted their instruction leadership. Reviewing the data helped me to understand that there was a shared accountability for the work and next steps once principals communicated and utilized their leadership teams, but also points of self-reflection from the principals, where they questioned what would be next depending on how they changed practice as a result of the reflection as it related to building the capacity of the leadership team.

**Professional Development Findings**

**Introduction.** Research Question 2 involved leadership practices of principals due to participating the PPLC intervention. We asked principals about how they provide professional development based on a cycle of leadership practices. In essence, this entire intervention was about their learning and their development as principals, from each other as peers, and from collaboration, support, and collective accountability for their schools and for each other. The learning and development of principals hopefully produced learning for their
schools, their leadership teams, and their teachers, and a learning community for all, where students succeed.

As principals conducted observations and gave feedback to teachers from what they saw, they communicated and used their leadership teams as part of a cycle of their leadership practice. Communicating with their leadership team and strategizing on next steps and planning is essential in changing practice. After collaborating with the leadership team, principals next cycle of practice would be to provide professional development for teachers so they can get better. Following this cycle of practice also allowed for a timely, quarterly or 8-weekly data check-ins for each school. Principals reviewing this data hopefully saw ways to provide support for teachers, but also from a reflective stance, it hopefully helped them to see where they needed more support.

The data I collected on professional development detailed how a PPLC influenced participating principals in their provision of professional development for their staff. Furthermore, the findings show how principals refined methods based on their data, and how principals developed teachers once they experienced the PPLC.

**Refining methods based on data.** Thinking about instructional leadership and the pulse of a school, principals should be refining methods and actions based on data. As part of the PPLC, we reviewed 8-week data, which defined the work of each quarter in the school year. Principals in their PPLCs could talk about their data and share ideas as a way of learning, but also to determine the next steps.

As an example of refining methods based on data, a principal stated,
My 8-week check-ins ... forced me to reflect on things that, what was in my goal, and then identifying those individual students that needed the additional support, to check in with the teachers and to change the professional development.

Another principal commented on refining methods based on data, but she was clear that it was about learning what to do next with it instead of getting bogged down in it. She was also looking at the data to determine what they said about the principal's instructional practices in other areas. She reported,

I did not plan my professional development necessarily around the data that I pulled. I used it, but I [tried] to think of professional development opportunities as practice focused, and not.... I tend to refer to the collection of data as like academic autopsies. So, I want you to know what's there, but I don't want to get bogged down in nitpicking what has already happened. Here's the data; this is it. I'm giving it to you. Now, what can we do to affect this? Right now, I am geeked about this science achievement. So, we know kids have to read, and they have to be able to do math, but we're not demonstrating achievement in reading and math. So, how do we parley this achievement in science over here into reading and math?

Another principal mentioned data as a way to push principals to develop their staff professionally. She said,

I think just whether it was the 8-week check-in or the PLC, I think it helped drive the other professional development and obviously, having the data right there, sort of forces your hand. Right? Just like we do with our teachers, forces their hand to certain situations to look at their data, so it forces our hand to look at our data and then reflect on why our data looks like it does, whether it be the same or whether it be totally contrasting or however. So, I think it just pushes you, which then hopefully supports the outcome on the other side.

Finally, another principal refined her methods based on data to influence planning and development. She also mentioned working with the leadership team, which connects to how team members act as instructional leaders on the way to cycles of improvement. She said,
I would look at the data about whether meeting a target or whether approaching a target, then I would from that create mini action plans, and work with the teacher leaders to implement. I feel like from that part of it, in terms of either professional development or action planning with the leadership team, [we need] support where we were lacking, around different things.

The value of using data to make professional development decisions for teachers was valuable for principals based on their comments. Making adjustments, action planning and having 8 week check-ins with the leadership team would allow them to know if they met their goals and targets.

**Teacher development.** Professional development for the principals in the PPLC is supposed to trigger developing teachers. Several principals spoke specifically about instructional practice, cross collaboration, and different supports for teachers as a result of participating in the PPLC.

One of the principals discussed teacher development that connected to most of the PPLC work in early literacy, stating,

I would definitely say that the 8-week check-ins and what was happening in classrooms, that the results kind of led me to focus on how we refine our professional development for staff members. The PPLC focus was guided reading, so our professional development plan for the year was kind of around that and sharpening that aspect.

Another principal gave more detail about literacy in the upper grades and development for teachers infused with some of the literacy programming that is creative, cross-collaborative, and video-based, so principals can revisit it. She stated,

The principal in my PPLC was asking for some support with a research-based reading program. She really uses it. And, our seventh-grade teacher this year, she’s eighth-grade this year, she also uses it. So, maybe if we record
them, those can be some professional development that if teachers question how to implement the novels ... we’d be able to share that.

Last, a principal was thinking of development that was cross-collaborative and similar to what principals do in the PPLC intervention. She said,

When I went to Mary’s school and visited her guided reading, then I went back to my kindergarten classroom, I’m like ... it doesn’t line up. There’s no alignment. I knew what my teachers were not doing. So, then I was able to say to them, “You guys need to work together, and you need to do this together.” And, then take them with me to Anna’s school so that they can see.

Principals in these instances were using ways to cross-collaborate and figure out how to use their own resources to provide professional development for their teachers based on what they needed. Also, it seemed as though what principals were doing in the PPLC intervention became a possibility for an intervention that teachers can do with each other.

Although most of the work was in early literacy in the PPLC, one principal also made a connection with professional development with math. She said, it did show me the professional development that’s needed. For example, we’ll look at.... Some of the things we were looking at was our usage and our math intervention. If our usage is not where it’s supposed to be, no wonder our children are not performing on our math assessment. We already made the correlation; they have this amount of usage, so you’ll get the results.

**Summary.** The findings for professional development as a result of principals participating in the PPLC intervention suggested a need to refine their methods and work from the data, especially the quarterly and 8-week check-ins at their school. Principals need their own support through the PPLC, as well as development for teachers, who are in front of students. This portion of the cycle of improvement came through cross collaboration with teachers of different schools,
which could possibly mirror the PPLC, as well as developing better pedagogy for instructional practice.

