

**TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: AN  
EXPLORATION**

**©Joanne Pitman**

B.Ed., University of Lethbridge, 2000

A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Lethbridge  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA**

March, 2008

## Dedication Page

I dedicate this work to those teachers and leaders who reflect, evaluate, and consider. May we commit to asking the hard questions and getting to the heart of the matter: student learning.

## Abstract

This study is an exploration of leadership practices that develop and sustain a professional learning community (PLC). More specifically, it explores teacher perceptions of these leadership practices in the context of a school district in Alberta, Canada. The study employed qualitative research in the form of interviews of sixteen teachers from one school district. Findings include description of teacher perceptions of leadership practices as they relate to shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. It is necessary to recognize the interrelated nature of structural supports along with cultural underpinnings to fully develop and sustain PLCs. Moreover, the findings highlight the influence of structures in supporting dimensions of collective learning and shared personal practice. The need for careful consideration of the power of school culture over the effective use of any structure is evident. Leaders' continuous modelling and involvement are imperative to develop teacher capacity to embrace shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. Furthermore, the building of trust and celebration of teacher and student learning moulds a schools' culture to one that reflects success in the various PLC dimensions. The study concludes by suggesting possible areas for further research in addition to demarcating suggestions for continued reflection within the field of leadership as it relates to developing and sustaining PLCs.

## Acknowledgements

To Kelly—you have been a central part of this amazing journey. Your support, encouragement, patience, sacrifice, and love have allowed me to “do this thing.” You are incredible and I thank you.

To my children: Bailey, Ethan, and Anderson—your love for me, smiling faces, and requests for playtime have kept me grounded in what is truly most important.

To Mom and Dad, Holly and Jerry, Patrick and Patti, Jay and Sharlene, and Krista—many thanks for checking on my progress and supporting me through late nights, sick children, and all of life’s demands.

To George, Art, and Lance—thank you for your questions, thoughts, and reflections. You have helped me grow as an educator and as a researcher.

To my friends and colleagues—thank you for indulging me in many conversations beginning with “so what do you think of...” and not running in the opposite direction.

To the Faculty of Education Graduate Studies and Research staff, specifically Joyce Ito—your email “presence” and dependability and flexibility have been exemplary.

To the participants in my research study—thank you for sharing your insights, successes, reflections, and wishes for continued improvement in our profession. May we continuously learn, question and care for one another for the purpose of improving our profession and consequently, student learning.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables.....	ix
Chapter 1: Background and Research Question.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI).....	3
Research Questions.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature.....	6
Research on School Culture.....	6
Research on School Improvement and the Change Process.....	10
Research on the Characteristics and Cultural Underpinnings of PLCs.....	15
Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Practices.....	22
Research on Leadership.....	25
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	34
Sample.....	36
Research Design and Procedures.....	39
Data Collection.....	39
Data Analysis.....	40

Validity and Reliability.....	41
Ethical Considerations.....	42
Chapter 4: Findings.....	44
Shared and Supportive Leadership.....	44
Leadership Characteristics.....	44
Shared Leadership and Decision-Making.....	45
Shared Values and Vision.....	49
Staff Attitudes.....	49
Communication of Vision.....	50
Reflection of Vision in School Activities and Operation.....	53
Collective Learning.....	56
Risk-Taking.....	61
Celebration of Risk-Taking and Innovation.....	63
Supportive Conditions.....	65
Structures.....	65
Relationships.....	74
Climate of Trust.....	78
Motivation and Inspiration.....	82
Shared Personal Practice.....	84
Chapter 5: Analysis.....	91
Shared and Supportive Leadership.....	91
Shared Values and Vision.....	94
Collective Learning.....	97

Supportive Conditions.....	105
Human Capacities.....	111
Shared Personal Practice.....	118
Chapter 6: Implications for Practice and Research.....	125
References.....	132
Appendices.....	142
A. Letter of Introductions and Request for Participants.....	142
B. Participant Consent Form.....	144
C. Interview Protocols and Questions.....	146

## List of Tables

Table

1. Participant Profiles.....	37
------------------------------	----

## Chapter 1: Background and Research Question

### *Introduction*

This study will reveal teacher perceptions of the ways in which leadership practices influence development of professional learning communities through the examination and synthesis of qualitative data. Investigated within the context of the current movement of schools across Alberta to becoming professional learning communities, this study will be a timely contribution to the current provincial discussion regarding the implementation of professional learning communities and the central role that leadership practices will play in the success of this endeavour.

In 2001, the concept of professional learning communities (PLC) attracted the interest of school jurisdictions across Alberta when Dr. Richard DuFour presented at the Reaching and Teaching conference in Calgary. However, it was not until 2002 that the concept of PLC's became widespread and individual schools began their journeys towards becoming learning communities. "Our school(s) will be a professional learning community" became a popular catch phrase used by formal leaders of school districts and individual schools alike. In fact, the report published by Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) went so far as to include as one of its recommendations a requirement that every school is to "operate as a professional learning community. . ." (p. 65). Yet as schools across Alberta embrace the concept of PLCs or attempt to implement any major change, attention needs to be given to leadership practices and their influence in the creation or hindrance of professional learning community initiatives. The literature reveals that it is formal leaders who have the largest influence over the success or failure of structural and cultural changes taking place in schools. As Mitchell & Sackney (2001) point out "saying that a learning community must be thus and so does not automatically

make it so”

(<http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/mitchellandsackney.html>).

### *Background*

A PLC is defined as a community of professionals exhibiting the following characteristics with the goal of continuous learning for both professionals and students: supportive and shared leadership; collective learning; shared values and vision; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice (Hord, 2004). The concept of PLCs is essentially a model for school improvement. However, as Deal and Peterson (1999) point out, the concept of school culture has been overlooked and omitted from discussions of school improvement, despite the fact that it is documented as having a substantial effect on the success of school improvement (Barth, 2002; Deal & Peterson, 1999). Moreover, formal leadership is attributed significant influence over school culture (Sergiovanni, 1990). This being said it is prudent to make a thorough examination as to how leadership, school culture and PLCs are intertwined in both the literature and in the reality of Alberta schools. This study undertakes to explore and describe the theoretical expectations as perceived by teachers of leadership practices, school culture, and PLCs and the realities of these key concepts in an Alberta school district.

The background of PLCs in the Alberta context relates directly to The Alberta Commission on Learning (2003) which states: “. . . we need schools that operate as professional learning communities” (p. 64) and requires schools to operate as such. The Commission further identified three guiding questions as being central to PLCs:

1. What do we expect students to learn?
2. How will we know if students have learned it?
3. What will we do if students have not learned it?

The statements contained within the Alberta Commission on Learning provide policy advice to the Alberta government. There is recognition of not only the importance of PLCs, but also the positive results in all areas of education when such learning communities are in place. Yet to “require every school to operate as a professional learning community” appears to presuppose that the knowledge base for development of true professional learning communities exists. This requirement also presumes the existence of the awareness leaders must have of prerequisite developments which must initially occur (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 64).

*Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)*

To further underscore the importance the Alberta government is placing on schools operating as PLCs, the second cycle of AISI funding went towards 23 district projects involving approximately 163,000 students--all of them in some way connected to the concept of establishing PLCs

([http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k\\_12/special/aisi/ClearingHouse/report\\_cycle2](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/ClearingHouse/report_cycle2)).

Clearly, a substantial amount of AISI funding has and is being used to develop PLCs. While it is true that PLCs manifest differently in each school, there are still foundational aspects which must be adhered to. In reading through the overviews of some school AISI projects, it is evident that “becoming a professional learning community” is seen as developing a new health curriculum or even providing students with a first aid course. These very specific activities when compared with the literature on developing PLCs do not seem to align with the theoretical framework, but yet have been approved as PLC activities. Does the provision of funding for these projects mean that a PLC has been or is being established in those schools?

The development of effective PLCs requires that school leaders be prepared to address their school culture prior to skipping ahead to questions such as “What do we expect students to learn? How will we know if students have learned it? What will we do if students have not learned it?” (Waterhouse, 2003). While the literature does not refute the importance and centrality of student learning and achievement in the PLC model, one must again be aware that there are prerequisite developments and plans which must take place along with continuing practices to build and sustain a PLC.

### *Research Questions*

The guiding question for this study is:

- A. In what ways do teachers perceive leadership practices as influencing the development and sustainability of professional learning communities?
- B. The framework for this research is built on the following themes and sub-questions:
  - 1. What are the leadership practices in developing professional learning communities?
  - 2. What are the leadership practices in sustaining professional learning communities?

### *Definition of Terms*

Leadership – the state of having influence over people and events, whether through a formal position or informal status in order to achieve desired outcomes.

Leadership practices – the behaviours or strategies a leader employs in order to achieve desired outcomes.

Administration – includes the formal leadership at the school level: principal and vice principal.

Cultural underpinnings – the theoretical cultural requirements necessary to build a foundation for school improvement.

School culture – the norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape members decisions and practices (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

Professional Learning Community - a community of professionals exhibiting the following characteristics with the goal of continuous learning for both professionals and students: supportive and shared leadership; collective learning; shared values and vision; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice (Hord, 2004).

School Improvement – actions taken by a school staff to impact and improve student learning and academic achievement. In this context, the development of professional learning communities in schools is synonymous with school improvement.

Organizational Learning - individual and collective inquiries that modify or construct organizational theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

## Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

### *Research on School Culture*

In this section, the understanding of school culture as it is defined and explained in relation to school improvement and PLCs will be discussed. It is imperative to establish a clear and strategic understanding of school culture and its connection to the foundations of developing PLCs. In defining the phrase school culture, it is useful to first consider various definitions presented for the term ‘culture.’ Anthropologist, Geertz (1973) set the foundation for understanding culture as the implicit and explicit established pattern of meaning. He includes in this explanation elements such as norms, values, beliefs, traditions, rituals, ceremonies, and myths. Similarly, Schein (1992) when discussing organizational culture uses the reference to patterns in culture. Schein defines culture as:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

Schein focuses on the hidden assumptions which make up culture as opposed to the overt behaviours. The strength of these hidden assumptions appear to have a powerful influence over overt behaviours. Willower (1984) also addresses organizational culture and describes it as “the peculiar set of traditions, values, norms, and other social structures and process that characterize a particular organization” (p. 36). The multifaceted nature of culture as presented by these authors signifies complex implications when applied to a school setting.

Stolp and Smith (1995) provide a definition of school culture which again involves the historical transmission of meaning. These include “the norms, values, beliefs,

traditions and myths understood, maybe in varying degrees, by members of the school community” (p. 13). Cavanagh and Dellar (1998) discuss school culture in terms of individual and collective perceptions of the social environment within a particular school. These perceptions create a common bond between teachers, a bond which in fact may be either positive or negative in nature. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) provide further detail defining school culture as “the norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions that shape members decisions and practices” (p. 8). Barth (2002) echoes this definition of school culture, but in straightforward and perhaps more self-explanatory terms as “the way we do things around here” (p. 6). Within this definition, it is pertinent to note the myriad unstated complexities surrounding it, for one cannot analyze culture from a merely superficial level.

A central theme of the literature focusing on school culture is the concept’s complex and subjective nature (Barth 2001, Cavanagh & Dellar, 1998; Cheng, 1997; Osborne & Price, 1997; Stoll, 1998). Various authors state that school culture cannot be understood as a stand alone component, for it is inseparable from the structure of the school (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1998; Hopkins, 1994; Stoll, 1998). Stolp and Smith (1995) point out that any attempt to measure or understand school culture should involve an attempt to understand the “systemic patterns and relationships” inherent in school culture (p. 19). The concept of systemic patterns or systems theory approach to analyzing culture requires that one analyze the larger picture considering underlying trends and forces of change: the process of changing school culture may require modifications to particular components of the school, but the outcome will not be successful unless one takes a holistic view of culture. (Short & Greer, 2002; Stolp & Smith, 1995). Studies suggest that piecemeal attempts at change will be ineffective. Since organizational culture is related to

systems theory, large changes to one specific part of the school must be supported by the whole as all are affected (Short & Greer, 2002). Fullan (1994) points out the inherent flaw in some improvement initiatives where only the structure of an organization is addressed: “to restructure is not to reculture .... Changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills, and beliefs” (p. 49).

The question of how organizations learn requires attention when contemplating the modification of organizational culture. Argyris and Schon (1996) explain that learning may be a sign of either a product or a process that results in a product. However, they implicitly state that organizations do not learn as a result of individual or group learning. To further clarify their explanation of what constitutes organizational learning, Argyris and Schon describe “espoused theories-of-action” and “theories-in-use.” Espoused theories-of-action signify the beliefs or assumptions members identify as guiding organizational behaviour. Theories-in-use are the theories-of-action that direct what members in fact do. Theories-in-use relate to Barth’s (2002) definition of school culture where they are acknowledged as “the way we do things around here” (p. 6). While staff may all be in agreement with the espoused theories-of-action at a school, these may be contradictory to the theories-in-use. According to Argyris and Schon (1996), there are two ways in which organizations can learn and change their theories-in-use. The first is through single-loop learning which involves refining the theories-in-use by changing the process, but ultimately leaving the values of a theory-in-use unchanged. Double-loop learning, however, is more complex in that this type of learning results in a change in the values of a theory in use as well as changing the strategies and assumptions associated with the theory in use. Therefore, organizational learning is demarcated by both individual and collective inquiries that modify or construct organizational theories-in-use.

Accordingly, Fullan's (1994) concern with attending only to the structures within a school when implementing school improvement is proven to be correct. Organizational members will not learn when there is a disconnect between the espoused theories-in-action and the theories-in-use. Put simply when the walk does not fit the talk, organizational learning will not occur.

Schein (1984) provides further guidance when focusing on organization culture.

He asserts that there are three levels of organizational culture:

1. artifacts
2. values and beliefs
3. underlying assumptions.

The following provides examples of how each level might be analyzed in relation to school culture: artifacts reflect the daily routines, assemblies, and visual signs which may be easily noted by a casual observer; values and beliefs reflect the character of the school and may be observed through the treatment of students or staff, classroom teaching styles, *etc.*; underlying assumptions exist implicitly and are not necessarily noticed by staff, parents, or students (Stolp & Smith, 1995). The separation of culture into several levels allows for a more clear analysis and understanding of the existing school culture. The importance of understanding school culture is underscored by Deal and Peterson (1999) as they maintain that school culture influences the focus, commitment, motivation, and productivity of teachers. Undoubtedly, a factor which influences such crucial attitudes and actions especially in the context of building PLCs, must be given careful consideration and strategic thought.

*Research on School Improvement and the Change Process*

When discussing school improvement, Wagner and O’Phelan (1998) comment on the inadequate understanding of school improvement, for they state that the focus remains on three primary activities: what should be taught, how it should be taught, and the use of assessments to ascertain students’ levels of competency—a point similar to the three questions some have used to simplify the definition of a successful PLC. As the characteristics of PLCs and their relationship to school culture are explored, it becomes glaringly apparent that school improvement cannot take place solely in the context of the above primary activities.

Barth (1990) expresses similar criticism of existing approaches to school improvement. He discusses the use of list logic as a primary form of school improvement where the basic assumption is that lists of desirable characteristics which are clearly described and presented will be neatly applied to schools. This approach may result in limited success, but on the whole Barth sees it as a failing one. He recognizes the attractiveness of the approach due to the list logic base and ease of sound presentation especially when the audience is comprised of government organizations or school board members. List logic contains a sort of validity as it suggests knowledge of the direction headed and specific steps which need to be taken. However, it cannot succeed in the long term as the concept of school culture is completely circumvented. A number of qualitative studies reveal a clear link between school culture and the issues arising from the progression of school change (Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Sarason, 1982). Each study indicates that school culture must be attended to when implementing change. Osborne and Price (1997) reinforce the connection between school improvement and culture as they state that “until school improvement efforts connect up with a ‘cultural’

master-link, long-term, meaningful change will be an unlikely event” (p. 10). In fact, all planning for school improvement must keep in mind the continual development of school culture rather than focusing on structural pressures. Without this attention, school culture will decline and consequently, the improvement initiative will be futile in its attempt at reform. (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1998; Stoll 1998).

Stoll and Fink (1996) provide a more in-depth definition of school improvement which takes into account the power and position of a positive school culture where school improvement:

- improves student outcomes;
- focuses on teaching and learning;
- builds change capacity despite its source;
- defines its own direction;
- considers its current culture and strives to develop positive cultural norms;
- identifies strategies to achieve goals;
- addresses the internal conditions that encourage change;
- preserves drive during periods of turbulence; and
- observes and appraises its process, progress, achievement and development.

Upon further analysis, one can observe similarities between Stoll and Fink’s definition of school improvement and the characteristics of PLCs. In fact, Cavanagh and Dellar (1998) maintain that “school improvement occurs through the growth of the learning community’s culture and perpetuation of the common values which bond the community” (p. 11). Furthermore, research shows that “school improvement can be considered as a process of cultural transformation” (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1997).

The school culture must be one which fosters teacher involvement and commitment to the entire process (Eaker, Dufour, & Burnette, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 1998; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Stoll & Fink, 1996). It is more likely that schools will accept concepts or plans that are in alignment with the existing culture of the school (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1998; Conley, 1993; Fullan, 1990). School improvement initiatives that do not take into account the power of school culture will most likely fail. According to Conley (1993), school culture is familiar, stable, and clear whereas change induces strong emotional and psychological responses. He believes that this is a major reason for the failure of change in schools.

Change often requires questioning one's own practice which may result in a "period of considerable ambiguity" (Goldman & O'Shea, 1990, p. 43). Therefore, teachers must be able to practice understanding their experience and express their craft knowledge in relation to the change. This discussion must be built into school structures in order for authentic sharing and growth to take place. Teachers are able to bring about cultural change if they express common needs and establish common values. Cavanagh and Dellar (1998) identify the need for a critical mass to be formed by teachers as a prelude to the acceptance of change. In order for the formation of a critical mass to take place, the current culture must be understood and the proposition of new values, introduction of new ways of doing things, and communication of new governing ideas should take place. Ideally, if staff members see these concepts as beneficial in helping them to improve their own work, they may repeat the behaviours and eventually cultural change occurs (Schein, 1992).

The building of the critical mass to accept change will not occur if school culture is poisoned when what Barth (2002) identifies as 'nondiscussables,' are off-limits when

the underlying issues within school culture are not brought to the surface. These may involve marginal issues or issues central to student achievement and classroom practice.

Barth's nondiscussables are extended to the implementation of school improvement:

“When teachers perceive the existence of disparate attitudes concerning implementation of an externally instigated innovation, it is likely there will be a reluctance to openly express opinions” (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1998, p. 9). Therefore, administrators must ensure that attention is given to the development of open communication to further the change process.

Further to the issue of building the critical mass and open communication, is the need for schools to understand what educational change entails. Lieberman, Darling-Hammond, & Zuckerman (1991) identify a number of lessons learned regarding school improvement, all of which assist in further understanding issues facing schools seeking to implement change:

- Conflict is a necessary part of change.
- New behaviours must be learned.
- Team-building must extend to the entire school.
- Process and content are interrelated (interpersonal dynamics and sound ideas must go together).
- Finding time for change enhances the prospects for success.
- A big vision with small building blocks can create consensus and progress.
- Manageable initial projects with wide involvement and visible concrete results sustain the restructuring process.
- Facilitators, along with opportunities for training and for retreats, are critical components of successful restructuring efforts. (pp. 36-38)

The lessons involving conflict, new learned behaviours, team building, vision, and sustaining the process through manageable initial projects are all lessons which specifically relate to the need for an understanding of school culture and the change process. Fullan (1994) goes on to point out that school improvement is a process, a journey, not a series of linear steps easily checked off. Difficulties and uncertainty will be a part of the process and problems are in fact a requirement for change—they must be expected. Additionally, problems allow for the process and issues surrounding change to be more clearly understood. In fact, schools which actively look for possible problems experience the most success in school improvement implementation (Stoll, 1998). Goldman and O'Shea (1990) point out that controversy within school cultures is positive when it is out in the open and is taken on with the goal of defining problems and developing genuine solutions. Hopkins (1994) also identifies that long term change requires a de-stabilization period where times are unsure and uncomfortable. Sergiovanni (1990) outlines four stages of school improvement:

1. Initiation (getting started)
2. Uncertainty (muddling through)
3. Transformative (breakthrough)
4. Routinization (remote control)

These stages relate to the change process as discussed by Fullan (1994). Some stages may take longer than others to complete and movement through each stage may not always be sequential—at times staff members may find themselves revisiting issues associated with previous stages. It is important to note a potential weakness in Sergiovanni's model—ending at four suggests that there is an end to the improvement process where change or adaptations are no longer necessary. This approach is not consistent with the concept of

continuous improvement and learning associated with PLCs. However, despite this weakness, the first three stages provide background for leaders attempting to understand the change process.