**Inductive Coded Areas**

**Introduction.** Another aspect of the research was a set of results that emerged inductively from the evidence. In this component of the research, I was trying to assess the perceived value of the PPLC intervention, the challenges the PPLC intervention has raised for principals, whether principals developed professionally or personally due to this learning intervention, and their expectations of this intervention.

**Description of how principals perceive the value of the PPLC.** Analyzing and studying the responses of the principals to determine the perceived value of the PPLC intervention was interesting. There were few responses that gave evidence of this. However, I found one response most compelling, because it seemed to be grounded in a loop of learning, a social network need, and an undergirding of relational trust. The principal simply stated,

I ... wanted to implement it in my school, because, I just felt like I had a person I was able ... or, a group of people, the first year, that I was able to ask questions of, and I know Mrs. Carrion, our first year, she said the same thing to me. I’m glad I have a group that we meet with every month, that at least if I have a question, I can ask and not necessarily always go to you and e-mail you. You may not always have the answer. You may have to go to someone else.

The principal in this response felt comfortable enough to go to a fellow principal in the PPLC for support rather than me, most likely because of the trusting relationship that has developed within the group. She also seemed to recognize the monthly
consistency of the PPLC as a place to social network, and she even named a principal she could go to, which she saw as a resource to make her more effective.

Last, on the loop of learning, the PPLC made this principal want to implement PLCs in school, and this is a reflection on how this intervention felt for principals, as some want to have it in their own buildings. As something the principals were experiencing, one principal noted almost in a surreal way that principals were living inside the experience and, as a result, getting something out of it. She expressed this as follows:

The whole concept of PLC, even though I feel like I don’t have a full grasp of it.... I mean, just that whole concept of living in it is something that’s new to me, or newer to me. It’s not like something that you can just stick a name on and throw it in a box and it’s a PLC. It’s a process, and I don’t know if I fully understand it, but I feel like I’m learning more about it.

With that response, it is interesting that the principal explained the experience as a concept that she could neither really understand nor decide what to make of, but she was openly willing to participate with an openness and curiosity to understand what was happening and its effects.

Another principal captured the value in a deep way, simply saying, “[From] Year 1 to Year 2 we got better about how we understood where to be, and it is a living thing that happened. Like the PPLC is something that happens; it’s a lived experience.” Further questioning might unpack this principal’s comment or lived experience in this PPLC in more detail to determine what it feels like to have a lived experience of learning, and how that translates into becoming a better instructional leader. Did the lived experience capture the essence of collaboration, support, and collective accountability, which translated into an instructionally motivating
experience? Or was it, as another principal captured it, the perceived value supported by relationships and trust? She stated,

That’s one of the things, in relationship.... Go back to how the relationships, [were] able to build.... I was able to honestly talk to people about some of the cares and concerns, which ... gave me a chance to address more of the cares and concerns.

This feeling of someone caring about you and being concerned about your well-being in a group of peers raises the question of whether this makes you a better instructional leader because you feel supported.

**Description of challenges by principals who have participated in the PPLC.** The challenges of the PPLC intervention are quite numerous. I wonder whether the time of the interview connected to the tone of some of the challenges, since the interviews took place after school. In addition, other challenges for the principals in the PPLC involved the process and whether it met their immediate needs at the time, or whether the intervention was too structured, in that there were non-negotiables within the intervention that did not allow for deviance. For instance, a principal stated,

the work was so urgent and certain things were nonnegotiable because there was a point where we needed to see achievement happen and see some things move. So, at certain times, was it a space for risk taking to happen? I think it depends on where a school community is, how much of a risk you can take for certain spaces, you know. When I think about my school, I think about the ELA data versus the math data.

In this example, the principal needed a more open discussion to look at math, but the PPLC focused on literacy practices and instruction.

More reflection by principals supported getting better at data collection and the accountability that the qualitative data enable. For instance, a principal stated,
First of all ... me having a better knowledge of the data helps my teachers have a better knowledge and understanding of it, because I am going to be able to break it down and explain it to them a little bit differently. I don’t know how well we still use data to inform our instruction, but it’s something we can always strive to get better at, to really differentiate based on the data.

In this instance, the principal looped back to breaking data down to help teachers with more in-depth data usage.

Another principal referenced data, but she was more concerned about accountability in terms of the group dynamic and goal setting around the data. The principal noted,

So, we discussed our data, but we never discussed next steps. It seemed like I would come, and we would meet, and I would have my stuff, but when we came together as a PPLC, and just offline talking, everybody did not have all their stuff together to really talk about next steps. I just think as a PPLC, if we had a clear focus ... we were true as a PPLC. I think it just goes back to being held accountable, that if we say we’re going to move 10%, even with our third-grade reading levels, and we did not meet that target, there should’ve been some conversation.

Besides accountability and rigor, this principal wanted discussion of next steps, which she defined as a true PLC. This, this principal felt ready and prepared for a different type of process, and she evidently perceived the PPLC much differently than the rest of the group, as she stated that others did not come prepared.

The research thus far has been more about the structure of the intervention, reflections on how do to better as a result of the PPLC, and reflections on how to come together around the data and the accountability of those data individually and collectively. The next pieces of research revolve around issues in the PPLC that denoted a lack of agency, voice, and respect. For instance, one principal stated,

I guess you could say it changed the relationships. It gave me more of a......
No. I guess, this may be one of the fail-safes of it. Not one of the fail-safes,
one of the issues around the PPLCs. A lot of the time, I just was quiet. You know, quiet by default, because that was the best way to make it through the meeting, and out of the meeting without upsetting some of the people.

This particular principal was quiet to avoid upsetting someone, and she also noted

If the responses that were received, or the ability to push back on thoughts. If some the things that I believe that came up, since I was a first- or second-year principal, a new principal. I just definitely had to, not necessarily take it, but I just had to go along with it, when some of the stuff didn't necessarily make sense to me.

This seems to be just going along with the PPLC, but not really engaging in the process, and going along to get through it. Last, that same principal stated near the end of the interview, “It is about how to make those connections with those smaller groups inside of the larger groups, so people don’t feel isolated.” The feelings of being isolated, I assumed, could be the result of many of the other statements on not being open. The notion of relational trust is missing for these principals, although in this instance, this particular principal was in a PPLC with a mentor.

Another principal in another PPLC had challenges from an apparent lack of relational trust and collaboration. She said,

I don’t even know right now. I don't know. It's knowing that story, it's as if you need that time like out of school time to get to know them more. In order to build on sharing what you do in your building, because that trust and rapport is still not there. I really don't know. I can't even answer that right now.

The response seemed to be frustrating for the principal even to give. The research did not lead to this dismay, but it could be a reason why someone in a PPLC could feel isolated and voiceless. This same principal also said,

Well that goes back to what I originally said. I know for me, I still had a wall up, because I’m looking, “How [do] you come to my building and tell me anything?” So, I think within my teammates, I knew from one, the only thing
he was going to look at, he wanted to see my lunchroom routine. That’s it. He wanted to see my routine, my operation.

In this instance, she seemed not to appreciate that the others were giving feedback, but she also felt insulted and almost disrespected that others wanted to see operational things, as opposed to instructional items.

Furthermore, the same principal said,

The people that I call on, is because of even their offline conversation, is about the work, but it’s not so much about the work. When people are not in their element, you get to know who they really are. These individuals, I don’t want to say people [have] got to prove themselves to me, but I know they’re about the work.

The feeling that other principals in the PPLC need to earn respect and prove themselves to her, and her feeling that people in the PPLC are not focusing on the work, possibly operational work, does not meet the expectations of this principal of what should happen in a PPLC. The last comment by this principal was,

So, I’m not going to say that part, but ... nope. Even within the PPLC, I felt shunned.... Because, you know how I’m perceived, I’m not even going to give anybody the benefit of the doubt to try, two to five years from now, to use it against me. I’m serious. I always look at it, that we may be working side by side at a different level, or you may report to me one day, and I don’t want to be in a position where you don’t trust me, and you can’t stand me, based on self getting in the way.

As noted, this particular principal has a lot of relational and trusting concerns and deficiencies that do not allow her to be or to feel like she is respected and part of the group.

Description of opportunities of personal growth by principals who have participated in the PPLC. To begin the analysis of an example of a principal’s opportunity experiencing personal growth, one principal stated that, “I hate to say
that but that the only way you are able to actually see your growth because you are in it. For me, I’m always like, ‘I can get better and better.’” Being a part of the experience of a PPLC helped this principal to see signs of improvement. The intervention also had principals reflecting on their craft and their work, and they acknowledged their feelings on the agenda within the PPLC. For instance, one principal said,

"to go back to the one of the things I learned about, I got a chance during those PPLCs for people to see who I am, or how I think. So, after people saw who I was, or how I think, I was able to ask more high-level questions, I didn’t have to keep it real surface.

This transformation for the principal allowed her to learn about herself, but it also allowed others in the PPLC to learn about her. As a result, it seems this principal feels more valued and justified in her work, which has allowed her to be more vocal in asking questions of the group. I could imagine that her synergy impacted the quality of the group.

Another principal seemed to take responsibility for failing to coach another principal effectively. Interestingly enough, coaching usually takes place one on one, but in this instance, the principal felt that the PPLC would be a useful vehicle to help to coach, support, and mentor. She said,

"That’s where I feel like I failed him in the matter, that maybe I didn’t share my process properly. He thinks that he can just get from 0 to 100 and not know all of the hard work that I’ve done underneath that. The work that I did underneath was not me standing in front, it was me backing people to then stand up front. I guess I am that leader who is behind the scenes. I don’t need to be in front.

In this instance, the principal seemed to be taking this hard, because she felt as if she had failed her colleague. The principal was thinking and reflecting on the process by
which she chose to coach the person, she highlighted that she is a supporters of her staff, and she alluded to some delegation strategies.

To support the notions of delegation and being supportive of staff, that same principal went a step further and began to reflect on her teaching experience, what she valued then, and its importance now. She said,

I was a middle-school teacher. We have a difference, and that is a different love and a different perspective, where I feel like relationship building is most important, and developing people is more important. I just have a different school book, how to move a school and move people.

She learned this skill early in her career, it had an impact on her work within the PPLC, and it became relevant when she thought about how to work with peers within a group. Another principal reflected,

One of the things is trust. From the question: So, what did, if anything, did you learn from watching any of your peers, as leaders in their own schools, during these visits? Think of their actions as leaders, or their interactions as leaders, if anything.

This principal learned and reflected from watching her peers that these interactions are indicative of relational trust. Principals not only noticed and reflected upon this, but they also deemed it important for leaders. Furthermore, one principal reflected on the transparency of relational trust and basic reflection, stating, “What I learned is openness.” What that particular principal does with being open to her staff and to others in the PPLC can have huge implications for the culture and climate of her school and/or the culture of her group of peers, provided that they are open and humble. This level of vulnerability might improve not just relational trust in groups, but also the social networking and loop of learning that can result from being open.
Description of opportunities for professional growth by principals who have participated in the PPLC. Principals received opportunities for professional growth due to their participation in the PPLC. After spending time with other principals in the PPLC intervention, their comments seemed to focus on reflection and leadership. For instance, one of the principals said,

just seeing how other schools are run, just to see ... everyone has a different management or leadership style. It’s just good to see, it sort of validates my belief that there’s no one way to do anything, you could approach the same problem in different ways, none of which are the absolute way, and none of which is wrong, just a different way to approach and handle things, and so I would get ideas from the walkthrough, and I came to appreciate people coming to walk through here.

In this instance, the reflection drew on her experience and how her leadership shows up in the work at her school. Also, it includes ideas about problem solving and understanding other ways of approaching things. Maybe it could open the door to options that could be more viable with her leadership.