Following the establishment of a general understanding of the concept of school culture, the acknowledgement of the power of culture over the success or failure of school improvement initiatives, and the outlining of the change process, the next step is to identify the cultural underpinnings of PLCs.

*Research on the Characteristics and Cultural Underpinnings of PLCs*

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) discuss the concept of professional community as a requirement for a school to be productive and successful. Hord (1997) provides five defining dimensions of learning communities:

1. Shared and supportive leadership
2. Collective learning
3. Shared values and vision
4. Supportive conditions
5. Shared personal practice.

The dimension of shared and supportive leadership involves the development of roles where teachers are leaders alongside administration (Hord, 2007). Hord refers to “democratic participation” and “consensus about the school environment and culture and how to attain the desired environment and culture” as necessary characteristics of shared and supportive leadership (p. 4). It is necessary for administrators to relinquish their sense of positional authority and recreate an understanding of shared and collaborative leadership.

Collective learning is defined by the collegial and collaborative work and study of teachers (Hord, 2007). It must be viewed as a cycle where a group of teachers analyze student data, reflect upon and discuss results, determine necessary learning, access learning supports, and then apply the learning to their practice. At this point the cycle repeats itself (Hord). This cycle of learning is not disconnected and involves groups of teachers working together as opposed to individual professional development.

Shared vision is defined as a “mental image of what is important to the staff and school community; that image is kept in mind while planning with colleagues and delivering instruction in the classroom” (Hord, 2007, p. 3). Furthermore, Hord highlights the role of the principal as a regular communicator of the vision to all stakeholders by articulating “powerful images that encourage everyone’s commitment to the vision” (p. 3).

Supportive conditions are defined by two characteristics: logistical or structural conditions and human capacities (Hord, 2007). The logistical or structural conditions relate to the availability of time, space, and resources; whereas human capacities involve the “relationships developed among staff to promote collegiality and collaboration” (Hord, p. 4). Further to the development of human capacities, Hord reinforces the need for principals to be a driving force in this area. Principals are to help staff relate to one another, provide social activities for staff, and create a caring environment.

Hord’s (2007) final dimension of PLCs is shared personal practice. She describes this as being a non-evaluative review of teacher’s practice and instructional behaviours completed by colleagues. To develop shared personal practice, Hord emphasises the need for teachers to facilitate the work of changing practice with one another. Teachers require professional development in the area of shared personal practice to engage in this work. Learning strategies to develop shared personal practice such as questioning strategies

allows teachers to learn, practice, and implement the strategy together—fitting neatly into further development of the cycle of collective learning.

The elements as listed by Hord (2007) vary somewhat from those covered by Kruse, Louis & Bryk (1995). They identify the elements of PLCs as involving reflective dialogue, focus on student learning, interaction among teacher colleagues, collaboration, and shared values and norms. To add to the discussion in the literature regarding the elements of PLCs, Dufour (2004) identifies three core principals: ensuring that students learn; a culture of collaboration; and a focus on results where teachers work in teams engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote team learning and student achievement. It might be suggested that in comparison to Hord (2007) and Louis, Kruse, and Bryk (1995), Dufour's core principles over-simplify PLCs to a point which may cause leaders to omit certain preparations and plans necessary in the building of PLCs.

In addition to the description of what PLCs look like, Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1995) also describe five requisite structural conditions for learning communities to succeed:

1. providing adequate time for teachers to meet and exchange ideas
2. locating teachers in close proximity to one another
3. ensuring teacher empowerment
4. creating school wide communication methods
5. using methods that require teachers to practice together.

However, once again, if only the structural conditions are addressed, the reculturing of a school will not take place (Fullan, 1994). The cultural underpinnings and structural conditions of PLCs are interdependent.

Three of the five principles of the “Improving the Quality of Education for All” (IQEA) project as supported by the Institute of Education at the University of Cambridge (U.K.) reflect this concept of a learning community (Hopkins, 1994). They include developing a shared vision with all members of the school community; building and maintaining a culture which encourages all members to learn; and finally creating structures within the school which promote collaborative activity. The basic assumption here is that this approach to school improvement will essentially result in the advancement of student learning and the development of a school culture which promotes learning and collaboration for its members.

Silins, Mulford and Zarins (2002) discuss the nature of learning organizations and speak directly to the learning component of PLCs. They note that schools that are learning organizations have “systems and structures in place that enable staff at all levels to collaboratively and continuously learn and put new learnings to use. This capacity for collaborative learning defines the process of organizational learning in schools” (p. 616). They identify four dimensions that characterize a school’s capacity for organizational learning.

1. Trusting and collaborative climate
2. Taking initiatives and risks
3. Shared and monitored mission
4. Professional development

These diverge somewhat from the dimensions listed by Hord (2007), but assist in the further fleshing out of the wide and complex variables discussed as foundational aspects of PLCs.

Barth (2001) asserts that for change to take place, teachers and administrators must lead in their own learning. The speed at which the world changes requires that schools be able to adjust. Furthermore, modelling has a forceful effect on all members of the school. Finally and perhaps most importantly when considering the multiple interests served by educators, the continual effort to learn by both teachers and administrators is a renewing force for the entire system. Goodlad (1990) points out that “if schools are to become the responsive, renewing institutions that they must, the teachers in them must be purposefully engaged in the renewal process” (p. 25). The renewal of educators results in the renewal of schools (Barth, 2001).

Little (1982) focuses specifically on the importance of collegiality amongst staff as a reflection of positive school culture which promotes learning. She specifies that collegiality necessitates the existence of four primary behaviours for staff: talking about practice; observing one another; working together on curriculum; sharing knowledge with one another. Additionally, she identifies the character of learning communities that have a demonstrable effect on teaching and learning as being one where teachers question and challenge teaching practices, respect opinions of colleagues, and are not hesitant to ask difficult questions, and tolerate “informed dissent” (Little, 2002, p. 46). Fullan (1991) echoes Little’s (1982) position on collegiality and recognizes that by eliminating teacher isolation and increasing teacher collegiality, one ensures that changes will endure. Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner (1994) also point out that for such collaboration to occur, there must be a promotion of intimacy and sharing of authority. In order to build this professional community and the concept of collegiality, “it requires that everyone be willing to give up something without knowing in advance just what that may be (Barth, 1990, p. 31). This does not seem to be too great a sacrifice when considering the results

of a positive school culture: higher student motivation and achievement, increased teacher collaboration and improved attitudes among teachers toward their jobs (Stolp & Smith, 1995). Staff must realize the importance of coming together to build towards a positive culture and consequently, a successful school. Mutual sharing, problem solving, the celebration of tradition and rituals as well as commitment and accomplishments result in the building up of school community (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Considering the personal nature of the activities listed by Deal and Peterson (1999) as necessary to building a culture of community, trust is a major factor in the success or failure of this endeavour (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Social trust between teachers, parents, and school leaders is shown to improve everyday work and as a vital resource for reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Greer & Short, 2002). However, one should note that although high levels of trust do not always translate directly into school effectiveness, it does allow for disagreements amongst staff without the accompanying distrust or paranoia which can occur in an untrusting school culture. Bryk and Schneider (2003) specify further that social trust involves four primary aspects:

1. respect
2. personal regard which relies on the participant's willingness to go beyond specific job requirements
3. competence in core role responsibilities
4. personal integrity

Their study showed that schools scoring low on relational trust had a one in seven chance of producing academic improvement in students. Schools with chronically weak trust during the duration of the study had essentially zero chance of demonstrating academic improvement. In conjunction with these results, Bryk and Schneider build the connection

between trust and organizational change where “increasing trust and deepening organizational change support each other” (p. 43).

Trust is of primary concern in the context of educational change when considering the emphasis put on relationships among adults in the school as a requirement for school improvement: “relationships among adults in schools are the basis, the precondition, the *sine qua non* that allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement” (Barth, 1990, p. 32). Additionally, Goldman and O’Shea (1990) point out that the re-defining of teachers’ roles as key partners in shared decision-making results in further emphasis on the existence of mutual trust between all concerned. Hord (2007) identifies that “building trust requires substantial time and appropriate activities that enable the individual to experience trustworthiness of colleagues and to extend or become trustworthy to complete they cycle [of collective learning and shared personal practice]” (p. 5). Noticeably, trust and adult relationships play a prominent role in the conception of PLCs.

Collegiality and trust are only two of the many elements of cultural underpinnings as they relate to PLCs. Conley (1993) discusses “The Ten Commitments: Prerequisites to Restructuring” (pp.17-21). Three of the ten commitments emphasize developing a culture of collegiality and collaboration and providing opportunities for professional development and experimentation. He stresses the need for shared and open decision-making so that concerns are discussed and dealt with immediately. The concept of addressing issues relates to the need for resolution of negative and positive emotions existing within a school culture to release the energy for change (Fullan, 1997). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) also identify six strategies for strengthening school structure. Although these are

listed as strategies, they may also be seen as requirements for strong school culture.

Culture can be improved through:

1. emphasis on shared goals
2. collaborative decision-making and reduction of teacher isolation
3. bureaucratic mechanisms such as the provision of money, effective planning and scheduling
4. staff development involving teachers teaching teachers
5. direct, continuous communication
6. the use of symbols and rituals to celebrate and recognize school culture.

It is interesting to note that Leithwood and Jantzi's strategies for strengthening school culture are virtual reflections of Hord's (2004) five elements of PLCs.

#### *Teacher Perceptions of Leadership Practices*

Considering that administration must work closely and strategically in leading teachers, it is pertinent to explore studies regarding the development of teacher perceptions of leadership practices as well as reviewing the existing perceptions of teachers. Lord and Maher (1993) provide two accounts for the development of leadership perceptions. Leadership perceptions may stem from matching information to categories stored in long term memory. If the information observed corresponds with stored categories or traits, then a perception of the person as a leader develops. The second account provided recognizes the potential for the development of leadership perceptions through inferential process—teachers judge the level of influence a leader may have had on events. Perceptions are created based on the level of desirable or undesirable results and the level of influence the leader may have had over the results.

Expanding on these explanations is the recognition of affective and cognitive reactions to leaders (Hall & Lord, 1995). People may have certain emotional responses which influence their perceptions along with the influence of their knowledge of leaders. Both impact the development of perceptions. They continue on to explore the development of self-schema—one's knowledge of and identification with specific traits. Lewter and Lord (1993 as cited in Hall and Lord, 1995) completed a study demonstrating that knowledge of and exposure to transformational leadership qualities will influence the way in which leadership perceptions are developed—the perceptions are focused on those qualities. However, if there is no knowledge of transformational leadership qualities, there may be a difference in the type of perceptions created.

In their study on the emergence of teacher perceptions of leadership Newton, Fiene, and Wagner (1999) approached the development of teacher perceptions based on constructivist theory. This approach is centered on the concept that “we learn and develop perceptions by synthesizing new experiences into existing perceptions” (p. 4). They documented that teachers' experience both as students and as professionals influence their perceptions of the principalship. Additionally, teachers may develop their perceptions of leadership based on their evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership behaviours of principals.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1996) studied the variables that influenced teacher perceptions of leadership practices. They indicated that “doing good work on behalf of one's school, and being seen to do such work, is likely the most powerful strategy for positively influencing teachers' perceptions of one's leadership (p. 531). Furthermore, in-school conditions such as “the school's mission, vision and goals; culture; programs and instruction; policies and organization; decision-making structures; and resources” are the

strongest variables which explain teacher perceptions. Finally, Leithwood and Jantzi cautioned against analyzing leadership perceptions based on gender as there are myriad conditions which may further influence teacher perceptions of leadership beyond whether the leader is male or female.

Teacher perceptions of leadership practices have evolved over time, yet similarities remain. Giannangelo & Malone's (1987) study revealed that teachers identified the most important leadership practices as being an instructional leader. Instructional leadership was defined by teachers as being involved with curriculum, informing teachers of innovations and current trends, and observing teachers teaching. Second to this, teachers indicated that the next most important leadership practice was that of building manager. This assertion contradicts current literature on transformational leadership, but may be more of a reflection of the American site-based-management approach. Another study revealed that teachers believed the most important leadership characteristics to be honesty, competent, forward-looking, inspiring and caring (Richardson, Flanigan, Lane & Keaster, 1992). Leech and Fulton (2002) studied teacher perceptions of leadership practices based on the framework of Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices inventory (1997 as cited in Leech & Fulton, 2002). This framework involves five dimensions of leadership:

1. Challenging the process
2. Inspiring shared vision
3. Enabling others to act
4. Modelling the way
5. Encouraging the heart

Of the five dimensions, teachers perceived leaders as most often enabling others to act followed by modelling the way. Third and fourth were inspiring shared vision and challenging the process. Of note is that teachers identified encouraging the heart as the least often demonstrated leadership practice.

As the education system evolves it should be expected that leadership practices and teacher perceptions of leadership practices should evolve as well. This is certainly evident in the research as leaders are required to move beyond curriculum knowledge and building management. It is necessary to carefully study the research surrounding leadership practices and the development of PLCs.

### *Research on Leadership*

The visible commitment of the majority of school staff is necessary for development of school culture and implementation of PLCs. What role do leaders play in influencing this development and what strategies are documented as being constructive in the creation of learning communities and positive school culture?

It would appear that leaders can no longer be characterized as merely managers or instructional leaders. Their role has evolved and must encompass much more for authentic learning to take place (Fullan, 2002). Deal and Peterson (1999) make reference to school leaders as the “models, potters, poets, actors, and healers. They are historians and anthropologists . . . visionaries and dreamers” (p. 29). This portrayal does not align with a one-dimensional job description of leaders. Further complicating the role of formal leaders is the assertion that “teachers’ perceptions of the nature of principals’ leadership as well as administrative teams leadership [are] critical to promoting organizational learning and more student-centered classroom instruction” (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002, p. 636). Formal leaders must be willing to reflect on not only their own perceptions of leadership

style, but should also be in tune with teacher perceptions as this has a direct effect on organizational learning.

Carmichael (1982) identifies the positional authority of principals where they are seen as all knowing and competent. She goes further to state that principals have absorbed this identity themselves making it problematic for them to work within the framework of PLCs. If shared and supportive leadership is in fact one of the key elements to PLCs, then principals must shed this 'omnicompetent' identity and delve into the realm of principal as learner (Carmichael, 1982; Hoerr, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1994).

In conjunction with the wide variety of roles listed by Deal and Peterson (1998), Fullan (2002) identifies five characteristics of principals who are most effective in bringing about cultural change. Principals possess a moral purpose where they feel a sense of social responsibility to others and the school environment. They hold an understanding of the change process and have the ability to improve relationships. In addition, principals allow for cultural change, knowledge creation, and sharing between staff members. Finally, cultural change principals foster coherence where the focus is on the task at hand and improvement efforts are not fragmented. Cheng (1996) in his research of leaders in Hong Kong schools summarizes school leadership as a position replete with complexities:

...School leadership is not only a process to influence the behavior of school members but also their attitudes, values, and beliefs; not only individual members but also the whole school; not only the goal of achievement but also goal development and culture building in school. (p. 10)

There are many expectations put upon leaders working in the school system. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) add to these expectations as they point out that leaders

must attend to the underlying assumptions and symbols of the life of the school to understand how values and beliefs are shaped. Leaders need to build and support a culture receptive to school improvement that encourages continuous learning.

Leaders must also consider issues which may arise in pre-implementation of PLCs and consider the conditions of readiness that may be vital prior to beginning (Fullan, 1991). Leaders who have already adapted their world-view to reculturing need to be sure to provide time for staff to develop this same readiness (Conley, 1993). This relates back to the importance of ensuring that individual goals and learning are developed prior to creating a shared vision. In order for leaders to understand change, Fullan (2002) sets forth six guidelines:

1. Innovation must be combined with coherence.
2. Leaders must assist others to evaluate and build meaning and commitment to new concepts.
3. Implementation will be difficult, especially in the initial stages.
4. Understand the areas of resistance and address concerns.
5. Transform culture.
6. No checklists are necessary as change is a complex endeavour.

Without question, leaders have a daunting task in front of them as they must ultimately deal with issues and variables which are not static. Sergiovanni (1990) explores the process leaders may move through as school improvement is implemented. He identifies four stages which relate to change. The initial stage involves bartering which is seen as the push to get the process underway. Building is the second stage and it provides the support needed for staff to deal with uncertainty. Thirdly, bonding provides the inspiration needed for participation and commitment which exceeds expectations. Finally, banking looks to

provide routine to school improvements where they become a part of the school culture (p. 31). Clearly, leaders of schools implementing major school improvement initiatives face a challenging situation, for successful implementation requires leaders to look at a larger set of variables involving not only pedagogy and policy, but also the emotions and attitudes of staff members. The need for leaders to improve relationships with staff is imperative to deal with change (Fullan, 1997). These relationships coupled with an understanding of how change works and shared commitment will help sustain the change process.

There exists a distinct relationship between leadership behaviours and school cultures which are collaborative, effective, and innovative (Sergiovanni, 1990). In a study of two successful Newfoundland high schools, Sheppard and Brown (1999) found that leaders were the key to the change process. Barth (1990) also verifies the connection between school leadership and the development of learning and community. Charlotte `a Campo's (1993) study based in British Columbia, Canada focuses on the principal's effect on teacher collaboration. Her research revealed that to foster teacher collaboration, principals must be well aware of the motivation and commitment levels of teachers and should have a vision of the ideal manner in which the school would operate. The visibility and audibility of this vision is imperative. Moreover, the principal must focus on the authentic involvement of teachers in decision-making further supported by specific procedures put in place to enhance this routine. `a Campo also identifies the need and availability of resources necessary for promoting and supporting collaboration. The leaders' understanding of staff needs as well as motivation and commitment will assist in building teacher collaboration.

In addition to recognizing the influence of the formal leaders (administration), over school culture and school improvement, one must also identify the significance of teacher

leaders in implementation (Barth, 1990). In fact, “leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school” (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). For, as Moller (2004) states:

if professional learning communities provide the best hope for sustained school improvement, and shared leadership is a critical component of successful professional learning communities, then principals must be both willing to share leadership and able to develop conditions and communicate expectations that will advance shared leadership among school professionals. (p. 140)

Developing leadership capacity in staff members is a cornerstone of sustainable school improvement. By increasing teacher leadership in schools, authentic receptiveness to change may take place as opposed to a passive or apathetic approach to new ideas (Lucas, 2002). Furthermore, “when teachers are enlisted and empowered as school leaders, everyone can win” (Barth, 1990, p. 128). Although much emphasis is put on the influence of administration over the development of school culture and consequently, school improvement, this influence may at times in fact, be shared (Bennett, 1998; Lucas, 2002). If this is the case, it is clearly beneficial to the school for administration to not only have a clear vision of the ideal school culture, but to also foster leadership amongst the teachers in developing culture and implementing change. Administration must understand the “distribution of power resources in the school and work with the people who possess them to promote the integrative culture . . .” (Bennett, 1998, p. 29). By doing this, administrators widen their leadership influence and will be more likely to shape school culture; moreover, they will also experience further success in implementing school improvement and developing PLCs.

In the Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement project, Moller (2004) identifies characteristics of schools showing high and low levels of readiness to develop a PLC. It is abundantly clear that those schools which had administrators who fostered teacher leadership were well on their way to developing a

strong PLC. Conversely, those schools with principals who saw shared leadership as merely obligatory and themselves as solely in control, demonstrated a low level of readiness to develop a PLC.

How can leaders encourage and empower teachers to lead? Blase and Kirby (2000) reveal that leaders who successfully change school culture and inspire leadership do so by supporting teachers. They specify that this support involves the following requirements:

1. Leaders expect that teachers lead
2. Leaders relinquish some control
3. Leaders build trust
4. Leaders empower teachers to address issues
5. Leaders include a variety of teachers, not only the experienced ones, in addressing issues
6. Leaders share responsibility for failure
7. Leaders recognize success.