Another principal referenced reflecting on leadership, saying,

We were able to identify habits of mind. There it was, habits of mind. I would’ve liked to see you go deeper with that so that we know how to strengthen ourselves around that. It’s not about stuff. It’s all about how to lead, become leaders, and leadership isn’t being a manager. It’s how do you get people to get on board with you to move your vision forward. [If] ... all the leaders just get on board with that, we’ll be able to do the work better.

The leadership reflection of this principal differentiates between the work of a manager and a leader, and it emphasizes moving people in the right direction based on the vision.

Another leader stated,

I liked [the PPLC], and to know that I could actually lead a nice group of people, then maybe a larger group of people one day. I mean, it definitely
encouraged me as a leader, reinforced my beliefs about systems thinking, structures, and being intentional.

This principal noted the beliefs about systems, structures and being intentional as a leader, but she also took a deeper stance, because she was one of the team leaders, who could reflect on leadership with other peers as confirmation of how principals also loop into leadership at their school sites. Another way to process the leadership reflection aspect of growing professionally is through practice. This principal exemplified this, stating,

I will say, I think the Leadership Academy, one of the things that was good for them, for what they did is they allowed us to bring what you call our problems of practice or our data and our situations to the table. We were working through things there; it was all aligned as well.

This principal pulled in resources from another learning experience and compared the PPLC intervention to her experience of working through problems of practice to help to increase her leadership capacity.

Last, one principal spoke of collective accountability, and how that supports professional growth. She said,

It gave me a little bit of insight into my colleagues’ expectations, and going from building to building, I could see a comparison between sometimes what they were talking about when it came to my building, and then seeing it in practice in their building. So, it just made me appreciate your goal for consistency within the network. I know we’re only four schools, but it was a good taste for me.

To leaders of leaders who are attempting to build a collective accountability, this comment is reassuring. This principal is connecting the PPLC intervention to a larger piece of the network, and hopefully realizing that her work at her school contributes to the success of the network, but also to that of the district.
Description of perceived expectations of PPLCs by principals. The perceived expectations of the PPLC by principals were relatively light, possibly because this was a new intervention. However, a few principals summed up the essence of the intervention as focused and comprehensive. For instance, a principal stated,

As people look at using the PPLC structure, it is a way to maximize time. We came to a school, we had the meeting there, the walkthrough happened there, you were able to join us, and we even did our debriefing there. All of that happened in one space where I think for across the network that we know in other spaces people still haven’t been able to visualize that happening in one meeting time. Sometimes people are meeting for you to walk through, then meeting this day, then debriefing on another day. I think that alone helped to maximize time, and it was purposeful and connected.

This principal thought it was purposeful and focused, but she realized that including a lot of content and making sure it connected helped principals to see this as a way to maximize time.

Another principal thought,

What I liked was [that] it was always a focus ahead of time, so you knew what you were meeting for. I like that you can be transparent, and you could really offer suggestions, your voice would be heard. I liked that there was opportunity to speak with colleagues, and there was always time for discussion, and going back to the first thing, they were very focused. When we met, it wasn’t just to me a meet, but there was purpose behind every meeting, and that we always reviewed what the focus was, and at the end of the PPLC, we went back, and there [was] always [a] summary of what lessons have been learned, and also we talked about what next steps are for when we had the next meeting, so everything was very well planned out, it was very intentional, it was worthwhile–these were meetings that you wanted to come to.

This intentionality that this principal felt and her willingness to come to meetings knowing that they were focused and had next steps may have been meaningful for her expectations of the PPLC intervention.

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A few of the principals had different expectations for the PPLC intervention. A principal said,

Out of the group of 38 kids that you started with, how many of them are still intensive? Like, really having that conversation that we’re doing all this work, and we’re talking about moving and growing students. Or how many of your students are still on or above level? So, being able to come back with that, so people have to really talk about what the work should impact. Sometimes it was at a level that it didn’t make it back to the students directly. Like, I understand how it impacted the students, but it didn’t make it back to the true data to say if it is, or if it wasn’t.

It was clear that the principals’ expectations for the PPLC were that they would look at more targeted student data to determine the impact of the intervention on individual students.

Another principal noted that “I think people try to use me as a buffer to try to figure out what your expectation is.” In this short comment, the principal was wondering what my expectations were for the PPLC intervention. This comment derived from a PPLC that involved some teachers who we invited as part of the intervention model. This principal added,

The teachers really collaborated amongst each other, and we peeked our head in, as principals, but we weren’t … I wasn’t really involved in their planning either, just because it was at the end of the year. It was the last 6 weeks of school. Like, “How do we make this happen?” Then, the teachers will come up to me and like, “So, what does Mr. D want to see?” I’m like, “I don’t know. I’m gonna find out.”

Based on this comment from the principal and the teacher comments, principals wanted to make sure that what they expected was what happened during particular PPLCs. This did not always happen.

**Google survey analysis from PPLC intervention meetings.** As I referenced in the design of this study, a I sent a Google survey to each PPLC after
each PPLC intervention meeting. Principals took the survey online, and I asked them to complete it before the close of business on that day. The Google survey connected to a Google portal and spreadsheet that allowed me to see the open- and closed-ended answers for all the participants for November, December, January, February, April, and May. Each month of the PPLC intervention had a broad focus on early literacy tied to the anchor goal of our district, but it was specific to Research Question 2, which targeted the effects of the PPLC on instructional leadership. The areas of instructional leadership that were the focus in November and then again in February were observation and feedback. The area of working with a leadership team was the focus in December and April. Last, the instructional leadership component of professional development was the focus in January and May.

The principals participating in the meetings that focused on observation and feedback (November and February) found that they appreciated and valued the walkthroughs and the feedback from their peers on the schools that hosted the walkthroughs. Principals also felt that hearing feedback helped them to think about what they needed to do at their schools, although it may not have been their schools that participated in the walkthroughs. Furthermore, principals found that strategies to support teachers and next steps for implementation were of value to them in the intervention. Last, some principals found articles and research incorporated into the PPLC intervention helpful to frame the work that they were doing. Some of the feedback for growth during these interventions included a request for more time in
the classrooms and more involvement of teachers in the process so that they could all learn together.

The principals participating the in meetings that focused on how they utilized their leadership teams (December and April) felt that hearing from teachers, having solid next steps, and collaborating around student work samples were the most valuable pieces of the intervention. The areas of growth centered around including individuals from their leadership teams in some of the PPLC interventions to have immediate sharing and firsthand information about the ideas and strategies for immediate next steps. The transfer of information back to the school seemed to be an indicator of or barrier to progress.

The principals participating in the PPLC intervention centering on professional development of staff (January and May) found that reflection about their work during the PPLC intervention provided motivation for them. It also helped them to think about the data planning and the overall goal execution necessary for their individual schools and target areas. In terms of growth, principals wanted more time for collaboration to decide how they would develop and provide professional development for teachers and staff. Often, the discussion would start but there was not enough time to work alongside other principals to develop and implement the professional development, even though they had assigned data points and goals.

**Summary**

I added the additional findings through the inductive coded areas as a section to give a broader look at each research question based on the principal interviews,
inductive coded areas, and Google survey. This allowed me to make judgments, find trends, and determine conclusions for my chapter on implications.
Chapter 6: Discussion

My purpose for this research study was to develop a monthly intervention that would assist principals in developing a collective accountability for their work in the School District of Philadelphia. This collective accountability would help principals to develop skills in support and collaboration in a PLC that would result in better instructional leadership practices of observation and feedback, better ways of utilizing their leadership teams, and better ways of developing people in their school. DuFour (2007) showed that there are three big ideas necessary for becoming a PLC, namely making sure that all students learn, building a collaborative culture, and establishing a focus on results. Furthermore, Marzano and DuFour (2011) stated, “If we are to help all students learn, it will require us to work collaboratively in a collective effort to meet the needs of each student” (p. 23). To make this collaboration and collective effort happen, they stated,

• Educators need to be organized in meaningful collaborative teams in which each member works interdependently to achieve the common goals for which they are accountable.

• Educators need regular times for collaboration, which should be routine.

• Educators are clear on the purpose and priorities of their collaboration so that they stay focused on the work.

• School and district leaders demonstrate a reciprocal accountability in which everyone supports with resources, training, and ongoing support to help the PLC process to succeed.

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This research and the need for change prompted this intervention for principals. Most of the research centered on what we can do with teachers in a professional learning community process; hence, I took this approach and conducted this research to make this an intervention for principals on a macro level. As an assistant superintendent, I modeled the approach for principals so they will have the ability to turn it around with their teachers. At the time I began this study, I was a practitioner in the field, one of 12 assistant superintendents, and relatively new to the city. My PPLC intervention has now become a common practice and approach for all 12 assistant superintendents. I believe that the intervention and vehicle for how we work with principals, how we learn from each other, and how we align the district goals to what happens in the classroom is the qualitative evidence about which principals have spoken. They have been involved in a process, and according to one of my principals during her interview, “[From] Year 1 to Year 2 we got better about how we understood where to be, and it is a living thing that happened. Like the PPLC is something that happens; it’s a lived experience.” In my first year as an assistant superintendent with a network of many schools, life was chaotic, each principal was independent, and there was little connection to and alignment with the districts’ goals and initiatives. Many principals isolated themselves simply because of the large workload and lack of staff and resources, but also due to the lack of trust among themselves because of limited interactions. This led to a lack of collaboration with principals, even though schools and communities were similar with similar issues, and they often did not have opportunities to share academic, instructional and operational resources. However, think how powerful it
is for principals to recognize that the intervention in which they are participating has helped to develop their skills and has allowed them to be vulnerable and humble enough to participate in this learning process.

Therefore, I sought to answer the following research questions to inform and share my work and to provide evidence as an assistant superintendent who supervises principals in Philadelphia:

- How do principals perceive collaboration, support, and collective accountability within the PPLC?
- How does the implementation of ongoing PPLCs serving principals impact their leadership and practices of observation and feedback, how they utilize leadership teams, and how they create professional development?

The sub-questions I used to help break down the research questions and to assist with my coding of my data were the following:

- How do PPLCs increase principal collaboration?
- How does a PPLC impact the support principals feel they need and/or experience?
- Does the implementation of a well-structured PPLC increase principals’ sense of collective accountability?
- Does the PPLC structure influence principals’ ability to observe instruction and to offer feedback?
- Does the use of the PPLC influence how principals build and utilize their leadership teams?
• Do PPLCs influence the frequency and/or quality of professional development that principals provide to staff?

The research design of the study included interviews with principals, open-ended surveys, and data collection for each of the PPLC intervention meetings. Various themes have emerged from the data, and combining the theory base approaches and research with the actual practice of working with the principals for the PPLC has provided a great context for next steps in this work. The six themes that emerged from my research were the following:

Research Question 1

• Collaboration among principals has been a valuable tool in this intervention. The need for relational trust is an essential reason why principals value collaboration.

• The PPLC existed inside and outside of the school day for principals, and it encouraged them to network, build relationships, and collaborate.

• Principals in the role of team leader were internally motivated to make sure that they were supporting their peers in the learning process.

• Aligned goals from the district and within the schools drive collective accountability for the principals. Guiding principals in concrete next steps interwoven in the intervention model may provide even more collective accountability.
Research Question 2

- Visiting other schools and collaborating about instructional practices in a PPLC helped principals to reflect on their practice as instructional leaders in their own schools.
- Building networks of principals can assist in building networks of teachers leading to sustainable best practices for instruction.

Review of Themes for Research Question 1 and 2

Introduction. In this section, my intent was to review the themes for Research Question 1 and 2. The first research question themes are about the experience of principals participating in the PPLC. The second research question reviews themes that depict areas of instructional leadership.

Research Question 1. The first question was about the experience of principals who participated in the PPLC intervention. The underlying theme of principals collaborating with each other emerged several times. Whether the meeting focused on observation and feedback, working with instructional teams, or providing professional development, participants found that collaboration and sharing were most helpful during the PPLC intervention meetings. Principals valued the collaboration embedded, and in terms of a relationship in many cases, it was the basis for communicating their needs with each other that created a sense of belonging.