Barth (1990) also reflects similar requirements in his discussion of empowering teachers. However, it is prudent to mention some additional requirements such as the need for administration to articulate teacher leadership as a goal. This may result in shared leadership becoming a part of the school culture. Additionally, Barth refers to the importance of involving teachers before decisions are made. This relates to Blase and Kirby's (2000) reference to empowering teachers to address issues. Leaders need to recognize when they are able to hand over the reins.

Formal leaders face a daunting task in the face of continual change. The nature of school culture and school improvement, specifically the development of PLCs, requires

that they are able to address a plethora of variables relating to these crucial aspects of education. How are formal leaders to accomplish this task? The model of transformational leadership as presented by Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) seems to be the most effective in dealing with the complexities associated with school culture and school improvement. Burns (1978) identifies a transformational leader as one who “seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower” (p. 4). Leithwood et al. (1999) provide a more in-depth description involving six dimensions:

1. building school vision and goals
2. providing intellectual stimulation
3. offering individualized support
4. modeling professional practices and values
5. demonstrating high performance expectations
6. developing structures to foster participation in school decisions.

Of these six dimensions, all have an effect on the school culture; however, in relation to school improvement initiatives, transformational leadership highlights the importance of fostering teacher leadership and capacity for change. This of course assumes that the leader must also have the commitment and capacity needed to implement change. Stoll and Fink (1996) identify transformational leaders as those who focus on the process and school culture. They work to understand the change process, foster a shared vision amongst teachers, and through leading by example, they reinforce their cultural beliefs. This falls in line with the ideal collaborative and collegial culture as identified by teachers.

Transformational leadership empowers teachers to move to a higher level of values, set goals, develop solutions to school-wide challenges and take part in shared decision-making (Barth, 1990; Lucas, 2002). Where mandated change marginalizes

teachers and will most likely fail due to a lack of commitment, the transformational leadership model works on the premise that school culture will coalesce around a sense of shared and informed decision-making where teachers are an integral part of the change process (Bailey, 2000). Therefore, while one model cannot address all issues present in schools, the transformational leadership concept certainly focuses on the need for a culture of collaboration and collegiality, as well as fostering leadership throughout the school organization for the successful implementation of PLCs.

Leadership clearly plays a significant role in the successful development of positive culture and consequently, implementation of successful PLCs. Leaders must be cognizant of the strategies and approaches they may employ to further build their interpersonal relationships with staff members and continue to foster cultures of collaboration and collegiality. It is imperative that leaders understand the change process and not only support teachers in this process, but build a foundation for the development of shared leadership and shared decision making to move forward. Leaders cannot merely recognize the importance of shared leadership and decision making, they must develop the conditions where teachers feel empowered to lead. It is logical to assert that positive school culture and strong PLCs will co-exist as key components of transformational leadership.

School culture must be recognized as having extraordinary power over successful school improvement and must therefore receive strategic attention from both teachers and leaders. A review of the literature reveals how successful PLCs are in addressing the needs of school culture and school improvement, for the ultimate goal is the enhancement of teacher learning and student achievement. While there is a plethora of literature addressing the elements of PLCs, school culture, and leadership influence in both of the

previous areas, it has become obvious that there is a need to fill in the experiential gaps of teachers and leaders as they embark on the journey of operating as PLCs. Do leaders know how to strategically address the cultural aspects of PLCs? How do teachers perceive leaders as influencing the cultural underpinnings of PLCs? How do leaders address the change process when working to implement PLCs? What are the leadership practices which teachers perceive as sustaining PLCs? These questions, while addressed to some degree in the literature, need to be explored in order to understand the state of school culture and leadership as schools continue on their journeys to becoming PLCs.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This section will delineate the research methods used, research design, and my philosophy behind embarking on this study. A qualitative approach was employed in order to understand the leadership practices teachers perceived as influencing the building and development of PLCs. The axioms which compose the naturalist paradigm provide the foundation for the implementation of qualitative research design to understand human behaviour through how the world is experienced. A naturalistic inquirer is a phenomenologist “concerned with describing and understanding social phenomena . . .” (Guba, 1978, p. 12). More specifically, qualitative research can be defined as research meant “to describe or understand the phenomena of interest from the participant’s eyes” (Trochim, 2001 p. 162). Using the axioms of naturalistic inquiry and more specifically the purpose of qualitative research, I wanted to acknowledge the individual realities existing for each participant and for his or her school as a whole. Charles and Mertler (2002) further specify the purpose of descriptive research where the purpose of a qualitative design is to “show status by first describing and then, to the extent possible, interpreting past and present situations, conditions, behaviours, interactions and trends ...[which may]... satisfy a desire to gain increased knowledge about the phenomenon of interest ...[and]... may frequently provide a basis for decision-making” (p. 265). The application of inductive data analysis and idiographic interpretation allows for clear description of findings specific to the context. The goal of this study is not to provide law-like generalizations, but rather to provide interpretation of the findings meaningful to the realities of the research subjects (Swann, 2003).

My initial focus for the study was to discover teacher perceptions of leadership practices currently influencing the development of PLCs. Interwoven with teacher

perceptions of leadership practices influencing the development of PLCs, are their perceptions of those leadership practices considered to be most influential in sustaining PLCs. I also desired to explore the leadership practices which are currently influencing school culture and the effective implementation of school improvement initiatives. It is also necessary to recognize the overlap between leadership practices developing PLCs and leadership practices influencing school culture. In comparing research on the characteristics of positive school culture and dimensions of a PLC it is evident that the two concepts are interdependent (Cavanagh & Dellar, 1998; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1998; Short & Greer, 2002; Stolp & Smith, 1995).

The literature is clear in its assertion that it is formal leaders who have the most control and influence over the development of school culture and consequently the development of PLCs. However, leaders' level of understanding of the complex variables surrounding school culture and PLCs as well as their attention to these variables will differ from school to school and between individual administrators. Rather than focusing on how formal leaders perceived themselves to be influencing PLCs, I wanted to explore teacher perceptions of leadership practices. Some of the variables that may influence teacher perceptions of leadership practices include the level of understanding of PLCs on the part of both teachers and leaders, the number of years of teacher experience, school configurations, and district level influence over structures already in place to support PLCs.

It is not the goal of this study to identify the negative and positive leadership practices at each individual school represented in the sample. Rather the intention is to provide clear description of the practices perceived as being used in developing and

sustaining PLCs and to understand these practices in the context of the theoretical foundations of PLCs.

### *Sample*

The research sample consisted of sixteen participants currently teaching in an urban Alberta school jurisdiction. Over 5500 students are enrolled in the district and it employs over 370 teachers. Of the sixteen participants twelve were female and four were male. The gender distribution of the sample was not planned, but is reflective of the gender distribution across the school district. Interviewee's teaching experience ranged from one to thirty-two years with six of the teachers having five or less years of teaching experience, seven with six to ten years of teaching experience, two with eleven to twenty years of teaching experience and one teacher who has taught for over twenty-one years. Of the seven schools represented there were three schools with students in kindergarten to grade six , two with students in kindergarten to grade nine, one with students in grades seven to nine, and one high school (grades ten to twelve). Student populations ranged from around 350 to over 1200. See Table 1.

Table 1

*Participant Profiles*

<i>Teacher Pseudonym</i>	<i>School Pseudonym</i>	<i>School Population</i>	<i>School Configuration</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>
		<i>Less than 500</i>	<i>Elementary (E)</i>	<i>1-5 years</i>
		<i>More than 500</i>	<i>Secondary (S)</i>	<i>6-10 years</i>
			<i>Elementary/Secondary (E/S)</i>	<i>11-20 years</i>
				<i>21 + years</i>
Lisa Ritter	Brockton Community School	More than 500	E/S	1-5 years
Peter Smith	Brockton Community School	More than 500	E/S	6-10 years
Anne Bently	Brockton Community School	More than 500	E/S	21 + years
Nina Gregson	Brockton Community School	More than 500	E/S	6-10 years
Fionna Germaine	Brockton Community School	More than 500	E/S	1-5 years
David Pence	Brockton Community School	More than 500	E/S	1-5 years
Susan Lapierre	Pineridge	More than 500	E/S	1-5 years
Carrie Fredricks	Pineridge	More than 500	E/S	1-5 years
Marissa Schultz	Pineridge	More than 500	E/S	6-10 years
Janelle Thomson	Pineridge	More than 500	E/S	6-10 years

Table 1 continued

*Participant Profiles*

<i>Teacher Pseudonym</i>	<i>School Pseudonym</i>	<i>School Population</i>	<i>School Configuration</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>
		<i>Less than 500</i>	<i>Elementary (E)</i>	<i>1-5 years</i>
		<i>More than 500</i>	<i>Secondary (S)</i>	<i>6-10 years</i>
			<i>Elementary/Secondary (E/S)</i>	<i>11-20 years</i>
				<i>21 + years</i>
Rachel Benson	E.B. Anderson	Less than 500	E	11-20 years
Patrick Trane	Centennial	Less than 500	E	11-20 years
Bonita Roberts	Black Rock	Less than 500	E	1-5 years
Shelley Black	Heritage Central	More than 500	S	6-10 years
Treena Jamison	Miller	More than 500	S	6-10 years
Sam Taylor	Miller	More than 500	S	6-10 years

As an employee of the district, the research reflects my ‘insiderness.’ For the way in which the research evolved reflected my interest in the state of PLCs and leadership practices currently influencing PLC development. I was part of the first group of teachers and administrators who learned about PLCs being first introduced to the conceptual framework at a conference featuring Dr. Richard DuFour. Following this conference the school at which I was employed joined a pilot project funded by the ATA. Throughout this process, I experienced firsthand some of the frustrations relating to implementing and supporting organizational change. I began to record my own reflections as they related to learning communities and school culture. It was from these experiences that I began to

develop an initial focus for research. Because of my ‘insiderness’ it was important that I identify my own experiences and the interrelationship existing between these and the cultural categories existing within the research. As a result, I was able to establish distance (McCracken, 1988). By identifying what “familiar expectations might be in place” (McCracken, 1988, p. 33) I was that much more thorough in my identification of the various categories requiring exploration within the school district context.

The sample consisted of teachers currently employed within the school district. I was given permission by central office to use the district email system to contact teachers requesting their voluntary participation. As the objective was not to make law like generalizations to the population of educators, this method of sampling met the goal of exploring teacher perceptions of leadership practices within the context of one district.

### *Research Design and Procedures*

#### *Data Collection*

Interviewing was the central data collection method. The process of interviewing allowed me to “pose questions and when necessary probe or otherwise follow up to obtain clearer responses in greater depth” (Charles & Mertler, 2002, p. 162). Employing interviewing as a data collection tool may result in concerns regarding its validity. However, we must acknowledge at the start the nature of the interview – a social interaction and therefore understand that it could never be essentially free of subjectivity. Specific interview questions combined with a series of prompts were created to compensate for my own understanding and biases during the interviews. The categories covered within the interview protocol were based on concepts presented in the literature (McCracken, 1988). The purpose of the prompts was to ensure that all aspects of the open questions are addressed. These prompts were “designed to give structure to the interview”

without violating the law of non-direction (McCracken, 1988, p. 22). Although participants were only interviewed once, the issues of consistency and truthfulness may have been diminished by guaranteeing confidentiality and asking open-ended questions supported by various prompts.

I used the district email server as a tool for my initial invitation. This was sent out to all teachers in the school district (see Appendix A). Interested teachers were asked to contact me at which point I mailed them a Letter of Consent (See Appendix B) as well as a copy of the Interview Protocol (see Appendix C). The majority of interviews took place in the teachers' classrooms or offices and ranged in length from one hour to one and one half hours.

#### *Data Analysis*

Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed into text. In qualitative research, there are a wide variety of data analysis methods from which to choose. Grounded theorists use three levels of coding: open, axial, and selective for the purpose of developing systematic, detailed, and explanatory theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Tesch (1990) differentiates between "structural analysis," where the structure is contained in the data, and "interpretational" approaches where the "research overlays a structure of her/his own making on the data, as a device for rendering the phenomena under study easier to grasp" (p. 103). In the case of this study, the initial interview protocol being based on Hord's (1997) characteristics of a PLC assisted in the interpretational approach where the five characteristics were used to analyze the data.

Data was coded according to its initial relation to any one of the five characteristics of a PLC. Following this "first pass" of data analysis, key words within responses were highlighted and separated into more detailed categories. Additionally, any

overlap within the data was identified and causes and relationships analysed. This approach allowed further exploration into the connections and relationships among categories resulting in a stronger analysis of the data in relation to literature surrounding the research question.

### *Validity and Reliability*

Three of the ten schools in the district are not represented in the sample; however, every school grade configuration is represented. When considering the sample size and type, I was concerned about the conditions of sufficiency and saturation (Seidman, 1991). However, the condition of sufficiency was met as participants were from a range of schools representing all possible grade configurations and years of experience. The condition of saturation was proven in the categories related to the research question and sub-questions. Nonetheless, some of the data that resulted would benefit from further exploration in the matter of contextual variables such as district policies, school size and configuration, and teacher and leadership experience. However, a larger interview sample would not result in a distinct saturation point and in fact would necessitate the implementation of a different research method. Therefore, the exploration of the contextual variables is beyond the range of this study. The small sample size does suggest that the data is not likely to “reflect the trait distributions that exist in the population” (Charles & Mertler, 2002, p. 154). Yet, because of the rich descriptive detail, the findings, while not statistically significant, do offer noteworthy information about leadership practices, school culture, structures, and teacher attitudes as they relate to PLCs.

Furthermore, the need to validate findings was met by using “member checking” where one or more participants check the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2005). This

assisted in ensuring that transcripts of interviews were correct and that the findings represented participant experiences and perceptions.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical guidelines and policies established by the Human Subjects Review policies were strictly adhered to. The names of participants, colleagues, schools, and the school district referred to in the interviews are not included in the research findings. All participants and schools have been assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were completed in the same calendar month and specific dates of interviews are not included as part of the findings. Segments of participant responses based on the digital recordings and transcripts are quoted or paraphrased within the findings and analysis, but again, any identifying references are not included.

The results of this study cannot be generalized to all schools, administrators, or teachers. They do, however, potentially provide insight into the connection between theory and practice, leadership practices employed in schools, and the way in which PLCs are redefining roles within the educational system. The analysis of the findings is based primarily on Hord's (1997) model of PLCs with further support from Hipp and Huffman's (2003) study of PLCs. Further to the use of Hord's (1997) model of PLCs is the research surrounding the influence of school culture—for the development and sustainability of PLCs is expressly intertwined with leadership practices that shape and maintain positive school culture. The findings are arranged to reveal teacher perceptions of leadership practices as they relate to each of the five foundational dimensions of PLCs:

1. Shared and Supportive Leadership
2. Shared Values and Vision
3. Collective Learning

4. Supportive Conditions

5. Shared Personal Practice

In chapter six, the successes and challenges facing leaders when developing PLCs are explored, prompting suggestions for areas of further research and the identification of existing supports and barriers to sustaining PLCs.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### *Shared and Supportive Leadership*

Teachers identified a number of central beliefs pertaining to who a leader is and the actions taken which makes the person a leader. All participants identified both administration and teachers as leaders. Four participants included an additional category in that they separated department heads and teachers as examples of leaders.

### *Leadership Characteristics*

When asked what characteristics made a person a leader, participants segregated their descriptions of administrators and teacher leaders. Six participants referred to administration as working solely from the level of positional leadership or authority. This will be further explored in the presentation of data on shared leadership. Administrators were described as people who manage the school, provide resources for PLC, provide motivation, help problem solve, take charge and provide support. Rachel Benson's comment elaborated on the leadership style necessary for PLC's when describing the characteristics of a leader:

It's a broader leadership role in terms of keeping the PLC moving and ensuring that people have the resources they need and providing the encouragement people need to keep going. And acknowledging success and helping to problem solve where there hasn't been success. And [asking] 'What do you think went wrong and how would you change it?' So, it's more of a support role, I think, for them. And it almost seems funny to think about leadership and support in the same sentence meaning the same thing. But in a PLC they are.

The concept of leadership being supportive emerged as participants described characteristics of teachers who are leaders. Marissa Schultz highlighted that teacher leaders in her school are "people who have established a reputation for being supportive colleagues, professional and dedicated to the ideals of our school." In addition to the emphasis on being supportive, five participants stated that teacher leaders in their schools

demonstrate they are not afraid to take a stand. This is closely followed by a willingness to take risks and to follow through on a vision and goals as Susan Lapierre explained: “It’s not just an idea that floats out and disappears—there’s action . . . and they’re motivated to see it through.” Teacher leaders were also perceived as exercising clear communication skills and seeking input from stakeholders prior to making decisions. They were described as being approachable and open minded—able to look at past experiences and determine their application to present and future situations.

Two participants indicated that teachers are often leaders due to their expertise in a certain area. Tied to that expertise is the ability to model instructional leadership on staff. Benson shared as “the teacher develops some expertise in a particular area, they take on the leadership for that in the school.” David Pence remarked that some teachers have an “affinity for a given subject area or age level. They are able to take on a role where they provide good examples of practice, exemplary practice. Not necessarily with any specific recognition as a leader—no titles. But just their peers know that this person can help me out in that given area.”

#### *Shared Leadership and Decision-Making*

The level of shared leadership and decision-making varied from school to school. Seven of the sixteen participants felt that leadership and decision making is not shared in their respective schools. Concern was expressed regarding the amount of top down decision making. Nina Gregson noted that administration created the direction and the school is expected to follow. Anne Bently remarked that “it is not a cooperative, it’s ‘this is what you will do.’ So, to me it is not true PLC. It is not a collective ‘we need to work on this together,’ it’s ‘you’re going to do it this way.’” An example of this perceived

decision making relates to the whole school goal where Gregson identified the goal as being “good . . . but, could be more effective had there been involvement from staff.”

At Pineridge School, all participants shared that leadership and decision making was not shared between administration and teachers. However, an additional dynamic materialized where all participants made direct reference to examples of individual teachers who had stepped into an informal leadership role of their own accord.

Participants also stated that although leadership was not shared between administration and teachers, leadership was shared amongst teachers. When asked whether leadership was shared at the school, Schultz stated “No, not willingly,” and explained further that:

leadership is shared in terms of colleagues in that there are those on staff who take it upon themselves to lead others, whether it be professionally in terms of professional development or the sharing of new pedagogy or what have you. It also can be in terms of assisting new staff. A lot of that leadership is placed on the shoulders of non-positional leadership staff.

Schultz clarified that leadership was something staff take initiative for as opposed to something they have been asked to do by administration. An additional example of this type of “self initiated” leadership was the decision regarding a whole school goal. The goal was set during a meeting where administration was absent. Department heads took the lead, and consensus was established amongst the teachers regarding a whole school goal. Lapierre commented that “Honestly, I think letting us run with our staff decision was not necessarily done out of pure excitement, but perhaps out of fear of not following consensus that the staff came to while they were gone.”

The challenge of working in a top down system was noted by some participants. Carrie Fredricks remarked that it was “difficult to work in a situation where you see a clear boundary of power.” She also noted that decision making was frequently affected by the timeline set in a meeting where adequate time was not allotted for discussion and

consensus building. Fredricks felt that allowances should be made to ensure that teachers have an opportunity to express their thoughts or if that was not possible, administration needs to follow up with those specific teachers.

Five participants indicated that shared leadership existed to a degree at their respective schools. While there was shared leadership through departments and various committees, a concern was expressed regarding “token shared leadership” with the term ‘token’ indicating that administration asked people to be involved in activities in a leadership role, but then did not use the data or results from those activities to inform further practice or decisions. An example of this was when teachers had taken responsibility for PLC activities but when administration made a call for all groups to start again, it resulted in a lack of staff buy in as they felt there would be a lack of follow through. However, in general, Peter Smith felt that teachers were consulted prior to making decisions, and although teachers were not a part of making the actual decision making, their input is considered to some degree:

I think the staff have a lot more input into the decisions, even though we [are not] in the admin meetings. I think that we do have a lot of input, or are considered . . . We might not have a lot of input as far as the final say, but I think we do have a lot of behind the scenes type thing and we are listened to, I think and that comes into play, even though we’re not in the meetings.