The next finding related to the commitment of the principals to the PPLC intervention and how they experienced it by not just connecting in school but also
outside of the school day. Principals found themselves in this relationship with others, and although I began the intervention with principals, I hoped that through this experience, principals would support each other. This finding about principals seeking support from their colleagues even outside the intervention relates to the work of Silins, Mulford, and Zarins (2002), in that a component of organizational learning that extends to teachers on a macro level can extend to principals in the learning community. Silins et al. contributed that “a trusting and collaborative environment is the extent to which the school’s climate and culture is one that supports collaborative work, sharing of information and open communication. Discussions among colleagues are honest and candid” (p. 26). In the case of the PPLCs, principals also used social media apps extending their day to support and collaborate, which became a meaningful PPLC tool for communication.

Each PPLC had a team leader assigned to help me to co-facilitate the PPLC group. For this study, I had the honor to interview three of the team leaders to gather their perspectives of this intervention. I found an unwavering responsibility and motivating accountability from these individuals to support, develop, and coach their fellow principals. For instance, one team leader asked, “How can I meet? How can I be supportive of people reaching their goals, also being supportive of the agenda items you may have had to share with us as it related to the district mandates?” This principal team leader, although I co-facilitated her PPLC, was dedicated to making sure the agenda items met the needs of her colleagues, while respecting the larger goals of the district. Each PPLC team leader showed
ownership and dedication to helping others, which was clearly evident throughout the intervention.

The last theme that emerged for Research Question 1 shows that principals support a collective accountability, but that they would benefit from concrete next steps. This showed in the PPLC surveys, but also in the interviews. The collective accountability for the goals of the district and the connection to the classroom seem clear, especially since we set priorities in early literacy. However, the actual next steps for what principals would help teachers to do in the classroom for students could have received more support and direction in areas of teacher and professional development.

**Research Question 2.** The second research question focused on instructional leadership practices. Furthermore, the focus was on the practices that principals exhibited and whether the PPLC intervention played a part in helping them to become better at observation and feedback, utilizing their leadership team, and providing professional development for their staff.

The first theme that evolved from the findings for Research Question 2 involved principals reflecting on their instructional leadership and the way it impacted their schools. Part of the intervention involved conducting a walkthrough at a host school and giving feedback to the host principal, but also talking about key instructional practices that supported early literacy. Goff, Goldring, Guthrie, and Bickman (2015) said that, “providing meaningful feedback through assessment and helping principals to interpret through coaching is a viable tool to improve leadership practice” (p. 1). Furthermore Goff et al. stated that, “principals need to
support and develop their capacity, and ... coaching helps principals’ self-reflection in order to provide leadership change” (p. 1). This model for coaching may need interpretation, but coaching one another in the PPLC intervention is one way of providing professional learning, but more important, supporting their own self-reflection as it relates to their leadership practice.

The second theme that evolved from Research Question 2 was that building networks of principals could assist in building capacity and learning loops for teachers leading to sustainable best practices for instruction. Research by Dufour and others mainly addresses best practices for teachers. The PPLC intervention used the PLC process for teachers created by Dufour as a springboard to launch the best practices of a professional learning community for principals in Philadelphia. Just as we hope teachers will get better and improve their pedagogy, we expect the same for principals in their instructional leadership practice. Building a sustainable model of learning for all connected to the school is important, as the district goals must align with classroom instruction. In this PPLC intervention, we focused on early literacy. The district anchor goal focused on all students reading on grade level before 8 years old. This meant that the classroom instruction had to support this, and that principals had to make that connection by aligning their best practices for instructional leadership for literacy development.

Conclusion. There were findings that supported the instructional leadership necessary to connect to teacher practice while building best practices for the entire network. The collective learning from the groups of principals seemed to be the most powerful practice and the concept of constructing a learning loop connected
leadership practice to teacher pedagogy. In addition, principals found value in utilizing cross-collaboration meetings where literacy instruction was discussed and shared whereby all educators have opportunities to learn from one another.

The PPLC Experience from the Researcher’s Perspective.

In reviewing the findings of the research questions and also gathering themes that I felt evolved from the research, I would be remiss if I did not discuss from my perspective of how the PPLC experience and the dissertation experience influenced my own conceptions of leadership. Therefore, I would like to bring both experiences together by discussing what I learned and know to be true about leadership through the experience of the PPLC, what the inquiry process of the dissertation contributed to my understanding of learning and leadership, and how these experiences influenced my future thoughts of leadership.

Through this experience, there are three items I know to be true from this study. I know that people want to engage in work and problems of practice with peers in similar positions. Creating these common learning experiences as a leader has been an amazing experience for me and has helped debunk organizational structures that keep educators in isolation. Building community among leaders brings a collective strength that began with simply building a team of strong leaders.

The second item I know to be true is that relationships, trust, and support are key components of building successful teams. Embedded in the relationship is being able to build and set conditions for leaders to have emotional intelligence for themselves but also for others on the team. Part of developing the PPLC intervention, was producing a lot of pre-work to create the teams and the
relationship. Helping the leaders to trust me first and then using that as motivation to be able to trust and work in relationship and support with others was necessary in the planning and implementation phase of the intervention. Activities of self and emotional intelligence played a huge role in team building and PPLC development.

The last item that I now know to be true is that creating environments for leaders to learn in any condition is possible if you focus your efforts on helping people develop their own set of skills by honoring their areas of strength.

Embarking on this work, I chose to use this approach in order to build a framework and foundation where working with people is first and foremost and then layer in the work of the district (i.e., literacy, college and career readiness). By taking this approach, I was able to create a professional environment for people to be authentically accountable to themselves and to others that they worked alongside.

The inquiry process as a part of the dissertation contributed to my learning and leadership by helping me to trust safely what I know and learned about leadership in my 20 plus year career. Beginning this career as a teacher assistant, I had no knowledge of pedagogy, instruction, lesson planning, or even tools that support the curriculum. What I trusted in myself, as a teacher assistant, was my ability to build relationships and value people, coupled with my desire to make sure students were safe and to find the resources needed for them to learn.

Many years later, currently in the role as an assistant superintendent, the core of my work is driving instructional leadership. Entering this inquiry process for the dissertation was a little conflicting. For example, answering Research Question 1 identified how I was able to meet the needs of my students over the
course of my career and defined many aspects of my leadership story; however, in my current position as an assistant superintendent in an era of accountability, I approach the work with an outcome based approach. I realized the balance between both the elements of Research Questions 1 and 2 are necessary in order to build great school leaders and great teams. In other words, the inquiry process allowed me and gave me permission to analyze both the social and emotional experiences of leaders while incorporating the instructional focus areas and best practices for leadership and learning.

Through this dissertation research, I have now become more confident about why and how I approach my work with my schools and my leaders. As a learner in this process, I pushed myself to bridge both aspects of the research questions, and as a result, this shaped my thoughts and taught me the value in creating the common learning experience, not just for principals but for all of those in leadership work in various departments in education and other non-educational entities and organizations. As an example, I am currently providing inquiry support from this intervention to another department in the school district. I am testing my hypothesis about how leaders in this department collaborate, support, and have a collective accountability tied to their department goals. In a sense, I am helping them to tie the district expectations to the ground level implementation work. Having this safe space of the dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, gave me permission to challenge myself, which began with inquiry but also contributed to me being a learner and a leader. This dynamic plays a dual role in the development of self and in my contribution to the leadership of others.
I based my future thoughts of leadership on the three items I discussed earlier and how they helped me understand the concept of being both a learner and a leader. I feel more confident that my approach to work with the hearts and souls of people coupled with common learning experiences is now the key to my work, and I have identified this as my area of strength that I will continue to work on and develop. My lens for aligning leaders to the goals of the organization has become very clear and deliberate in my actions, where I now take a more evidenced based approach to solving issues, have become a better listener when working in teams, and have become a more strategic thinker and thought partner when coaching principals. As a result, in the final discussions of this dissertation, I have become a stronger partner and advocate for students in Philadelphia.

In summary, the findings of the research questions, the inquiry process and also the gathering themes that I felt evolved from the research, were shared openly and honestly. My perspective about three items for what I know to be true about leadership, my experience of being a learner and leader in the dissertation process, and my future thoughts of leadership now frame a new way of thinking for me that will continue to elevate and impact my leadership thoughts and actions.

**Implications**

The following recommendations are based on the intervention model that I implemented with a group of principals in North Philadelphia for 6 months. I collected the data for this study to help to provide a rich and engaging learning experience that would assist principals in becoming better instructional leaders.
The vehicle I used for this intervention was the PPLC, which I modeled and researched from the work of DuFour and the PLC process for teachers.

There must be a vehicle to assist principals in connecting their schools, and more specifically the classroom practice, to the district goals. Anchor Goal 2, which is to have students reading on grade level by 8 years old, was the focus of all the PPLCs. This PPLC was the vehicle to get them to that realization. While in the space of the PPLC, I believed that feeling supported in a collaborative environment with collective accountability for the work and each other would drive motivation for learning about the leadership activities and actions that support transforming schools. I designed three activities for each principal to focus on in sequence in monthly PPLC meetings. For instance, I customized each PPLC around observation and feedback, leadership team usage, and professional development of staff.

Throughout this intervention, the concept of relational trust seemed to be at the forefront of the principal’s work. Although the principals in this study did not always explicitly say so, Bryk and Schneider (1996) stated that, “the academic work of the school rests on a foundation of social relations among school professionals” (p. 2). Relational trust is built on respect, regard for others, competence, and integrity, which each principal exhibited in each PPLC meeting. Furthermore, according to Bryk and Schneider, the PPLC intervention supported the moral imperative to help principals to take on difficult work of schools, facilitated accountability for shared standards, and helped principals to experience autonomy and mutual support while providing a safe space for principals to experience new practice.
The implications of this work far exceeded my expectations. The data collection, work with principals and principal leaders, and research and development of this systematic intervention has helped me to create a model that can transcend any organization. The model for leaders, not just principals, to have common learning experiences, and the need as humans to belong and gather, indicate a need for a sense of belonging wherever learning occurs. This model represents a collection of all my work with these high-performing leaders (principals), and the notion that if we want to get to a desired state, this representation of a common learning experience for leaders is necessary. Figure 2 gives a graphic representation of this learning experience.
**Figure 2.** Common learning experiences for leaders.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Additional research for this study focusing on the work of the team leaders and how they have impacted the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the PPLC would be valuable, as would the implications for assisting with instructional leadership. Principal leadership is extremely important, and it has connections to the success of students, but principals who are leaders of other principals while still
in the role are particularly important. The complexities of the role and the people who volunteer to lead their peers in this work makes me wonder about their effects, but also their motivations. Other recommendations for future study include the following:

- The concept of double loop learning as a theoretical lens for this study with principals is an important one. Principals engaged in an intervention that challenged them and suggested ways to learn and then to deliver information to their schools. This loop back would be an interesting way to assess the learning of principals in the monthly intervention.

- In this study, I chose to use observation and feedback, looking at usage of the leadership team, and providing professional development for staff. Another study could pick other items connected to instructional leadership and tie them to quantitative data for student achievement.

- Other researchers could apply social network theory as the theoretical lens for principals meeting and socializing with each other within a network or organization.

- Other researchers could analyze the achievement of the schools in relation to certain principal-led leadership activities to determine its impact.

- High-performing principals (based on evaluations) of high-performing schools or low-performing schools could participate in the PPLC.
As a result of this study, I suggest that principal supervisors read this research and the work of PLCs by Dufour. Many of the items that we view as good for schools should also be good at the macro level, and researchers can model and customize them for principals. This PPLC work has normed all the assistant superintendents in our district, and it has become the way that we manage, learn, and work with each other.