Four participants stated that they have shared leadership and decision making at their schools. Rachel Benson was emphatic that leadership and decision making were shared at her school. She explained that administration initiates and models the format of shared leadership and the decision making through staff discussions and establishing the will of group. This process was then established as a norm in the school. She elaborated on the leadership format further by explaining that those teachers who had expertise in specific areas were encouraged to take on the leadership role for the school in those areas.

Benson highlighted the significance of shared decision-making as she described what may result if the practice was not present: “. . . if you take that [shared decision making] out, that diminishes the trust. And if you dilute the trust it’s like a domino effect. Then you diminish the trust, then you diminish the willingness to be open about the learning and then you diminish the willingness to share.” Patrick Trane presented a slight variation on the previous example where the school employed a “quasi-consensus” decision making model; decisions were generally made using one of two processes:

1. There is a presentation of options, followed by discussions, and finally a group decision.
2. Input is gathered from all staff and then the principal decides.

Trane also gave an example of the involvement of all staff in creating the School Improvement Plan where “we were divided into teams and teams kind of worked on various aspects of our school goals and our achievement results . . .” A discussion amongst all staff followed that activity where each goal was discussed openly. Bonita Roberts felt that it was a conscious decision on part of administration to have everyone involved in decision making and that administration encouraged shared leadership by providing information to staff as to where they can be involved and then allow staff to take the initiative to become a part of the various aspects of the school leadership. This is similar to the structures discussed by Shelley Black where shared leadership was established by having grade families, department heads and PLC team leaders. Additionally, these structures allow for further shared decision making where teachers were given opportunity to discuss and share their ideas and/or opinions within the group or via email. Black commented on the importance of shared leadership where administration focused on providing the “support of the teams to be working together. It

has got to stop being a top down. I think it really has to be much more collaborative. Much more planning with the end goal of students' learning.”

Despite participants' general indication that the characteristic of shared leadership and decision-making was important to developing and sustaining a PLC, seven of sixteen participants identified a distinct lack of shared leadership and shared decision-making at their respective schools. Five indicated that these characteristics existed to some degree, but had yet to become perceived as being legitimate and integrated within the school culture. Only four participants perceived the characteristics of shared leadership and shared decision-making to be wholly incorporated into the school culture.

#### *Shared Values and Vision*

All participants reported that their schools have a vision or mission statement. Additionally, each one alluded to a process where at some point in the past four to five years, all staff assembled to discuss the vision of each school. Whether a formal committee assisted in the creation of a vision, or the entire staff met on a regular basis, the creation of vision statements was a whole school venture. Some schools completed professional readings followed by group discussions and all staff dialogue, concluded by a committee decision. However, this is not to say that all research participants were a part of the school's vision making process as for some, the process took place prior to their employment at that school.

#### *Staff Attitudes*

Benson immediately knew the vision statement of her school and went on to describe the varied responses of staff as they worked towards creating a vision:

. . . it was very much an evolution. But for some people...they went that's it! That's exactly what a school's supposed to be, that's the kind of teacher I want to be, I got it...and other people went 'ah, I don't know about this.' But it was very

much a gradual evolution where as we talked and as people started doing things and people began to see how those things impacted learning for kids, people started to come around.

Gregson described her school vision as a “pretty little statement” not consciously connected to the running of the school. Trane commented that he felt the school vision to be conflicting in nature. On one hand the vision focused on all students achieving excellence and yet there were many discussions about the limitations of students: “I think there’s a little bit of a philosophical mix there. We don’t . . . you know, I don’t know if we’ve ‘bought in’ – certainly not staff-wise, that all students could achieve excellence.” This feeling of ambiguity on the part of some participants was further reflected in Treena Jamison’s comment in response to her school’s core values: “We’re in limbo.” Sam Taylor described the vision as being “topsy turvy.” He attributed this to the fact that administration had asked teachers to begin the vision process again despite having a shared vision statement already in place. Focus groups had been created, ideas presented to the whole group, and then administration was to decide on a final statement. However, the actual vision had not been communicated back to teachers at the time of the interview.

#### *Communication of Vision*

Two of the participants noted that the vision was a part of everyday activities and decisions. Benson explained that the vision was so embedded in the culture of the school that “...if a new administrator came in here tomorrow and said we’re not doing this anymore, he’d have a rebellion.” Roberts pointed specifically to the fact the principal and/or vice principal always referred to the school vision at staff meetings and that all PLC activities reflected the mission and vision of the school. She also talked about the practice of administration in pointing out practices and activities identified as being parallel to the vision: “the principal a lot of times if he sees something happening, he will

tell you,... ‘you are teaching that, that’s part of our vision, that’s part of our mission,’ so you know it’s pointed out to remind you...”

For many, the school’s vision, while present and possibly reflected in some school activities or structures, was not communicated by administration as part of the every day activities of the school. Twelve of the participants indicated that the vision was not central to the operation of the school. Gregson commented that “other than being in print on, you know, like your letterhead and that sort of thing, is it really something that is like a common communication or expressed all the time to the students? No...it’s not something that’s common dialogue.” All teachers from Pineridge indicated that the school’s vision was posted in the school and provided to teachers in their information folders at the beginning of the year, but there were no leadership practices which demonstrate consistent communication of the vision. Schultz commented that the vision was made, and then left:

I think what has happened is that things have become very departmentalized, very not in my backyard focused. In terms of our vision, we have a vision; we have a vision statement, but we’ve had very little discussion about pyramids of intervention so that we can address our vision, school make-up, shared responsibility for student achievement.

Trane also acknowledged the lack of direct communication where he stated that the vision was in the handbook and in the agenda but “I can’t point to any examples when we really talk about—when we refer to it in our decision making process.” Black, when discussing leadership practices which communicate the vision, shared that there was a lack of specific references connecting the day to day activities as taking steps towards achieving the vision: “It’s not distinctly, see this is our vision, it’s not, they’re not going back to it and saying are we doing the things that we need to do to accomplish this—to see this vision through.”

Lapierre used an analogy comparing the school's PLC as a "rudderless boat." She continued on to explain: "We're moving in the water, but we don't know where we're going... We're very much treading water with no thing blinking in the distance saying here this is where you need to go with it." Lapierre made direct reference to the need for administration to communicate the vision of the school and indicated that "with the vision and supportive conditions, everything else falls into place. Then you can come up with those goals and you can come up with the steps you're going to take to continue to be collaborative and professional...." Smith acknowledged the need for leaders to provide a focus through emphasizing the shared vision: "...keeping us focused to what's happening during the year, but [yet] having a general focus, or the...long range plan or where we're headed." Thomson recognized a lack of focus and understanding of what a PLC should even look like in her school and felt that "it's almost that our vision statement should be stated before we start every meeting...I mean it really needs to be the focus of what we are thinking..." Furthermore, Thomson provided specific examples of this communication of shared vision being brought to the every day activities of teachers. She felt administration needed to say:

...this is our focus; we are focusing on student learning. How can we best do this? So today we are looking at assessment and let us keep that focus in mind. Who is making it? Who is not making it?... What are you guys focusing on? Are you looking at your reading program goals? Let's make sure we are pulling those scores; let's get this meeting going.

Roberts supported the requirement for the shared vision to be a constant focus for teachers:

I think it's important that our school has a common goal and I think our statement that we have achieves that. We are all working towards it and... admin takes the leadership to keep making sure that we are hitting that goal—that it's a realistic goal.... It becomes more realistic for everyone when there is evidence that we are using that goal.

*Reflection of Vision in School Activities and Operation*

Although a large number of participants indicated that there were a lack of leadership practices which communicate the vision to teachers, all were able to identify activities, structures, or attitudes which reflect characteristics of the school vision. Schultz noted that because of the composition of the school population and the nature of special programming within the school, the vision was reflected to teachers. Additionally, when the teachers of Pineridge met to establish their whole school instructional goal, they referred to the vision with the goal of bringing a diverse staff to focus on one thing. Susan Lapierre identified risk-taking in instructional practice as reflecting the vision. She also noted the importance on focusing on actions that reflect the vision of a school:

...as far as the steps towards our vision, I know one of them is taking risks to improve student learning. And I think that's something that traditionally administration is very afraid to do. And this year I said basically part of taking this is falling on your face and that's something I'm willing to do, so I'm going to take a risk and we're going to do this and whether you like it or not this is how it's going to be and they liked it. So, it's happening. But I think sometimes they lose the focus of walking the talk instead of just talking the talk.

Additionally, Carrie Fredricks connected a whole school project focusing on respecting diversity and building relationships as reflecting the school's vision. This is a project which was brought forth by a teacher, but has received the support of the administration in that they provided funding for materials and provided time to meet with the students.

Participants from Brockton Community School identified various structures in place at the school as reflecting their vision. They referred specifically to the creation of cross-graded homerooms as one such structure. Two participants identified this as a tangible example of how their school vision is reflected in daily activities. Gregson explained her view of the structure: "I do like that now we're doing cross-graded

homerooms...where kids are working to create a better environment, inspiring them to achieve, and you know, that teamwork, idea. I think that that's inspiration."

Additionally, David Pence spoke of the style of communication amongst staff as well as the general working environment as reflecting the school vision:

A big part of that mission and vision in this building is an enthusiasm for learning and an enjoyment of the environment and that can be conveyed through simple things like the ending of emails when administration signs off on an email . . . there is a 'cheers' or there's 'have a great day.'" A little smiley face stuck in the middle of an email; again it is supporting that environment. We come here and we have a good time. We are working hard to educate students and we want to make this a positive environment. Even conversations are very upbeat and very few ideas that I've ever presented have been turned down.

Participants from E. B. Anderson, Centennial, Black Rock, Heritage Central and Miller schools also referred to celebrations and assemblies as a reflection of their school's vision. Further structures which support the school vision centered around programming changes, scheduling, student discipline and team teaching. Benson shared the purpose of E. B. Anderson's Monday assemblies where teachers presented students with awards for academic learning, cooperation, and for helping others. "We are constantly trying to communicate to students that we value working together, that we value being a team, that we value being a learning community."

Black explained that teachers have been asked by administration to provide feedback on the schedule and teaching assignments. She saw this as reflecting the vision because administration was working to ensure teachers were in the positions best fitted to their strengths. Additionally, Black cited the leadership practice of employing consistent student discipline and expectations as a reflection of the vision. She felt that due to staff discussions both formally and informally, "students know [the expectations] because there

seems to be a fair amount of consistency amongst staff and how they apply the rules and the consequences they have for them.”

Treena Jamison and Sam Taylor identified inspirational quotes posted around the school as meant to reflect their vision. However, both commented that because the school’s vision is currently unclear, and the fact that the quotations were placed by administration with no teacher involvement, teachers have little or no ownership of the quotations and their purpose. Jamison specified that the quotes are:

another classic top down. Instead of emailing the staff and saying ‘do any of you guys have wonderful quotes that would inspire the kids?’ The admin just did it on their own...but we don’t feel any ownership with that. We don’t feel a part of that. We don’t even know what our core values are for sure.

Conversely, both participants identified that administration does model the vision in their every day engagements with students. Jamison described an assembly where an administrator reinforced one of the aspects of the vision during a video:

We actually stopped the video five minutes in because all the kids were talking. And the administrator stood up and said, ‘You guys need to learn how to respect each other and become a good audience. Turn your cell phones off, turn the beeper off,’ I think that definitely reflects the core value that we need to respect each other and be responsible.

Jamison also recognized the difficulty from a leadership perspective with implementing and following through on a shared vision. She commented on teacher behaviour and positioning during assemblies:

I get frustrated because here I am dealing with this management and dealing with bratty kids, while other people are sitting by the door relaxing. Like yesterday, kids were talking so I finally went over. I was sitting at the door the same as everybody else, and then I eventually went and sat with a group of kids who kept talking, but then you feel kind of like an idiot because there are twenty of your co-workers sitting behind you that didn’t do anything. And so, sometimes you almost want it [vision and expectations] top down and have the admin say, ‘no this is where you belong. This is what you are supposed to be doing. You are not showing respect by not doing what you are told.’ But, on the other hand, you don’t want them [administration] to be heavy-handed. So where is the balance?

All participants understood that a shared vision is important, and in fact, many felt that leaders need to refer to it as a regular part of school activities and planning to keep it front and center. Despite the general lack of communication of the vision, all participants identified meaningful activities which upon reflection did mirror the vision of their individual schools.

Mission and vision statements exist for all schools represented in the study. However, only two participants identified their mission and vision statements as being communicated in such a way as to suggest it be an integral facet of daily activities and decisions. Fourteen participants made specific reference to the need for administration to ensure the mission and vision statements were a regular component of each school day. Conversely, upon consideration all participants referred to activities, structures, or attitudes present in each school to reflect the vision or mission statement.

### *Collective Learning*

Participants identified a wide number of leadership practices which assist in building collective learning. Some of the practices related to structures or systems in place within the school, while others focused specifically on leadership activities. Central to the structures encouraging collective learning, were the eight half days and four full days scheduled into the school year. This meeting time was embedded into the school year to allow PLC teams within schools time to meet. The high school had an alternate schedule where students are dismissed at 12:35 pm every Friday; each afternoon is then dedicated to PLC team meetings. Additionally, the district provided three full days in the school year where scheduled PLC district teams are to meet. The high school participated in two of the three district PLC days. This structure is central to many of the references to

the development of collective learning, as participants identified this as one of the practices most important in allowing the reflection and learning to take place.

Participants from Brockton Community School spoke of the learning that takes place within their PLC teams. Goal setting, staff meetings, and Professional Growth Plans were identified as practices that encouraged collective learning. Two participants identified the whole school instructional goal as assisting teachers in establishing their focus for learning. Coinciding with the whole school instructional goal, administration has enlisted the expertise of presenters who were able to provide further training and resources relating to the school goal. Furthermore administration had redesigned the monthly staff meeting where it no longer consisted of purely informational content, but was now a time when professional readings were provided to the staff followed by a group discussion regarding the concepts and their application within the school. Staff members have also been invited to submit topics or material to be covered in this manner during the staff meeting. The Professional Growth Plan was identified as another tool that determined what teachers wanted to learn. Germaine spoke of the need for more effective use of Professional Growth Plans between administration and teachers. She felt there “should be more scheduled meetings throughout the year” which would result in teachers being held accountable to meet the goals they set.

At Pineridge School, participants described their whole school goal as guiding aspects of collective learning on staff. An effective leadership practice in establishing the whole school goal centered around small group discussions which were then brought to the entire group. In this way, all teachers were able to have input into the goal and consequently, increase the collective learning which could take place. Specific inservices

were being provided to teachers directly involved with the goal. These teachers were then responsible to develop methods to share those same practices with a small group.

However, two participants perceived a lack of understanding of PLCs as impacting the way PLC time was in fact used. Lapierre identified that the district was now providing new teachers with two days of PLC inservicing. She felt this to be useful in providing further support to teachers in developing PLCs. Lapierre spoke positively about the establishment of the whole school goal and the way in which the goal guided the learning of teachers. Yet Fredricks expressed concern about the lack of time allotted for the discussion of practice and how the collective learning of teachers was impacting students. She further explained that some of the designated PLC time and School Improvement Plan days have been spent working on marking assessments:

It's frustrating to do the assessment on student work on a PLC day knowing that it's an opportunity to share. It's an opportunity to start learning from experience, to share those personal experiences of what's working with students, what's not. There's not that sharing.

At E. B. Anderson, teachers were described as consistently bringing new research based ideas to administration. Benson identified the administration as encouraging collective learning because they were open minded and involved in developing Professional Growth Plans with teachers. As well, Benson commented on the importance of weekly team meetings in the collective learning of teachers. These meetings were one hour in length and were embedded into the daily school schedule. The focus was on the discussion of student learning, teaching practices, and sharing. Benson also recognized that in order for PLCs to be built and sustained, administration was required to be "willing to be learners themselves and to be very open about the fact that they are also learning."

Trane described the use of scheduled common prep times as one way in which leadership supported collective learning. However, he also commented that he was unaware of how often the time was used in this manner. Trane identified the individual nature of learning at the school. He, like others, spoke about the Professional Growth Plan as a document which assisted in determining teacher learning, yet went further to speak of the individual nature of the Professional Growth Plans and the fact they revolved around a personal conversation with administration. Additionally, he commented that:

I don't think the school has had opportunity with the PD [Professional Development] day, to really focus on school-based professional development. So, in that sense, then I think that teachers with visions on how they're going to grow are individual decisions more...I think a lot of it is kind of individual assessments of needs and interest.

An additional leadership practice identified as encouraging collective learning was the provision of time for teachers to learn and discuss teaching practices or classroom programming. Bonita Roberts mentioned that when she and her fellow colleagues were looking at using literacy backpacks, an early literacy program meant to build family literacy and lifelong learning, the group was provided with sub time to meet and learn about the implementation of the literacy backpacks within the program.

Black, at Heritage School, spoke of the difficulty of differentiating between leadership practices that supported collective learning or were perceived as merely a "to-do list." She described her perceptions of the use of PLC time at her school:

If there is any specified learning taking place, it's top down. It's the department head saying this needs to be done. Frankly, what I've seen during PLC and SIP time other than those collaborative discussion sessions more often than not, it's a list of tasks that need to be completed. You know, such as identifying the essential outcomes and all that kind of jazz. There isn't a whole lot of what I would consider learning anyway. It's more what needs to get done.

Conversely, Black identified committees which engaged in collective learning both formal and informal in nature. An example she spoke of was the anti-bullying program being implemented in the school. Additionally, a professional development binder was available to staff where teachers place extra handouts or information gathered at conferences or inservices. Teachers were then asked to provide either a summary via email or during a staff meeting regarding any PD they have attended.

Leadership practices that support collective learning at Miller School were primarily identified as relating to professional development opportunities. Both Jamison and Taylor commented on the support received from the administration in providing professional development opportunities for staff. Jamison described how all teachers from her department were allowed to attend sessions relating to testing; whereas other schools in the province only allow one or two people attend: “They [administration] make sure that the department can work together to learn skills of how to improve.” She also expressed her appreciation regarding the effort administration made to inform teachers of potential professional development opportunities: “It is the actual support—they are willing and they will actually email and say ‘Hey, we heard about this through the pipeline.’”

Additionally, Jamison also discussed the need for planning and follow-up for collective learning to take place. She described her PLC team as a team that starts, but does not finish things and expressed frustration with the lack of planning and focus on the part of the team leader. “For two years now, we even ask, we write down a timeline of when things should be accomplished, but that doesn’t get done. We don’t have a real set goal in our department, and we have brand new curriculum next year. We have brand new curriculum!”

To summarize, six participants identified the establishment of whole school instructional goals to be a large component of leadership practices developing and sustaining collective learning. Two to four participants referred to each of the following: professional growth plans, small and whole group discussion, structural support (time, resources), and encouragement as supporting the development of teachers' collective learning.

### *Risk-Taking*

In relation to collective learning, participants were also asked to identify leadership practices that encouraged risk-taking and innovation in their teaching practice. Participants shared that while they may not have many specific examples of leadership practices which encouraged risk-taking and innovation, their administration kept an open mind to new ideas presented to them and generally allowed teachers to take risks. This support was demonstrated through verbal encouragement, time, or the designation of money to assist in the funding of new projects or programs.

At Brockton Community School, Gregson commented on the support she received for differentiated professional development to further develop her school specific program. She felt this allowed her to be exposed to more innovative teaching practices within the discipline. Additionally, teachers spoke of the practice of celebrating the activities of PLC teams at staff meetings, bringing attention to innovative practices being implemented within the teams. David Pence made reference to an experience where his idea had failed, but yet he still felt supported by leadership in terms of attempting new practices. He felt that "in terms of offering suggestions for improvement rather than hypercriticism, shutting things down, I think that we are very strong in this building." Bently noted that although she was unable to identify any practices which she saw as

encouraging risk-taking or innovative practices, she could not identify any practices discouraging it. She felt that she took risks in her teaching practice regardless of what leadership provided to support it.

Teachers at Pineridge School expressed frustration with leadership practices relating to risk-taking and innovation. Lapierre commented that she was unsure whether the administration at her school would be aware of teachers taking risks in their classrooms. She remarked:

I think we're encouraged to be self motivated through our professional goals . . . I don't know if our administration would even know we were taking risks and being innovative in our teaching, because we rarely see them in our classes; we don't share units with them unless we're the ones telling them about something cool that's happening in our classes. We're never asked about it. We're never encouraged to say "Hey! This is what's going on in our class. Come on and check it out."

Lapierre spoke further of her perception of a fear of taking risks and being innovative: "I don't know if it's because it's always been done this way and we do it until enough other people aren't doing it any more and then it's okay not to do it too." Similarly, Schultz remarked, "There is just very little flexibility or support in terms of trying new things that will enhance or support teacher practice." Schultz also spoke of the importance of leadership being able to visualize the possibilities of innovations brought forward by teachers. She felt that without this vision, teachers get to the point where they no longer want to bring new ideas forward.

Conversely, participants from Pineridge School did identify teacher leaders within the school who employed practices that support risk taking. These teacher leaders demonstrated their excitement for the activities occurring in one another's classrooms. Janelle Thomson indicated "that through speaking to those people there would be a lot of support and a lot of them making you feel positive and excited."

Trane elaborated on what he perceived to be a desire for safety on the part of his school administration at Centennial School: “I sense a certain desire to not make mistakes. To, to be safe.” Whereas he felt that sometimes in order to take risks leadership needs to recognize that some curricular objectives may not be addressed at that point, but could always be covered later.

Roberts expressed her appreciation of her administration; she specified that they showed excitement for new ideas and even sacrifice their own time to provide support for teachers so they might take risks. She provided an example where her administration had helped to further research an innovative practice with her and then provided funding for implementation.

At Miller School, both participants commented on established structures which they saw as encouraging risk taking. Money was provided to support the design of new courses for students. Additionally, administration assisted in the implementation of team teaching for specific courses. Administrators made themselves available to support these undertakings.

#### *Celebration of Risk-taking and Innovation*

In addition to the practices which encouraged risk-taking and innovative practices, were the practices which shared and celebrated these experiences. All participants revealed that they considered the celebration and sharing of risk-taking and innovative practices on the part of teachers to be an important leadership practice. In fact, with the exception of one participant, all felt that more celebration needed to take place in their respective schools.

Examples of leadership practices which celebrated risk-taking and innovation centered on verbal or written mention of individual teachers or whole PLC teams at staff

meetings. School newsletters were an additional method of celebration mentioned, as was the local newspaper. Sam Taylor mentioned that his administration sent formal letters of thanks and congratulations regarding jobs done well. He felt this was a “nice gesture” which was “personal and well-meaning.” Additionally, Thomson shared that teachers looked out for one another and made sure they celebrated risk-taking and innovation within their own PLC groups or departments.

Eight participants noted a lack of celebration at their schools. Gregson spoke of the significance of administration showing “the accomplishments of each group even if they’re small.” She expressed concern regarding the lack of acknowledgement of accomplishments as she imparted that “when your group never feels like it is getting any acknowledgement for what it does, I think it really puts people down. Due to this lack of celebration and acknowledgement of collective learning, Gregson observed that when teachers sat down to work on aspects of PLC, “it was more of a dampening effect . . . that we would have to work on PLC . . . It wasn’t like – excellent!”

Fionna Germaine noted that in order to be able to celebrate activities, leadership must be aware of what is happening in classrooms and within PLC groups. This was similar to comments made by Lapierre and Fredricks where they felt that true recognition of teacher practice to be lacking and that administration was not aware of what teacher’s were doing.

In general, participants referred to verbal encouragement, time and money as leadership practices which encouraged risk-taking. However, ten participants could not identify demonstrated leadership practices that encouraged risk-taking. All participants perceived the celebration of risk-taking as important. Similarly, fifteen participants

indicated the need for increased leadership practices which celebrate risk-taking and innovative practices.

### *Supportive Conditions*

Participant feedback regarding leadership practices that develop supportive conditions focused on building structures and professional relationships. When speaking of structures, participants centered their comments on the provision of time, finances, learning resources, communication structures and space to meet.

### *Structures*

Six main themes emerged from participant responses in regards to structures. First and foremost was the issue of embedded meeting times. Central office has embedded time into the school year schedule for school and district PLC teams to gather together as previously described in the section on Collective Learning. While all participants clearly indicated that this time was important to their PLC, some concerns were voiced. Peter Smith acknowledged the issue of the time of week and day that was scheduled:

PLC Friday comes and it's a tough part of the week for PLC to happen some weeks—some weeks are very, you know, demanding and so forth and at the end of the week it's like 'Wow! We just made it through the week and now we're supposed to stick around and share our learning' . . . It's kind of tough some times. But, we certainly plug away through it. There is quite a bit of time there in place, but the timing during the week is a little—the energy levels are a little lower at that time of the week.

Additionally, Fredricks spoke of the need for further structures to ensure that the PLC time was wisely used. She expressed frustration regarding the lack of follow-up surrounding the PLC meeting time. Teachers were given an agenda to cover and use the PLC time to create responses to tasks, yet Fredricks felt that teachers were not taking further action on tasks like the development of their SMART goals. She partly attributed this to a lack of follow up on the part of administration and that teacher outcomes were

being lost in the “shuffle of time.” Moreover, Fredricks explained that when the next PLC Friday comes, teams have a completely new task at hand: “I think when you take a look at stress levels around the school, I think everyone’s feeling that . . . these are great ideas: ‘Let’s do this. Let’s do that.’ but we haven’t had a chance to truly understand what the task is at hand.” She continued to speak of the issue of time and follow through:

We take a look at doing our first step and assume that it’s going to be continued through the collaborative time that none of us seem to have, or on our prep time which usually accounted for by other school tasks. It’s extremely frustrating. It’s frustrating because you can see where it goes, but it never quite gets there. And then the next year you start all over again, because it’s been routine.

The embedded time is obviously useful and is seen as an important structure to supporting the development and sustaining of PLCs, however, participants noted some difficulty surrounding the timing and use of meeting times. While all participants indicated their support for the embedded time set by central office, several shared the need within their schedule for a weekly time to meet. Germaine felt this would allow for “more reflection on professional work” for teachers. Benson was the only participant to speak of further embedded time beyond district PLC time and common prep times. She described the teachers at E.B. Anderson School as all having one hour a week to meet within their teams. Benson commented that being committed to scheduling the embedded time and being able to think outside of the box was a key leadership practice in creating supportive conditions.

Participants also expressed their opinions that monthly staff meetings could be a constructive use of time in supporting PLCs. Seven participants commented on the importance of moving past a traditional informational staff meeting and allowing teachers to share their teaching experiences. Schultz spoke of the staff meeting that took place with elementary teachers and the time set aside for teachers to share and ask questions:

“...we just naturally as a group share things: ‘Oh, I’m stuck on this, I don’t know how to mark this, can you look at it? Oh I really need a good assessment for this journal activity. Do you have one?’” Smith described the effect of a sharing time at the end of a meeting: “...even though it took time, it gave us a full...sense...of accomplishment as a school...”.

Participants expanded their discussions about time to meet to areas of common prep time, sub time allotted, administration coverage, and further embedded time. Participants from all schools spoke of availability of common prep times to teachers. Yet, it was clear that either not all teachers had access to this common prep time on a regular basis, or others were not making use of the common prep time to meet. Two schools were described as having common prep times for some, but not for all grades or departments. This was identified as being a divisive issue on staff where some felt they were not receiving fair treatment in regards to the development of their PLC groups.

Roberts described the use of common prep time from her experience as being well used. Additionally, she spoke of the practice of administration involvement during those common prep times: “We can use that half hour block to get together and collaborate on things. I know that administration also know that, so they like to drop in on stuff when we do that, and they are always trying to see what’s going on and how they can help.”

Most participants recognized that if they requested sub time for the purpose of further collaboration or expansion of their professional learning, it was granted. Ritter referred specifically to an instance where she wanted another teacher to observe a specific student. Administration made this time available to teachers and Ritter viewed this as being a supportive and accommodating leadership practice. While no other teachers spoke of having requested sub time for the purpose of observing another teacher, a few indicated

that if they requested it, they felt that request will be supported through either sub time or administration coverage.

The theme of communication structures was also identified as playing a role in developing supportive conditions. Team feedback sheets, email communication, mail boxes, and bulletin boards were all used as examples of communication structures. Team feedback sheets were described as a sheet each PLC team was required to complete following a team meeting. PLC teams are to record group goals, and the actions taken to achieve the goals. Space was also allotted for questions or comments to be made. These forms were used to some degree in all participants' schools. Not all participants mentioned these sheets as a form of communication. Those who did mention the use of team feedback sheets shared that they were important in ensuring administration was aware of any questions or issues teams may be having. In some cases, administration responded in writing to questions on the feedback sheet, or questions or requests were answered in person or via email. Germaine referred specifically to the feedback sheets as a communication method providing teachers with a sense of support; administration used the sheets to provide further ideas to the team as well as to comment on the progress of the team. Gregson further explored the practice of building accountability as she explained her view of how the structure of team feedback sheets should be used. She felt that administration must be diligent in ensuring the quality of team activities: "...if you say we're going to work on assessment, ...make sure that each group...hands not just hogwash in to you. That you hand [in] something that is moving forward." Gregson described the differences between two PLC teams where one team was extremely successful and the other team was struggling. She felt that administration needed to be

involved with those groups to further understand the differences and then ensure that the group that was struggling was in fact meeting the expectations established by all teachers.

The use of email was recognized as a central form of communication at most schools. Participants noted that administration frequently uses email to notify teachers of professional readings available to them, applicable upcoming PD opportunities, and to celebrate teacher and student successes. Jamison also noted that in her school, email is frequently used as a tool for collaboration where teachers email their ideas back and forth as opposed to formally meeting. She felt this to be effective and efficient especially when considering the large number of staff at Miller School.

Three participants commented on the use of their school mail boxes for communication. A teacher leader at Pineridge was identified as creating “Warm Fuzzies:” a postcard that teachers could use to recognize the work of colleagues or express appreciation for things being done in the school. Furthermore, Benson noted that administration used the mailboxes as a place to leave encouraging notes or small treats for teachers indicating their appreciation for the hard work going on in the school.

Two participants identified bulletin boards as a communication structure within their respective schools. Benson described the designation of a bulletin board in the staffroom as a place for teachers to regularly post activities or instructional practices. This was one more avenue set up by administration for the purpose of providing a venue for teachers to share and celebrate their learning or student activities. Schultz shared that a teacher leader had created the ‘Teachers’ Pride Wall’ where teachers “select a piece of [student] work, piece of writing, piece of art, what have you and submit it to her to be placed on the board. We tell why we thought it was so special.”

The presence of professional development opportunities was also perceived to be a central aspect in developing supporting conditions. Six participants identified the provision of professional development workshops and conferences as an important structure. Schultz referred to the importance of institutional support for PLC. She specified that leaders must take into account that

teacher improvement will still have to take place sometimes outside the classroom. That you may have a small group of experts who engage in outside PD [professional development] and then are expected to bring back that PD to the larger group that that is supported monetarily and with time. Time and opportunities for collaboration amongst staff and not just the sharing of student work or evaluation of student work, but also in terms of shared evaluation amongst staff, between leadership and staff, regarding their practice.

A few participants from both Brockton Community School and Pineridge School commented on the influence of their whole school goal over the type of professional development available to all teachers. However, in the case of Pineridge School, only a limited number of teachers were allowed to attend the professional development. Fredricks noted the need for a plan as to how the group attending the workshops will share the information and practices with the rest of the teachers. Similarly, participants commented on the importance of structures which promoted the sharing of professional learning amongst teachers. Black provided examples of structures set up by her administration to encourage the sharing of information and practices learned during professional development opportunities. Teachers who have attended professional development are expected to provide a summary of their learning to all teachers via email or during a presentation at a staff meeting. A professional development binder was also created for the purpose of providing teachers a place to assemble handouts and resources from these opportunities.

All participants spoke of the provision of a variety of resources in the form of books, teaching materials, professional readings, and technical support as an essential structure in the development of supportive conditions. Roberts recalled her experience in regards to her PLC team asking for assistance: “We’ve talked about something and we ask admin for advice on it and they will come to you with a book. The principal came to me with a book yesterday. He said ‘Here read this, this is what your problem is about.’”

Benson described her school’s administration team as providing teachers with a wide variety of books:

One even dealt with dealing with change and how that affects you personally and how to cope with change. Which didn’t have anything to do specifically with respect to learning communities, but in certain ways helped to put that into place to get that whole idea of change in perspective.

Richards spoke of professional articles and books provided to staff and individual teams for the purpose of expanding their knowledge and instructional practice in the area of assessment. She felt that these resources assist the discussions teachers have regarding their instruction, but also commented that while teachers do the readings at hand, they may not go further in their own time simply because they feel “pretty overwhelmed with everything that’s being asked of them.” Additionally, the provision of professional readings and expected group discussion was also seen as serving to promote shared practice. Bently felt this practice might “get people to change their focus. And it’s giving them an opportunity to do professional reading which is very difficult in day to day [activities].”

Despite the recognition of most participants regarding the provision of books and readings on the part of administration, Taylor shared his frustration with the lack of content in the professional libraries of schools. He felt there needed to be an expansion of

professional literature in his school as well as further promotion of book clubs and discussion groups which would review the current literature.

Two participants spoke of instructional resources purchased for specific aspects of programming in their schools. This was supported by administration and seen as a constructive use of money. Thomson described a reading program which required that teachers in her department worked with a variety of students and then meet as a group to review their progress: “We would get together and talk about the students in our groups, how it was going, was everyone achieving, were there any students where their program wasn’t fitting. And we looked at their scores . . .” She felt the implementation of the reading program assisted the PLC team to increase the sharing between teachers.

Further to instructional resources is the provision of instructional support in the area of technology. Jamison shared that two of the computer teachers have been provided with extra time to assist other teachers in the integration of technology in their instructional practice.

All participants identified that they are provided with adequate space to meet within their teams. Roberts commented that her administration frequently gave up their office space to allow teachers a quiet place to meet during the day. Thomson mentioned that space for the implementation of new programming for students was also provided and noted the attention to detail when administration was scheduling space for teachers.

Additionally, Thomson referred specifically to the proximity of teachers to one another as a variable which affected the amount of sharing taking place between teachers. Thomson commented that she was in constant contact with the teachers in her department whose classrooms were close to hers.

Finally, five participants spoke of the structure of teaching assignments as contributing to the supportive conditions for a PLC. Trane described the increased shared practice between he and another teacher because of scheduling:

We're doing sharing of the gym where there's maybe two teachers in the gym at the same time with the kids. And so we're getting to see each other teach, we're getting to lead or support, you know, and then I think that's pretty valuable.

Fredricks noted that she now has another teacher to assist in her room two blocks a day. She found that the structure of this type of team teaching has increased the communication of teaching practices used specifically in the area of Math. This was echoed again by Jamison and Taylor as they spoke of the team teaching structures set up at their school. Both participants commented on the effectiveness of team teaching in promoting collective learning and shared personal practice. They felt that the act of teaching in that type of arrangement allows for increased reflection on teaching practice between the two teachers. Jamison recognized that personalities of the teachers working together can impact the level of collaboration and shared practice; however, she felt that it at least provides the opportunity to work together. Pence also described one instructional arrangement where "there is one teacher delivering and then they will have a second teacher circulate to monitor student progress . . . It's a team teaching environment and they switch who is delivering on different days as well."

In summary, sixteen participants identified the district wide provision of time for PLC teams to meet as central to developing supportive conditions. The availability of common prep times was also noted by all participants though it should be noted that not all teachers in all schools have equal access to common prep times. PLC team feedback sheets, email communication, mail boxes, and bulletin boards were referred to as examples of communication structures.

Six participants noted the provision professional development opportunities as a central leadership practice in developing supportive conditions. Additionally, all sixteen participants referred to one or more resources such as books, teaching materials, professional readings and technical support as central structures. Five participants identified the structure of teaching assignments such as team teaching, or the sharing of classroom space to promote collaboration and supportive conditions.

### *Relationships*

Within the exploration of supportive conditions and more specifically, relationships, are the leadership practices which encourage cooperation and support amongst colleagues, build a climate of trust, and motivate and inspire teachers.

Participants identified a wide variety of leadership practices that encouraged cooperation and support between staff members. All participants commented on the importance of administration modeling the behaviours of cooperation and support. Ritter referred specifically to her perception that “admin is very welcoming and friendly and they always try to make the time to talk about other stuff too, other than school with us.” Pence shared that it also was important that the leadership at his school did not pretend they were perfect; administration shares failed teaching practices or strategies they have attempted. Roberts felt that the leadership at her school models strong communication skills and involvement in classroom activities and practices. Consequently, teachers were made aware of the practices of other teachers and encouraged by administration to work together. Black, at Heritage Central School continued the theme of modelling as a central leadership practice. She described the administration as modelling teacher support in their willingness to cover classes for teachers when necessary.

While Jamison indicated that there were issues on staff, she also spoke of the level of cooperation and support modelled by administration:

We have a fairly fractured staff. There are a lot of different people with a lot of different personalities. I think for leadership practices they encourage cooperation. Every once in a while we may see that the admin disagree with each other, but they will never publicly gather camps against each other as far as I can see, and I think that is a good leadership quality that we are not encouraged to be fractured. In fact, they try to encourage or plan activities where we can do things outside of school together and they encourage us to see if we know each other on a different level.

Furthermore, Taylor indicated his perception that administration attempts to model cooperation and support through their interactions with teachers. He identified the leadership as being supportive and honest.

Participants also described structures that encourage cooperation and support. Bently noted the staff meeting structure at her school; she felt that the implementation of group work and small group discussion during the meetings assisted teachers in working together and expressing their differing views. Yet she did express increasing concern that this level of cooperation and support was not achieved on some PLC teams citing her own experience with diverse personalities being unable to work together. Germaine also acknowledged the existence of issues between staff on PLC teams, however, she felt that administration involvement in these meetings can assist in solving some of the relational issues between teachers.

In the case of Pineridge School, participants commented on structures that encouraged and discouraged cooperation and support. Two participants noted the use of the teacher created “Warm Fuzzies” postcards as a structure that encouraged cooperation and support. Others identified the use of grade level meetings as promoting cooperation and allowing for a formal time for teachers to collaborate on student issues. Schultz

recognized the importance of teachers being encouraged to eat together and spend time together in the staff room. She felt that these behaviours have “not sort of been institutionalized—we are not sort of a group” and that major efforts needed to be taken on the part of administration to change this. She also commented that the school has “many unwritten expectations and responsibilities” and in response to that, a teacher colleague is attempting to put together a new staff handbook explaining some of the lesser known aspects of the school. Additionally, veteran teachers made sure through the use of the district mentorship program, that first and second year teachers felt supported by their colleagues. Thomson commented that “the most important thing you can do as a leader is to let people know that you care about them and that you support them. And that your support of them as individuals is your primary concern.” Fredricks echoed the importance of teachers feeling cared for and for leaders to “see you as a person first”.

At Centennial School, Trane again spoke of the development of structures on the part of administration. He felt that they are strongly encouraged to work as grade level teams. Additionally, these teams are encouraged to work together on a variety of projects one of them being a school wide project. The very nature of the project has teachers talking about things that build cooperation and support not only between staff members, but also students. Trane noted that through the development of these activities “everyone will improve.” Also contributing to the sense of cooperation and support is the organization of the potlucks on the PLC Fridays and informal staff gatherings. Trane acknowledged these social gatherings as another leadership practice that promote cooperation and support.

In the case of E. B. Anderson School, Benson described the celebrations, atmosphere of collegiality, and sense of shared responsibility as contributing to the

cooperation and support amongst staff members. She made direct reference to the fact that administration acknowledges what teachers do every day and celebrate it. Moreover, Benson commented that “we don’t work for them [administration], we work with them.” She felt that the administration was very clear on communicating that they are a part of the team and that the shared responsibility at the school for students was central to increasing the levels of cooperation and support. Benson elaborated that no one teacher or small group holds responsibility for everything, but rather there was a sense that everyone contributed to the success of the school.