**Conclusion**

Building a strong system for leaders to learn is basically human work. Figure 2 showed the collective effort of developing a common learning experience for leaders, and in this case, principals. Couple this with the research about teachers in their buildings, and the importance of learning together in PLCs, which has worked in a macro external approach with principals in a school district, becomes clear. This intervention came out of a chaotic time in my work, when I needed to make sense of how I could help principals to grow and develop, and how I could connect the district goals to better classroom instruction in a large urban district.

I owe the first part of this work to an organization called Partnership in School Innovation. It showed me and modeled for me how with structure, alignment, and goals, upper level school leaders can build a network of engaging and learning practices. Once I witnessed this, it became clear that I would have to create an intervention to support my principals in North Philadelphia. How they experienced the PPLC in terms of the intervention and the social and emotional context of their experience was important for me as an assistant superintendent. I owe this research in its entirety to a great group of dedicated, caring, and resilient
principals in my network. Working alongside them in this dissertation has been one of my greatest learning experiences. In addition, they helped me to realize that setting conditions and creating common experiences for a group of people with totally different perspectives and through collaborative discussions can help to create a focus and synergy for a network of schools.

In challenging, urban settings, the principalship is a huge task, and principals need to customize learning to uplift and build great leaders. By building great leadership, my hope was that the PPLC intervention would help principals to learn how to support one another, and together, to become better instructional leaders and to impact not just the school, but also the network and the district. The findings of the previous chapter are relevant to our future work and to the district, now that PPLCs are a practice and expectation of all assistant superintendents in Philadelphia.

Having conducted this study, the end goal is to create that desired state of schools in which robust, engaging learning environments exist for teachers and for children, where everyone can learn, flourish, and be successful. The basis of the data was our School Progress Report at the end of this year; our network of schools made noticeably more progress than other networks of schools in the city. This means we focused on early literacy, and we moved students into different tiers of improvement, more than most other networks of schools. Was this success because of the focus and intervention of this work, or did the success derive from the great experience I had learning with my principals about their work and going to school at
the same time, where I was able to reflect, monitor, and research supporting practices where theory and practice came together?

In summary, this study used several modes of research, but it focused mainly on the qualitative accounts of principals. According to the results, principals feeling supported, collaborating with each other, and having a sense of collective accountability are valuable for their growth, development, and learning, but building relational trust is a key factor in the effectiveness of the PPLC. The relationships among members of the PPLC may exist outside of the schools, and the role of the team leader is important for this intervention model. Making sure concrete action steps are part of the intervention is important as well.

Principals need to know and prepare for what is next. When principals collaborate in small groups about instructional practices, they reflect and internalize the work that they see, and they loop it back to the work necessary for them to improve at their schools. This learning by principals is critical in building a sustainable organization in which teachers are learning and finding the best practices for instruction. In all, this work is not possible without student data. Student data make all this work together, and they let us know if we are meeting and achieving our goals. If we are not meeting our goals, reflection on how we conduct observation and feedback, utilize our leadership teams, and determine what professional development our teachers need will support our growth.
Appendix A:

PPLC Team Meeting Exit Survey

Please circle your numerical response:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This meeting was time well spent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I learned something about leadership.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I learned something about teaching and learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am leaving this meeting with actionable next steps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I will share my learning with my leadership team.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please write a response to each question:

What was most helpful during this PLC meeting?

What could have been better during this PLC meeting?

How could I have improved this PLC learning experience?
Appendix B:

Follow-Up Questions

Follow-up questions (recorded) from the principal who hosted the monthly PLC meeting and walkthrough.

1. How do you think the walkthrough went?

2. What are some things that you learned?

3. What are some challenges this raises for you?

4. What will you do differently as a result?

5. Based on what you learned, what is something I should see or ask you about that would show that you have incorporated this learning into your leadership?
Appendix C:

Leadership Interviews

Data Collection – Experience in the PPLC:
How has this year and this experience in the PPLC compared to any other year?

In between the PPLC meetings, did you gather support from other PPLC team members? If so, how? Can you tell me a story or an example of how you received support?

Was having a team leader beneficial to your PPLC experience? If so, how? If not, what do you suggest?

Did the PPLC help you to develop a relationship with leaders in other schools? Did this relationship help you to feel supported?

Data Collection – School and Classroom Impact:
How did this experience in the PPLC help you to become better at observation and feedback?

How did this experience in the PPLC help you to use your leadership team more effectively?

How did this experience in the PPLC help you to plan for professional development?

Data Collection – Reflection of Self:
What did you learn from participating in the PPLC?

How did your learning help you to think differently about your role as a principal?

How did your participation in the PPLC help you to think about your role as the principal and the alignment between district goals and classroom practice?
Appendix D:

Codes

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<thead>
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<th>Description</th>
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<td><strong>DEDUCTIVE CODES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>Experience of PPLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E:COL</td>
<td>Collaboration – Description of how principals perceive collaboration in their PPLC experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E:S</td>
<td>Support – Description of how principals perceive support in their PPLC experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E:CA</td>
<td>Collective accountability – Description of how principals experience a sense of collective accountability supporting the goals and mission of the district within the PPLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
<td>Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>I:OF</td>
<td>Observation and feedback – Description of how principals participating in a PPLC are influenced in their ability to observe instruction and offer feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I:LT</td>
<td>Leadership teams – Description of how principals participating in a PPLC are influenced in their ability to utilize their leadership teams</td>
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<tr>
<td>I:PD</td>
<td>Professional development – Description of how principals participating in a PPLC are influenced in their ability to provide professional development to their staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDUCTIVE CODES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>Perceived value – Description of how principals perceive the value of the PPLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Challenges – Description of challenges by principals who have participated in the PPLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PerG</td>
<td>Evidence of personal growth – Description of opportunities for personal growth by principals who have participated in the PPLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProG</td>
<td>Evidence of professional growth – Description of opportunities for professional growth by principals who have participated in the PPLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EX</td>
<td>PPLC Expectations – Description of perceived PPLC expectations by principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E:CR</td>
<td>Collective responsibility – Description of how principals experience a sense of collective responsibility with their peers in the PPLC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