Participants spoke of the need for administration to hold teachers and PLC teams accountable. Benson gave the example of her administration’s willingness to hold teachers accountable. She indicated that practice of wanting “to know what it is you [teachers] are doing” was important to the success of PLCs for it “. . . keeps you honest with what you’re doing. And it keeps what you’re doing credible if you have to be accountable for it.” Trane explained his understanding of the role of leadership and the practice of accountability in terms of building and sustaining a PLC:

. . . the key word to me is ‘community.’ So in order for that to happen, leadership, whether it’s department or whether it’s school administration, whatever it is, leadership should know what’s going on. They should know the direction that the teams are taking, they should know the challenges and pitfalls, and they should know the successes . . . It happens a lot in face to face. It happens when an administrator is in one of our meetings to see where we’re at . . . You don’t want to be imposing, but enough to build that community so that the administrator is part of the community of professionals.

Trane then elaborated on the results of leadership involvement: “. . . when you know where the focus is and where they’re [the teams] are going, then if there’s encouragement or a little push needed, you can do it. If enthusiasm is lagging, you can try to figure out why.”

Black explained her view of the type of accountability necessary to building and sustaining a PLC. She felt that administration needed to develop:

Accountability to each other, and knowing that if something that isn't done that needs to be done for our students, for our school, that whoever has 'fallen [down] on the job' . . . are going to have other people asking them why. Not in a confrontational way, but saying this has to be done and there are no exceptions to it. Everyone has a responsibility to each other and that's only going to be built from a team perspective . . .

To summarize, six participants recognized the leadership practice of modelling and acknowledgement of PLC teamwork as building cooperation and support. Seven participants noted the influence of structures such as team meetings, encouragement cards, and staff social functions such as eating lunch together. Three participants spoke of the need for leaders to develop a sense of accountability between teachers and administration as well as between teachers as individuals.

### *Climate of Trust*

In regards to developing a climate of trust, Trane noted the leadership practice of ensuring confidentiality to teachers. He felt that teachers knew what they shared with administration would remain there and that in turn developed a climate of trust.

Participants at Brockton Community School spoke of openness, fairness, and professionalism when speaking of leadership practices that build a climate of trust. Gregson explained her perception of the importance of administrative involvement and honest communication: "When they [administration] are in our classrooms working with our kids, when they are out there with us doing supervision, when they are addressing issues that worry them or cause them concern. Making you feel like...you're on a level playing field, not that 'this is how it is' or 'I'm invincible' which is sometimes there." Additionally, Pence felt that administration gives teachers the freedom and respect they

deserve as professionals, trusting that teachers are able to make decisions that will improve student learning without having someone looking over their shoulders. Ritter associated the amount of feedback provided by administration with the building of a climate of trust. She felt that

. . . if you have regular feedback from admin, then the other things that we talked about, like feeling like you're in a trusting environment and all that kind of stuff, if you have regular feedback that's part of a daily or a weekly or a monthly routine, than you're that much closer to your peers or to your employees and able to, to trust each other . . . in order to make changes and risks.

Two participants identified the importance of establishing positive relationships; they described concern on the part of some teachers that they will be publicly chastised or made to feel “stupid” if they share their thoughts at meetings.

All four participants at Pineridge School spoke of a lack of formal leadership practices that develop a climate of trust between administration and teachers, but rather shared that teachers trusted one another. Lapierre shared that “there [are] days where it feels like we're [administration and teachers] all on the same page and we're very much on track. And then there [are] days where it feels like everything is falling apart and we don't really know what's going on anymore.” Lapierre went further to explain the trust between teachers as something where “we trust in each other's abilities, in our decision making skills, in how we deal with students, and how we react to one another...as professionals.” She felt that teachers trusted one another because they had never been given reasons to do otherwise, while that was not the case with administration. Schultz elaborated on this saying “... it [leadership] is not flexible, it is not open. There is a lot of stuff that goes on—sort of machinations that go on behind closed doors that we are not made aware. Information is kept from us and groups are played against one another.” Fredricks also supported this as she recalled the difficulty of knowing which administrator

dealt with specific issues and felt there to be a “lack of communication, lack of being able to approach someone—it seems almost like there’s hidden agendas.” Conversely, when speaking of teacher leaders, Thomson identified the ability to follow through on decisions and making sure things happened during meetings as a practice that built a climate of trust.

This was echoed at Black Rock School, where Roberts shared that administration was always available to talk and always followed through on conversations:

Even if I have a little thing to go to them about, they are always just there for a few minutes to talk to me, to quickly talk about whatever. They always get back to me again and that really builds my trust.

Roberts also described the teachers as “everyone talking to each other; no one’s really hiding in the dark.”

Three participants made direct reference to the importance of open communication when speaking of building a climate of trust. By open communication participants referred to the sharing of honest observations, sharing of information, and a willingness to listen and value feedback from colleagues. Black described the administration as willing to recognize areas of staff weakness which helps to build a different approach and takes away from the “climate of defensiveness” and negativity teachers and/or administration may exhibit. Jamison elaborated on the need for leaders to practice and encourage open communication. She felt that teachers should not have to worry about voicing their concerns or opinions for fear of being on the receiving end of a glib or condescending comment. Jamison described a situation where she and an administrator were discussing a scheduling conflict and after some time, the administrator came into her classroom and addressed her as a “spoiled brat” in front of students. Jamison commented that this type of practice “can definitely take away an atmosphere of trust in the school.”

In their references to leadership practices which build and sustain PLCs, participants indicated that creating a climate of trust was the number one concern. Schultz was emphatic in her statement that the most important leadership practice when building and sustaining a PLC was establishing trust: “Trust amongst leadership or people in leadership roles, trust between leadership and . . . colleagues, trust amongst colleagues; trust between the school and parents, school and students: trust.” Jamison also identified trust as the most essential leadership practice:

I think number one is trust. The leader has to ensure that teachers feel that they are in fact collaborating . . . it’s not one working and the other is not, it’s not ‘I’m not going to talk because I don’t like what she says about me.’

Thomson reiterated the importance of establishing trust as she linked its existence to the ability of teachers to take risks: “. . . if you want to take those risks, you have to be able to trust that it’s going to be supported.” Fredricks spoke of the need for the existence of trust as imperative to allowing teachers to feel as though they could continue to bring new ideas or solutions forward to the group. Speaking about an experience where she had brought forth new suggestions to administration, Fredricks felt there to be a lack of “respect of [her] ideas.” Moreover, Fredricks highlighted the importance for administration to establish trust by thinking about and discussing new ideas opposed to their immediate dismissal. Fredricks commented that “as soon as that wall is put up it is very difficult to walk down and try and discuss another topic.”

In the area of leadership practices developing a climate of trust, five participants referred to leadership modelling and practice of open communication and feedback. Four participants identified the development of trust as something teachers did amongst one another—excluding administrators. Eight participants emphasized that administrators

must first and foremost focus on the creation of a climate of trust to develop and sustain a PLC.

### *Motivation and Inspiration*

In the area of leadership practices that motivate and inspire teachers, participants emphasized the importance of working together as a team, celebration, and involvement. Richards shared that when administration acknowledge best practices, are present in classrooms, and ask for teachers' opinions, teachers feel ownership and renewed energy. Pence expanded on this by emphasising that teachers are motivated when administration provides the freedom for teachers to take risks. Lapierre shared the need for administration to convey their passion when they believed something was important. She referred specifically to exposing new ideas and communicating them to teachers: "This is an amazing idea and I need you on board and we're going to do this together." Participants shared the need for leaders to be passionate and demonstrate enthusiasm for PLCs and for learning in general. Ritter emphasised, "They [administration] need to be passionate about it in order to get the teachers passionate about it. And if the teachers aren't excited about it, it's going to be hard to make it work."

Trane also explained administrations' recognition of individual strengths as a practice he saw as motivating and inspiring teachers. He provided the example of leaders identifying the strengths of specific teachers and then providing them with opportunities to build on those strengths. Trane felt this communicated to teachers that administration trusted teachers' determination and ability and therefore motivated them to keep pushing themselves. Trane expanded his discussion of practices that motivate and inspire beyond administration and included leaders in all positions within the school saying:

. . . I would just reiterate that it's really important for the leadership to know the people . . . they need to know the passion, the strengths of the members of the community. And when they do, then that can mesh. And when they don't, it's not a community, you have a bunch of individuals.

Benson again acknowledged the leadership practice of reinforcing the shared sense of responsibility for the success of the school. She spoke of the true team approach taken by teachers and administration. Benson also shared that the leadership practice of acknowledging and celebrating teacher and school successes was central to motivating and inspiring teachers. Consequently, this also developed high levels of respect between colleagues and further motivation and inspiration.

Roberts commented that the administration at her school was very hard working and demonstrated their dedication to the school by the amount of time they put in. She felt that this motivated and inspired staff as they knew that their administration was dedicated to the students and school on their behalf as she felt that administration was “. . . not only dedicated to work, but dedicated to children. Seeing the way they interact with kids gives me ideas with how I can . . . interact with kids in my class or kids on the playground.” Similarly, Taylor and Jamison again spoke of the importance of modelling where administration was involved in the grunt work of the school; they picked up garbage and stepped in if a helping hand was needed. This was perceived as inspiring staff to do the same and continue their involvement with students beyond their individual classrooms.

Black spoke primarily of the influence of clearly defined goals as motivating and inspiring teachers. She felt that this inspires staff to keep going on in their work in a specific area. The achievement of that goal can then be celebrated by all teachers.

Both Smith and Taylor shared that leaders must demonstrate their energy and support for PLCs. Lapierre underscored this need for continued excitement on the part of administration. She felt the excitement for PLCs on the part of administration to be lacking and consequently, this trickled down to teachers. When speaking about the initial introduction of PLCs, Lapierre shared that “. . . there was a buzz, you could feel it. But the buzz isn’t buzzing anymore.” Moreover, Lapierre stressed that administration must show their passion for PLC and be able to express that in concrete ways:

. . .it can’t come across as just this time that the district’s given us to do PLC and everyone’s supposed to know what that is—like it’s a secret club that you’re not allowed to talk about what it is that you’re supposed to be doing in it. . . because I think we’ve lost that perhaps as a school . . . really getting why it is we’re doing what we’re doing.

Eight participants emphasized the importance of administrators demonstrating and expressing passion for PLCs and their work as educators when motivating and inspiring teachers. Three identified the need for administration to be involved in school and classroom activities along with the recognition and celebration of teacher best practice. Additionally, five participants referenced the importance of consistent emphasis on the shared sense of responsibility for professional and student learning and success.

#### *Shared Personal Practice*

Shared personal practice involves classroom observation, examining student work together, and sharing teaching practice. Participants shared their perceptions of leadership practices which encourage teachers to share their practice and gain feedback from one another. They focused their comments on modelling and the development of structures which support shared personal practice. Some of the data which emerged overlapped with findings presented within the segment on structures; however, it is informative to review the structures participants perceived as encouraging shared personal practice.

Fifteen participants indicated that modelling was a key leadership practice when encouraging teachers to share and gain feedback from one another. Participants identified a wide variety of examples of modelling on the part of school leadership. Benson commented on the process that had been developed at her school to foster constant sharing between teachers. She elaborated that a central part of the process was in

administration's modeling that [shared personal practice] too. Because they also ... are growing and learning, and they're quite open about that. And never have I sensed an attitude from them that 'we're the experts and we have all of this knowledge to impart so you should listen to us' because they're often looking for knowledge from us too. So, there's a really strong model there for searching out better ways to do things.

Roberts expanded on modelling as she shared how she felt when administration came into her room to observe—a practice seen by Roberts as positive and helpful:

I know they will give me positive feedback or feedback that I can use. So I don't feel they are coming in here and judging me. I feel like they are coming in here and just you know more like an equal thing . . . they are not in here to test me, they are in here to understand what I am talking to them about.

Roberts also recognized that because of scheduling, the administrators at her school were no longer teaching a specific class “so they have more time . . . They are popping in more and more and observing me and my students and just helping us work.” This was “very helpful, and not just asking questions, but also giving me advice and . . . it is very constructive criticism.” Ritter underscored the importance of administration modelling classroom observation for she felt that when they were in and out of classrooms, it helped to create the norm for teachers to be in and out of one another's classrooms as well.

Thomson, in referring to her specific department and the openness that existed between teachers, attributed it to an administrator who had modeled that shared practice:

. . . she shared so much with us and was so willing to you know at the drop of a hat, anything, she stepped in and gave you some strategies and she was always

willing to share and I think that she just kind of engrained that in all of us. Because [now] it is just so natural to say, 'Oh hey, come and take a look at this stuff.'

Taylor spoke of his appreciation for the modelling administration did in sharing their teaching practices. He perceived the administration to be excellent teachers and therefore welcomed the opportunity to hear about their experiences.

All participants indicated that to their knowledge, teachers were not formally observing one another teaching. However, it should be noted that all participants expressed their support of this practice and recognized it to be an effective tool in building a learning community. Some spoke of informal observation sessions, where during a prep a teacher might pop into another teacher's classroom to view a portion of a lesson or the behaviour or performance of a student. Thomson provided an example of this informal observation as she described the interactions of teachers within her department: "we are constantly in and out of each other's classrooms and that is often how we will [say], 'Hey, I noticed you have this. Where did you get that from?' or 'Wow! Your kids seemed really interested in that book. What are you reading?'"

The majority of participants stated that while they wanted to observe other teachers or vice versa, time availability was an issue. Richards, when discussing why teachers did not participate in classroom observation explained that "you are limited for how much time you have, what you need to get done, your level of organization . . .". Trane further elaborated on the issue of time as he felt that classroom observation was not happening "because of the hundred thousand pressures that we have, decisions that we have to make every day and they just keep pushing and there's always something pushing us from behind." In regards to time, Fredricks expressed that she thought administration should take "the approach of saying . . . 'this [classroom observation] is something good to do,

but the problem is how . . . you manage it? How do we schedule this in? How does common prep time . . . work for you [teachers]? Are you available at this time? Can I cover a class for you so that you can go look at this teaching style?” Participants felt that teachers would receive the offer on the part of administration to cover classes with a positive attitude. While some participants indicated that their administration had already communicated their willingness to come in and cover a class, others stated that they did not feel their administration would be willing to do so. Lapierre commented that she did not feel that administration coverage was “something that’s encouraged.”

Bently was of the opinion that administration needed to be more overt in their encouragement of shared practice and classroom observation. She remarked that the leadership should ask questions like “How’s it going? Have you had the chance [to observe another teacher]? Is there anything I can do to help so you two can sit down and go through a common test?” Ritter echoed this sentiment as she felt that shared practice increased when leadership is more strategically involved. She also provided specific examples of an administrator speaking with a teacher:

‘You guys plan to observe each other on these dates, we will cover you classes and then we’ll talk about what happened...’ I guess providing accountability and making sure it [classroom observation] happens, and for some people they aren’t as open to doing it I guess, so that, encourage them to start.

Jamison referred to another reason for the lack of classroom observation: a lack of a climate of trust within her school: “There are teachers in the department that I would be more than happy to come have come in and give me ideas and clues... There are other teachers in my department that there is no way I want them in my classroom and there is no way I want them to critique me just because I don’t feel comfortable with them.”

Taylor echoed this position as he commented that he felt teachers were “territorial” and

needed direct encouragement to build those collegial relationships which could then foster a level of comfort with increasing shared personal practice.

While participants indicated that classroom observation was not a standard element of shared personal practice at their schools, working together to examine student work was present to some degree at all schools. Ritter shared that

informally it [collaborating to examine student work] does happen, but probably not on a regular basis and more so on the high and low end of student work...if it's really low you share it. If it's really high you might share it, but formally and across the board on a regular basis, not regularly, not as much as it could be helpful....

Conversely, for some participants, working together to examine student work was a regularly scheduled if not daily exercise. Fredricks spoke of common assessments used by teachers throughout the year. She described teachers sitting down to “chart different writing traits that [students] have exceeded, [done] very well on, or shown evidence of, and then we have a chance to take a look at weaknesses within our class and our grade levels.” Although she felt positive about this opportunity, Fredricks felt that there remained some fundamental issues that impacted the effectiveness of this practice: “...we do have that opportunity which is exciting and really productive...but...there's inconsistency on what's going on in the classroom which I think makes this a challenge to take a look at analyzing results because you have the inconsistency of [other] assessment or assessment tools.”

Roberts described teachers examining student work together as something

we do on a daily basis. Sometimes it's formally, we will sit down and mark something together; we will sit down and discuss something together. Sometimes informally...I will have some student work and I just run over to the other teacher's classroom and ask them what they think about it.

Benson also provided an example of the collaboration she saw happening: "...last year with my team we...gave a common assessment and compared them. And if one class did poorly and one class did well then we talked about 'well what were the differences in teaching? What did you do that I should do next time that will make this more effective for my students?'" Black spoke of the whole school goal as guiding teachers' examination of student work. Teachers focused on developing common assessments for units and then met to share the data. However, she was unsure if further steps that were taken in relation to the common assessment.

Participants identified a variety of structures put in place by school leadership encouraging teachers to share their practice and solicit feedback from one another. They spoke of the importance of strategically planned meetings as an important structure to developing shared personal practice: grade level or department meetings, PLC team meetings, and staff meetings were identified as examples.

Finally, as previously mentioned in the chapter on Supportive Conditions, the use of the bulletin boards to share teaching practice and student work was also perceived as encouraging teachers to share personal practice and gain feedback. Benson also noted the use of a bulletin board in the staff room on which teachers posted lessons, assessments, or student work. This again was for the purpose of sharing with colleagues.

To summarize, fifteen participants identified the leadership practice of modelling to be essential to developing shared personal practice. In the matter of teacher observation, all sixteen participants identified concerns regarding available time to observe one another teach. Further to this, some expressed the need for administration to more overtly encourage teachers to observe one another's practice. Additionally, participants expressed the need for administration to ensure that a climate of trust does indeed exist at the school

followed by regular scheduling of times for teacher observation. All participants shared that varying levels of analysis of student work did exist within each school. Some attributed this to the establishment of a whole school goal or common assessments. Six participants also commented on the structures of various meetings as a leadership practice which allowed for teachers to share their practices with one another in a more formal sense.

## Chapter 5: Analysis

The analysis of the findings could be developed using several frameworks. In the case of this study, the underpinnings of PLCs as explored in the literature are centered on the five dimensions of PLCs as established by Hord (1997). In the literature review, the identification of formal leadership as exerting foremost influence over the development and growth of school culture and PLCs was explored. The foundation for the analysis is built on the understanding that leadership practices which develop and sustain Hord's (1997) five dimensions are integral to the overall development of a school culture which is anchored on the PLC model. Hipp and Huffman (2003) expanded upon Hord's (1997) initial comprehensive literature review and recommendations for PLCs in their follow up study. Their expansion of the five dimensions is also utilized in the analysis for the purpose of providing further detail and structure. Embedded within the analysis is discussion regarding the leadership practices which shape school culture consequently creating optimal conditions for the development and sustaining of PLCs.

### *Shared and Supportive Leadership*

Within Hipp and Huffman's (2003) study of the design and development of PLCs, they identified three characteristics of shared and supportive leadership:

1. Nurturing leadership among staff
2. Shared power, authority and responsibility
3. Broad-based decision-making that reflects commitment and accountability (p. 16)

Although all participants professed to value shared leadership and decision-making, almost half indicated leadership practices which develop this dimension to be relatively absent within their respective schools. The importance of this dimension cannot be over-

emphasised for “now is the time to move away from this deficit model that tells teachers what they need to do to improve, to a leadership design that engages both principals and teachers in making important decisions about improving schools” (Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000, p. 28).

While the Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes (LOLSO) study suggests that shared leadership within current school structures and systems may affect teachers as an additional burden (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002), participants in my study appeared eager to step into leadership roles. These same participants who expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction with leadership practices relating to shared leadership and decision-making also indicated that teachers were now circumventing positional leadership and in a sense, creating a ‘separate’ system of shared leadership and decision-making. The development of this ‘separate’ system is intriguing in that while participants expressed great frustration with the levels of shared leadership and decision-making, this dimension is still present within the school and is being further developed by teacher leaders. While seemingly unsustainable, it does appear to allow for some limited development of the dimension of shared leadership and decision-making. Fullan (1991) highlights the contrary nature of this situation as he identifies administration as being the primary change agent in school improvement. With the leadership capacity demonstrated by teachers, further guidance, support, and capacity building should serve to support this dimension not only in developing a PLC, but in sustaining it as well.

Other participants spoke of limited levels of shared leadership and decision-making, specifying that administration must follow through on decisions made by the whole staff, for not doing so implies that the thoughts and efforts of teachers are futile. The importance of follow through on the part of administration when building shared

leadership cannot be overemphasized as teachers must believe their efforts to be of specific application to the development of a PLC. Token shared leadership may be even more detrimental than non-existent shared leadership as teachers are quick to identify useless endeavours created more for appearance than actual action. This perception may result in reticence on the part of teachers to participate in a leadership position. When viewed through the school culture lens, token shared leadership allows for the creation of stories of failure for teachers recognize the futility of what they are being asked to do given their perception that shared leadership and decision-making may not be legitimate (Deal & Peterson, 2002). In so doing, administration is certainly shaping school culture—in a negative way.

Those participants who believed shared leadership and decision-making to be present in their schools, and identified leadership practices which developed and sustained shared leadership and decision-making, spoke primarily of the importance of administration taking the initiative to model and support teachers in this practice. This aligns with the findings of Huffman and Jacobson (2003). Their study revealed that leaders who were perceived to demonstrate a collaborative or transformational leadership approach were also leaders of schools who exhibited the core processes of PLCs.

Additionally, specific structures put in place further supported shared leadership and decision-making. Administrators' overt efforts to develop and recruit teacher leaders are central. It would appear to behoove administration to pay strategic attention to individual staff members as well as teams in order to support them when considering that they are the essential if not the driving force behind the actions and decisions of the school.

### *Shared Values and Vision*

The second PLC dimension is shared values and vision. Hord (1997) identifies the need for “a shared vision that is developed from an unswerving commitment on the part of staff to students’ learning and that is consistently articulated and referenced for the staff’s work” (p. 18). While all schools represented in the study have a vision or mission statement, it is evident that teachers perceive administration as attributing varying levels of importance to embedding the vision within the fabric of the school culture. Fullan’s (1994) checklist approach to school improvement may be applicable in that the push to become a PLC has resulted in administration rushing to meet specific goals without considering the entire process and purpose of those same goals. The need to quantify activities and results may in fact result in the separation rather than integration of the school’s vision in a PLC. An overwhelming majority of participants stated that while their school had a vision statement it was either never referred to, or presented only at the beginning of the year. In many cases, participants admitted to not knowing their school’s vision; they had to quickly read through it prior to our interview. Interestingly, no participants perceived the development of a school vision to be a waste of time—instead some took issue with the ambiguous nature surrounding the existence of their school’s vision. Participants signalled their concern with the lack of its application to their monthly and daily decisions.

It is of note that only two out of sixteen participants responded that they perceived administration as consciously integrating the vision into daily activities and decisions. This is concerning and conflicts with the need for administration to “continuously communicate the vision to all stakeholders” (Hord, 2007, p. 3). What contributes to this absence of daily communication of the guiding principle(s) of a school? Is there a lack of

understanding on the part of administration of the theoretical and practical importance of the vision statement, or is it a result of fading ideals in light of the many daily pressures and expectations placed on administrators? As values and beliefs are a central level of organizational culture (Schein, 1984), it is logical to assert that administrators need to pay close attention to the intentional integration of core vision or mission statements within the school operations. Huffman (2001) states that the “emergence of a strong, shared vision based on collective values provides the foundation for informed leadership, staff commitment, student success, and sustained school growth” (p. 17). Therefore, the absence of integration may be of concern when considering the cultural and foundational influence of a shared vision. Schultz emphasized the unifying effect of a shared vision integrated into daily routines and expressed concern regarding the lack of this integration at her school. She felt that the ‘not in my back yard’ principle had become more of a guide for the entire staff as a means of self preservation rather than opposition to working collaboratively. Furthermore, the absence of regular referral to so pivotal a dimension may also result in a deficit in reflection regarding relevance of the current vision. Moreover, accountability to actually move towards or achieve the shared vision is eliminated.

The results of this study seem to suggest a high level of readiness and capacity on the part of teachers to embrace PLCs. This appears most evident in the area of shared vision—teachers desire leadership in this area to establish a clear focus. Incidentally, the two participants who indicated that their shared vision was referred to on a regular basis also perceived their administration as exemplifying many leadership practices effective in developing and sustaining a PLC.

While the leadership practice of overtly communicating the schools’ shared visions was generally identified as an area that was important to a PLC, but needed further

attention, all participants were able to identify activities and school operations that reflect their respective shared visions. In this area, leadership practices as demonstrated by teacher leaders were identified more than any other dimension where the focus remained on the leadership practices of administration. Participants made reference to classroom activities, whole school diversity projects, and consistent student discipline on the part of teachers. It may be that participants were able to focus more on the daily activities of their colleagues and identify their contributions towards following the shared vision; whereas, in other areas participants may have seen administration as having greater influence or even control than teachers.

The interrelated nature of all of Hord's (1997) dimensions of a PLC was evidenced through participants' mention of structures they perceived as reflecting the shared vision. The establishment of structures such as cross-graded homerooms, scheduling, team teaching, regular assemblies and discipline were identified as a significant leadership practice in supporting the dimension of shared vision. Yet I wonder in most cases if there is a severe lack of regular overt communication of shared vision, if these structures would not be that much more effective were the conscious connection between the vision and structures made apparent to teachers.

The conscious connection of shared vision to the every day decisions, instruction, and activities which take place within a school is imperative especially if there is concern regarding their alignment with the existing shared vision. The obvious first point of return is to ask whether the established vision is in fact shared. Jamison focused on this point as she conveyed dissatisfaction with the clarity of their current vision as she felt that it was "in limbo." The main concern was the lack of connection between teacher behaviours and the shared vision. Achieving the balance between establishing a shared vision along with

staff accountability can be challenging. Jamison indicated the need for more of a top-down approach in how teachers were to interact with students at assemblies. She felt strongly that in order for teachers to guide student behaviour during assemblies so that it reflected the shared vision, teacher behaviour needed to change. Yet Jamison was cognizant of the pitfalls of a leadership practice which might potentially be construed as a form of micromanagement.

These issues reflect Barth's (2002) concern with the presence of 'nondiscussables.' This seemingly minor concern with teacher expectations and follow through is linked to the much larger matter of leadership practices which build open communication and align espoused theories and theories in use. The influence of underlying values and beliefs that compose school culture become evident through this example. If teachers do not collectively invest in a belief or viewpoint, something as minor as student-teacher interactions during assembly can become rather telling regarding the state of the culture of a specific school.

### *Collective Learning*

Hord's (1997) third dimension of PLCs is collective learning and application characterized by "sharing information, seeking new knowledge, skills and strategies, and working collaboratively to plan, solve problems and improve learning opportunities" (Hipp & Huffman, 2003, p. 16). Participants were questioned specifically regarding their perceptions of the leadership practices which influence collective learning and application. Once again, the interrelated nature of all five dimensions became evident; central to participants' perception of leadership practices influencing this dimension was the development of appropriate structures. Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1995) focus on five structural conditions necessary to establishing PLCs. One of those conditions entails the

provision of adequate time for teachers to meet and exchange ideas. All participants identified the significant influence on the dimension of collective learning and application of designated times to meet embedded within the school year schedule. Central office established this structure to support the development of PLCs in all schools. Joyce (2004) endorses and in fact requires that “central office folks need to be deeply involved in the process and need to create structures that small teams of teachers and most schools cannot make without their help” (p. 81). Furthermore, “current school structures will have to be reorganized to provide time for the development of knowledge and skills and the acquisition and examination of information” (Silins, Mulford & Zarins, 2002, p. 636).

Although the scope of this study was meant to focus on leadership practices within individual schools, the marked influence of central office support is of notable importance. The district wide implementation of embedded time removes some of the pressure from administration as they struggle to manage the many variables present within individual school contexts and configurations.

While all participants referred to the embedded time as influencing their collective learning, some expressed concern regarding the utilization of this time. Clearly, each school and individual group does not use the time in the same way as evidenced by Fredricks’ comments regarding the designation of PLC time for marking assessments: “It’s frustrating to do the assessment on student work on a PLC day knowing that it’s an opportunity to share.” Are expectations established as to time utilization? How is this communicated to teachers? Principals? Fullan’s (1994) statement “to restructure is not to reculture . . .” (p. 49) is relevant in that despite excellent intentions and plans to support teacher learning through the use of embedded time, this restructuring does not take into account teacher attitudes, relationships, and inhibitions or expectations. Leaders need to

plan to develop the collaborative cultures and be careful of ‘mandating’ them because of a structure.

Moreover, there was the common thread where participants spoke of the need to understand the effect of teachers’ collective learning on student learning. The connection between the implementation of PLCs and improved student learning was not the set goal of this study. Yet as Silins, Mulford, and Zarins (2002) assert, it is teachers’ instructional work that has the largest mediating effect on student outcomes. Therefore, logic would suggest that effective collective learning on the part of teachers has a positive effect on student learning. It would appear that these types of reflective and exploratory discussions are not taking place in some schools. Why not? Collective learning as described by the majority of participants does not seem to fit the cyclical nature to which Hord (2007) refers. Rather there are areas of disjointedness and varied expectations and areas of focus.

Researchers indicate that it is leadership which has the greatest mediating effect over the levels of organizational learning (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002; Collinson, Cook, & Conley, 2001). Consequently, administrators need to ensure they are modelling their own learning and encouraging teachers to regularly discuss the collective learning taking place as it relates to their teaching practice and student learning.

In addition to the embedded time set for all teachers in the district, first year teachers and those teachers new to the school district are provided with a two day in-service for the purpose of imparting the district beliefs and philosophies relating to PLCs. This in-service has been created by a committee comprised of district administrators. It would be interesting to study the effects of this in-servicing on teacher knowledge and comprehension of PLCs. Additionally, the role these in-services play in influencing individual school cultures and further development of PLCs could also be explored.

Further to structures perceived as influencing collective learning, some participants referred to further embedded time created by their administration. This embedded time was centered on common prep time for teachers as well as a formal weekly meeting of grade level teachers. Additionally, participants identified the provision of sub time for particular grade level or cross-graded meetings. The knowledge that the use of sub time was in fact an option seemed to provide participants with the ability to follow through on various processes of collective learning they might not otherwise pursue. The wide array of comments regarding teachers exploring and implementing new ideas suggests that the cost of this time is money well spent.

The format and content of staff meetings was also highlighted by participants as contributing to collective learning. Traditional information-only agenda cluttered by 'housekeeping' items are clearly unsuitable for the PLC model. Yet, only a few participants spoke of their staff meetings as an opportunity for collective learning. Exposure to current educational research and discussion concerning theory and practice mirrors Goodlad's (1990) argument that teachers "must be purposefully engaged in the renewal process" (p. 25). Further to this Norris (2004) believes that

staff development efforts that lead to the development of a cohesive group of educated adults who are lifelong learners will never come about as a result of workshops, checklists, or program implementation. This comes about by developing the attitude of a scholar who is equipped with the intellectual tools and the perspectives to make valid decisions (p. 12).

Thus, it is imperative that the practice of embedding current and applicable educational research is conscious and calculated. Teachers must perceive it as benefiting their practice both as individuals and as a collective. If the culture of a school's staff meetings is characterized by quick 'business' only agendas, leaders will need to be cautious of making a sudden wholesale switch. Nonetheless, scheduling in an agenda item which may

provoke some discussion and reflection regarding teacher practices or student learning is certainly a step in the right-direction. Demonstrating respect for the current theories-in-use combined with a small push to reshape those same theories will have much more positive results as opposed to cramming collective learning into a meeting—that type of learning cannot be mandated.

Participants in two of the schools focused on the influence of their whole school instructional goal over collective learning. Professional development opportunities were then concentrated on the learning related to the whole school goal. Joyce (2002) promotes a vision where the professional development plans are “concentrating on one high-quality strand at a time, with the content a part of curriculum or a teaching strategy that will enhance the learning of students. Connection to the knowledge base is very important” (p. 82). To create the conditions for collective learning requires a common focus be established—a focus able to transcend the barriers of grade level or subject where need be.

The cyclical nature of employing a whole school instructional goal becomes evident as teachers establish common vocabulary both in their own knowledge and in their approach to instructional strategies. Consequently, the development of widespread knowledge furthers the learning and shared practice amongst teachers. Participants from both schools which had established a whole school goal noted the effectiveness of school based professional development and the difference this made to the collective learning and instruction within the school. On a smaller scale, participants from Miller School identified the importance of administration allowing entire departments to attend subject specific professional development opportunities. Jamison recognized the significance of the contribution this practice made to the learning within the department. The provision of and exposure to current research applicable to various school contexts enables individuals

and groups to move forward in their collective understanding of best practice. If this is indeed the case, why is the concept of a whole school or even departmental instructional goal not more widespread? Is there a link between the lack of a consistently communicated shared vision and the level of collective learning occurring within a school? Are teachers resistant to this approach? Questions surrounding the varying levels of shared leadership and decision-making in addition to the structures supporting this dimension need to be more carefully researched and analyzed.

Some participants also referred to Professional Growth Plans as a tool for influencing collective learning; however, there was a wide array of responses in regard to their actual use and perceived value. All teachers are required to write a Professional Growth Plan each year and administration is meant to review and discuss the plan with teachers. The Professional Growth Plan as described on the ATA website should be “self-authored, growth directed and reflect the individual assessment of the individual professional learning needs” (<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/>). Administrators are then expected to meet and review these plans with teachers. However, participants indicated that this was at times perceived to be a mere formality and in some cases more of an exercise in futility. While Benson spoke of the importance and influence of the Professional Growth Plans on the collective learning of teachers, Trane contrasted this with the belief that Professional Growth Plans are viewed as more of an individual learning endeavour unconnected to daily decisions and collective professional development. Why is this view in existence? What needs to change? Some participants indicated that they did not even meet with their respective administration regarding their Professional Growth Plans. It would seem that this is an area of concern both in regards to the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding Professional Growth Plans and for the actual

reflection and follow through facilitated by administration. Again it is necessary to consider the culture of the schools in which teachers perceive the Professional Growth Plan to be ineffective—is that the norm for the school or is that a reflection of an isolated teacher/administrator relationship? The professional requirement that teachers write and review a Professional Growth Plan does not necessarily result in effective reflection and learning on the part of the teacher.

Leadership ability to follow through on stated goals also seemed to influence collective learning. Willingness on the part of teachers to exert the required energy necessary for collective learning is impacted by their perceptions of level of relevance and leadership ability to follow through. Jamison's frustration with a lack of follow through on her team may reveal an area of serious concern—especially when considering the sustainability of PLCs. Leaders both formal and informal must be cognizant of the high level of influence of follow through over continued collective learning. A perceived lack of leadership ability to follow through quickly builds Peterson's (2002) stories of failure and can quickly eradicate all teacher will to stay the course and develop a culture of collective learning.

Participants were also questioned regarding the leadership practices which encourage risk-taking and innovation based on collective learning. Although Hord's (1997) framework for PLCs does not specifically include risk taking on the part of teachers, the literature on organizational learning supports the exploration and analysis of this dimension. Taking initiatives and risks is identified as a dimension that characterizes a school's capacity for organizational learning (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002). The wide range of participant responses to the prompt involving leadership practices that support or encourage risk-taking may suggest a relationship between leadership style and the level of

development of collective learning. Half the participants expressed concern regarding the lack of leadership practices which specifically encourage risk-taking and innovative practice. These same participants conveyed reservations regarding the leadership provided to enhance collective learning in general (professional development, exposure to and discussion of current educational research). Both Lapierre and Trane highlighted their perception of a desire on the part of administration to be “safe” and continue to follow well-established norms of practice. While this approach may appear logical, even systematic in ensuring curricular objectives are met, it fails to take into account the wealth of current research being completed on both professional and student learning, assessment, and instruction. Additionally, this approach brings with it a potentially stifling nature—capable of damaging cultural growth and progress within a school.

Connected to participants’ perception that leadership practices were lacking in the area of celebrating risk-taking were comments related to the need for increased leadership involvement in classrooms and PLC groups. PLCs require more than leaders as managers. A wide variety of variables may be contributing to this perceived lack of involvement. Administrators may feel too overwhelmed with the myriad responsibilities and pressures to spend time in classrooms and sitting in on PLC discussions. In some cases, participants perceived that administrators were somewhat indifferent to their classroom activities due to a lack of response to direct invitations to come in and observe student work or presentations. A lack of attention to the area of celebration and recognition of the professional work of teachers negatively influences the hidden assumptions within a school culture. Moreover, it will serve to dampen the focus, commitment, motivation, and productivity of teachers (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The lack of celebration and recognition

clearly influences teacher perceptions of leadership practices which build human capacity—identified as being the second element of supportive conditions (Hord, 1997).

### *Supportive Conditions*

Hord's (1997) fourth dimension, supportive conditions, requires the presence of specific structural and relational supports. She defines these as the “physical conditions and human capacities that support such an operation” (p. 18). Hipp and Huffman (2003) are more specific in their characterization of both categories. They define structures as including “a variety of conditions such as size of the school, proximity of staff to one another, communication systems, and the time and space for staff to meet and examine current practices” (p. 13). On the surface, participant responses seemed to indicate that leaders have put in place the necessary structural supports for both developing and sustaining a PLC. There are varying levels of scheduled meeting times, resources available, communication systems, and money to support collaborative teacher activities. Space in which to meet was identified by all participants as a non-issue for all felt that they had access to adequate space to meet.

As indicated in the analysis of collective learning, the implementation of district wide embedded meeting times is considered a central support to developing and sustaining PLCs. Participants also included common preps, weekly meetings, and additional sub time as part of the structural supports. The designation of district wide PLC Days, while undoubtedly an important supportive practice in developing and sustaining PLCs, seems to have inadvertently created the impression of PLCs as being an addition to teachers' work as opposed to operating as a necessary component of the building of a collaborative learning culture focused on effective instruction and assessment. This became evident through participant references to “PLC stuff” or as in Ritter's explanation of teacher

attitudes “when it’s time to do PLC...” Moreover, Fredricks commented on the issue of the wide variety of “tasks” being assigned during PLC time. Her insight reveals the potential lack of reflection or learning during this time as once again, teachers are focused on completing a task and moving on to the next one. The label of the embedded time as being a “PLC Day” or “PLC Half Day,” combined with participant comments, suggests that this may in fact inhibit the cultural integration of the characteristics of a PLC. Once again, Fullan’s (1994) admonition “to restructure is not to reculture...” is applicable (p. 49). In some cases, PLCs may be something schools ‘do’ as opposed to ‘are.’

What practices do administrators need to change or modify to alleviate these potential concerns? How is the PLC time for individual teams planned? In some cases, might there be a need for administration to more effectively and strategically connect the learning and reflection taking place within individual teams to the whole school—the school district? Creating a cycle of reflection and discussion, staff learning, implementation, and then a return to reflection and discussion is being missed. While participants perceived various levels of modeling to be influential, there may be a need for further modeling of the cycle of collective learning to fully make use of the structure available. Considering the perception on the part of some participants that shared leadership and decision making could be improved upon, suggests that increased leadership practices which develop this dimension may have a positive effect on the implementation and use of structural supports.

Although concerns were expressed regarding the utilization of time, participants expressed widespread appreciation and for the majority, a positive perception that collaborative learning time is available to some degree in the district. Moreover, should they request further individual time, the majority perceived their respective administration

to be amenable to the request. It is unclear as to whether this perception stems from the support shown on the part of central office or whether it is because of the individual administrators.

In addition to the supportive condition of time, Hord (1997) also indicates the importance of communication structures. The type of primary communications structures spoken of varied based on school size and configuration. There is a gap in the data where participants did not articulate their thoughts on the clarity or even evaluate the effectiveness of the communication structures present in their schools. This omission may stem from the lack of specific probes in the interview regarding communication structures and is an area which could certainly benefit from further exploration.

Communication structures which support and result in further feed back and reflection appear to be most effective. Team feedback sheets, clearly central to documenting team activities, decisions, and needs, allow for regular feedback, and encourage administration and team accountability. Nevertheless, administration must demonstrate that the feedback sheets serve more of a purpose than mere record keeping. Participants were clear in stating their perception that administration must be deeply involved in the process to ensure team effectiveness thereby making certain that further development of PLCs is viable.

Staff meetings, emails, bulletin boards, mailboxes, were identified as being a part of communication structures. The level of usage and effectiveness of the various communication structures varied between schools with all participants focusing on email as one of their central forms of communication. This was underscored in the larger schools where the sheer physical size of the school and number of staff resulted in fewer face to face interactions. Email was identified as significant to supporting shared practice

as participants indicated that the content of many emails centered on sharing useful resources and asking questions. Despite the references to email no teachers spoke of online discussion groups or some form of online reflective tools within the district. The level of influence of these types of collaborative tools is unknown, but could certainly benefit from further study.

The additional communication structures participants identified seemed to have more of a focus on the celebration or sharing of practice and student achievements as well as encouragement. It is prudent to note that these structures were only identified in two of the schools represented. In one of the two schools, the structures identified were created by teachers and were perceived to be of great influence over energy levels of teachers. This is significant in the context of PLC sustainability. Informal leadership is central to creating a school culture reflective of PLCs. Yet again the importance of strategic development of shared leadership becomes ever increasingly clear.

The small number of participants referring to the existence of communication structures which serve to encourage and celebrate the work of teachers and students is partially reflective of the general consensus of the lack of celebration of teacher best practice along with the accomplishments of PLC teams. The otherwise general lack of responses surrounding communication structures again may be attributed to the absence of a specific prompt.

Leadership practices which strategically address the type and usage of communication structures used by educators are necessary. Again, school size and configuration will greatly impact these decisions. The purpose of communication structures should go beyond mere information dissemination. How can administration

build cultural norms within communication structures which support collaboration, reflection and collective learning?

While Hord (1997) does not specifically mention structures supporting professional development within her description of supportive conditions, it became evident through the data that participants perceived this as a necessary structure central to the development of collective learning. With the constant budgetary concerns on the part of district and school administrations, it is imperative that a financially viable plan be in place for the purpose of facilitating individual and collective learning. Although only four participants referred to professional development supported by AISI funding, closer analysis revealed that much of teacher learning was supported by these funds. The lack of specific reference to AISI projects may well have been due to the timing of the interviews as they were completed early in the school year and most AISI projects would have just been getting underway. Nonetheless, no references were made to collective long-term professional development plans, and in the case of one school the participant felt that professional development was essentially an individual undertaking. It is also necessary to take into consideration the influence of current contract negotiations over the development (or lack thereof) of long range collective professional development plans. The most recent Economic Policy Committee survey distributed to teachers in this district contained questions regarding the establishment of individual professional development accounts. It would be interesting to view the results of teacher responses to this question as it may have some bearing on both contract talks and administrative planning as it relates to professional development spending. Establishing a viable long-range plan for the learning of teachers seems central to establishing and supporting organizational learning.

Administration may need to attend to this long range approach to further develop and sustain PLCs.

Further to the financial support and planning for professional development, the structures which support the sharing of professional learning also have bearing on collective learning. Participants indicated a variety of approaches to this issue. Teachers may need more guidance as to how better to facilitate collective learning based on individual learning, for as Argyris and Schon (1996) assert, individual learning does not equal organizational learning. A few participants referred to the need to redesign monthly staff meetings, suggesting teacher awareness of a need for change in this area.

Administrators must be able to balance a desire for efficient discussion on housekeeping items along with a primary focus on collective learning. Cultural norms surrounding teacher expectation of staff meetings at each school need to be attended to. Before making any changes, administrators must give careful consideration to what might be removed, remodelled, or added to support and shape the culture surrounding staff meetings.

The provision of learning and instructional resources appeared to be a strength in all schools, though there was the indication of a need for improved access to current professional literature for the district as a whole. Although the ATA does have a professional library available to educators, it would seem that the distance and even the required effort to research applicable resources may prove to be too much for some teachers considering the daily pressures with which they are faced. The need to build a research based foundation is evident even as Benson spoke of how her administration at E.B. Anderson used professional readings to assist in building change capacity.

Additionally, Richards identified the provision of professional articles and books relating to Brockton Community School's whole school goal of assessment. Again, the need for

strategic planning in these areas was evident, as participants in this study indicated definite perceived benefits to their learning as a result of this structure.

Finally, the identification of teaching assignments as a structure which supports PLCs also became evident in the data. Again, this structure is not addressed as part of either Hord's (1997) definition of supportive conditions nor in Hippman and Huff's (2003) additions. Nonetheless, it seems to be a logical influence over the development and more specifically the sustainability of PLCs. While team teaching can be fraught with issues based on teaching styles, individual personalities and scheduling challenges, the benefits to both shared teaching practice and professional learning appear evident in the data. Worthy of note is the school context of participants who mentioned the importance of team teaching—all participants are at the secondary level. The frequency or even existence of team teaching at the elementary levels was not revealed in the data. Because of the homeroom teacher approach at the elementary levels, it may be worthwhile to explore the possible team teaching structures which may benefit younger students. While this may not be set in teacher scheduling, perhaps it could be considered when addressing student needs in multiple sections of the same grade.

#### *Human Capacities*

The second category of supportive conditions identified by Hord (1997) is human capacities. Again, the use of Hipp and Huffman's (2003) additional clarification of human capacities provides assistance in analysis of the data. They define these human capacities as being collegial relationships including "caring relationships, trust and respect, recognition of and celebration, risk taking, and a unified effort to embed change" (p. 7). Relationships need to move beyond congenial and should rather be collegial (Hord, 2007). This section of the interview evoked the most emotional responses from participants;

while some participants appeared comfortable sharing the leadership practices they saw as contributing to the relational aspect of supportive conditions, others seemed ill at ease and shared personal stories of frustration, division, and perceived hidden agendas. The intensity of participant responses, despite all attempts to apply theoretical models and break down the data shaping it into a series of diagrams or categories, exposes the very human aspect of education—an area requiring close and thoughtful attention from both researchers and leaders. The data from questions pertaining to the human capacities of PLCs underscored the importance of this category to both developing and sustaining PLCs. In this research study the majority of responses centered on leadership practices serving to further develop and sustain each school's existing PLC.

Extensive variations in personality, teaching and learning styles, and capacity to accept and implement change present a complex set of variables for leaders. Participants emphasised the necessity for caring relationships as their responses revealed the need for administration and teacher leaders to know them as people first and to demonstrate support in personal and professional contexts. Additionally, the majority of participants indicated that administration and teacher leaders must model cooperation and support as this practice was central to establishing these qualities as norms in schools. This aligns with Goleman's (2006) assertion that school leaders need to be cognizant of the influence of their behaviour for "humans' brains mirror the emotional states of others—particularly others in power..." (p.78). The norms of the school culture must be consciously addressed by leaders through more than the adjustment of structures—they must be attended to in terms of behaviours and attitudes as well.

Of significant note was the number of participants who spoke of administration involvement in classroom and whole school activities. Involvement translates into

knowledge and identification with the challenges and successes teachers face both as individuals and as a group. Additionally, participants felt that reinforcement of the expression ‘we’re all in this together’ was paramount to creating these caring relationships. Again, the data refutes the view of principals or administration as being ‘omnicompetent,’ allowing for teacher involvement in leadership areas and reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility.

The demanding nature of organizational learning and implementation of change requires that leaders be willing to share their own struggles as a fellow learner and educator. While some level of caring relationships appeared evident in all schools, three of the schools represented were characterized by participants as being ‘fractured’ to varying degrees. The influence of school configurations over this dimension is worthy of investigation as two of the schools were kindergarten through grade nine and one of them consisted of only secondary levels. It appears that the sheer size of staff may affect the level of caring relationships established.

Participants highlighted a wide variety of leadership practices necessary to foster Hipp and Huffman’s (2003) second mini-dimension of human capacities, trust and respect. They unequivocally supported Bryk and Schneider’s (2003) assertion that trust is a primary factor in building a learning community and implementing any kind of change. However, as illustrated in the findings, this is clearly no easy task for “building trust requires substantial time and appropriate activities that enable the individual to experience the trustworthiness of colleagues and to extend or become trustworthy to complete the cycle” (Hord, 2007, p. 5).

Leadership practices perceived as building trust and respect revolved around modelling and establishing open and honest communication, and involvement and follow

through. Similar to the building of caring relationships, having administration willing to share their thoughts phrased in a professional manner creates a relationship of equals. Teachers know when they are being patronized or being given feedback based on little first hand knowledge. Wisely, administrators and teacher leaders who wish to establish and build trust invest the time and energy in being involved or are at least well versed in the instructional practices and efforts of individual teachers and PLC teams.

Importantly, responses highlighted positive feelings towards leadership practices which emphasised being part of a team. Benson's comment that at E.B. Anderson "we don't work for them [administration], we work with them" reflected the general consensus that teachers and leaders must be on a level playing field. Public chastisement or even the perception that this might occur was underscored as undermining the building of trust. Intertwined with the team concept is the importance of the leadership practice closely related to shared decision-making where leaders trust that teachers are able to make decisions that will improve student learning. However, this is an important balance to strike as allowing teachers the freedom to make decisions does not mean being unaware of those decisions or instructional practice as was indicated by some participants. Involvement and an educated awareness of the decisions and practices of both individual teachers and PLC teams were deemed essential to building a climate of trust.

Responses regarding a climate of trust from participants representing Pineridge School were not reflective of the general themes shared by the rest of participants in the research study. These responses stand out in their characterization of an 'us versus them' dichotomy. All four participants revealed serious concerns with the level of trust between administration and teachers. Schultz's comment regarding her perception of the "machinations that go on behind closed doors" was indicative of the general theme of

responses in this area. Moreover, Schultz identified that “groups are played against one another” indicating significant issues in shaping a collaborative school culture. Applying Goleman’s (2006) assertion that teachers reflect the emotional state of those in a position of power underscores the pressing need for leaders to ensure that their daily practices and conversations embody the espoused values set up by the school’s shared vision.

Conversely, all participants at Pineridge School stressed the high levels of trust between teachers. Again, participants drew attention to the efforts and work of teacher leaders in building a climate of trust between teachers. Similar to shared leadership and decision-making, despite the concerns regarding the relationship between administration and teachers related by participants, teachers are stepping up to meet the needs of their colleagues in a unique and challenging situation.

Parallel to the emphasis on building a climate of trust is the recognition and celebration of risk-taking. Mere awareness of teachers who are taking risks and celebrating and sharing their products or results appeared to provide a great deal of support for further endeavours of this nature. Demonstrated excitement plays a central role in teacher motivation and resolve to move forward or adapt instructional practices. While most responses revealed the perception that teachers were welcome and in fact felt general support to take risks, the distinct lack of leadership practices which recognized and celebrated risk-taking may be of concern. The perception that recognition and celebration is for the most part deficient in participants’ schools parallels research completed by Leech and Fulton (2002). Their quantitative study revealed that the “least often behaviour exhibited by principals was the practice of encouraging the heart” (p. 10). Encouraging the heart as defined in their study involved the practice of celebrating and promoting the successes of teachers within the learning community. Leech and Fulton go so far as to

state that the “notion of encouraging the heart may be one of the most important functions of leadership” (p. 11). This corresponds with participant responses revealing their desire for increased celebration and acknowledgement of success.

Finally, Hipp and Huffman (2003) note the need for a unified effort to embed change as a component of Hord’s (1997) fourth dimension, human capacities. This particular component relates more specifically to the challenge of sustaining a PLC. When exploring the question of leadership practices that sustain a PLC, participant responses focused on practices which motivate and inspire teachers. Central to the concept of a unified effort were the leadership practices that emphasise a team approach and shared responsibility for not only organizational learning but also student learning. The common thread throughout the fabric of a PLC is community. Participants were acutely aware of the importance of working together for PLCs to be successful. They were inherently clear regarding their perception of the necessity for leadership practices that visibly support this team approach. Trane’s focus on administration knowing each individual as a professional and then working with individual strengths for the formation of a community is reflective of all participant responses. However, this same belief requires administrators to spend their time differently—they must focus on asking reflective questions of teachers and spend time in the staff room. Once again, the issue of balance becomes a chief concern in the world of leadership practices. Effective formal leadership teams which incorporate complementary personalities and strengths is key—how else especially in schools with large staff numbers can administrators meet the demands of teacher needs combined with managerial requirements?

Lucid and specific descriptions surrounding the weight of demonstrated leadership, enthusiasm, and passion for change were also central to building a sustained effort to

embed change in schools. Indicative of a plethora of comments relating to the energy and passion of leaders was Ritter's observation that "they [administration] need to be passionate about it in order to get the teachers passionate about it. And if the teachers aren't excited about it, it's going to be hard to make it work." The weight participants placed on this practice combined with the concern on the part of some of the passion and energy for embedding change was wanting requires attention. Administrators are to be the "models, potters, poets, actors, and healers. They are historians and anthropologists...visionaries and dreamers" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 29). The vast array of pressures and expectations placed on administration in building and sustaining PLCs reveals a disconnect between the current system which unfortunately in many cases focuses on managerial tasks and the identified ideal in the literature. Participants recognized this to some degree as they commented on the challenge for administrators to even be able to leave their offices due to the many demands on their time. While this disconnect is clearly evident in the area of motivating and inspiring teachers to sustain change, in my mind, it exists to varying degrees in all of Hord's (1997) five dimensions.

Further to the emphasis on shared responsibility and demonstrated passion on the part of administration is the identified need to establish clearly defined goals in order to embed change. Lapiere highlighted requisite expressions of clear goals as she noted concern that teachers have lost "really getting why it is we're doing what we're doing." Although this practice is also related to the clear communication of shared vision, it requires mention in the analysis of practices that sustain a PLC. The clear identification of vision and values permits teachers to recognize the achievement of these goals which then provides further motivation and inspiration to continue the intense work of a learning community. A celebration of the cultural norms needs to be established and brought to

fruition. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) identify teacher performance as being the most influential source capable of increasing capacity. Perception of success may be formed by feedback from others; therefore the need for leadership awareness and recognition of achievements are key.

### *Shared Personal Practice*

The final dimension of PLCs contained within Hord's (1997) model is shared personal practice. In Hord's initial literature review which established the theory behind PLCs, she focuses primarily on teachers observing one another teach followed by a discussion of observations. Hipp and Huffman (2003) flesh out this dimension as they list the critical attributes of shared personal practice as including observation and encouragement, shared outcomes of new practice and provision of feedback, and analysis of student work and related practices. Each attribute was familiar to participants, yet participants revealed varying levels of leadership practices which either supported teachers in initiating the practices or in sustaining practices within their schools.

Interview responses indicated that teachers believed further development of shared personal practice to be of benefit to teachers as individuals and schools as a whole. In promotion of sharing outcomes of new practice and discussing experiences with various instructional approaches, participants identified the leadership practice of modelling as being of highest prominence and influence. In fact, three participants made the connection between the influence of modelling over establishing norms in a school culture.

Thomson's reference to an administrator at Pineridge School who "ingrained" sharing in her department by modelling her own openness and reflective practice is demonstrative of the general consensus regarding the impact of modelling on cultural norms. The weight of influence attributed by teachers in this study to modelling suggests that administrators and

teacher leaders take close stock of their practices and understand the potential positive or negative influence these practices may have on developing and sustaining PLCs. Furthermore, the amount and depth of shared leadership in a school is once again highlighted. The building of leadership capacity and the involvement of teachers logically creates a situation where more leaders are cognizant of the necessity for modelling shared personal practice. In this way, administrators can advance the norms foundational to PLCs.

By modelling instructional leadership, verbalizing reflective questions and putting them to teachers regardless of level of experience, leaders are also able to develop competence in core role responsibilities thereby increasing levels of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Responses revealed widespread sensitivity to the level of involvement of administration specifically in teaching practices, team meetings, and sharing of their own learning. Again, Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) underscore the need for leaders to focus on their involvement in the work of the school, for involvement highlights leader commitment to the school organization.

The importance of classroom observation as documented by Little (1982) even before the emergence of PLCs as a popular framework for school improvement is central to developing collegiality. Nonetheless, this study revealed that, in general, informal classroom observation of teachers by administrators or fellow teachers is not the norm. Only two participants spoke directly of concerns relating to trust and “territorial” attitudes when explaining their thoughts behind the lack of observation taking place. Of interest is the effect of school configuration as both participants represent a secondary school. Research suggests that the existence of teacher isolation is firmly entrenched in secondary schools (Bezzina, 2001). Leaders must closely attend to the individual beliefs of teachers

and analyze the impact of these individual beliefs on the collective attitude. Consideration of strategic leadership practices is paramount to developing further success in this area. This area of weakness is acknowledged by Hord (2007) as she indicates that this dimension is “likely to be the last to be developed because of the history of isolation most teachers have experienced” (p. 5).

Additionally, mention was made of the evaluative nature typically associated with classroom observation. Because informal observation with the focus of providing feedback along with gaining insights into instructional or assessment practices is not the norm, leaders must contemplate practices which will assist teachers in altering their initial concerns and perceptions of classroom observation. This becomes even more significant as classroom observation and peer feedback has been identified as increasing teacher beliefs about their own professional capacities as well as contributing to a sense of collective capability (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999).

Nonetheless, participants expressed widespread interest in participating in observing other teachers teach or having colleagues come in and observe them teaching, but noted legitimate concerns regarding time and follow through. In fact, despite espousing the practice of classroom observation, this practice had essentially no presence in the daily activities of teachers. Some administrators have attempted to increase teacher understanding of the role of classroom observation in PLCs through the provision of professional readings. Teachers read through and discussed the philosophy behind the practice but responses to further probing revealed that no further action had been taken. Participant responses seemed to indicate that classroom observation may be the ‘tipping point’ for teachers in terms of expanding their professional practice. Organization levels along with a perceived lack of time and energy were central. The “hundred thousand

pressures” described by Trane reflected the overwhelming sense that despite the recognized value of teachers observing one another in action, at this point, teachers are not prepared to take the “bull by the horns.”

What do teachers need to enable them to move forward in this activity? Interview responses revealed teacher preference for administration to express clear expectations and follow through on those expectations. With the primary concern revolving around scheduling the time to observe, participants felt that administration may need to set up a structure wherein teachers sign up for times or are expected to observe colleagues a specified number of times throughout the school year. Of interest is the potential for these practices to be construed as being top-down; yet, it is teachers who are requesting the use of these practices. Evidently formal leadership must still be cognizant of those areas in which they may need to exercise ‘tight’ leadership for the purpose of providing structure and direction.

Sharing student work assists teachers in analyzing both students’ cognitive and skill levels as well as effective instructional practices. Responses reflected varying levels of integration of this type of sharing—for some teachers it was a daily activity existing both as formal and informal practice, whereas others collectively examined student work based on a set expectation for a common assessment. The professional learning connected to all practices relating to shared personal practice is key to the development of organizational learning. The implementation and institutionalization of this practice should be given close attention as it coalesces with collective learning. Two participants voiced concerns regarding the implementation of common assessments and the value of the discussion and future instructional practice. Fredrick’s, a participant from Pineridge School made the observation of the existence of inconsistent teaching practices or

alternate assessment tools suggesting again the importance of whole school goals and planned professional development which provides common vocabulary and foundational understandings in instructional practice surrounding areas of focus. If teachers are involved in the analysis of common assessment results, yet have extreme inequities in approach or even in the level of attention afforded specific content, how might this affect their analysis of student work? It may be easy to suggest that the proposal to focus on whole school goals and professional development results in stifling the creativity and individuality teachers bring to the profession. This is not the focus—rather the goal is to provide and build foundational knowledge and understanding which results in teachers making informed decisions regarding appropriate and effective instructional practices.

Participant responses to questions regarding their perception of leadership practices for developing and sustaining PLCs provide insight into areas of leadership strengths and weaknesses within Hord's (1997) framework. Furthermore, the importance of leadership practices which attend to the development and shaping of a school culture reflective of PLC dimensions are highlighted.

The perception of varying levels of leadership practices that support shared leadership and decision-making suggests a need for further development of administrative understanding of how to incorporate this dimension. Administrators must attend to the strengths and interests of teachers to support them in taking on leadership roles. Furthermore, despite the existence of a shared vision or mission statement at each of the participants' schools, consistent overt references to the vision or mission statement must be a regular leadership practice. The constant reminder of the image and purpose of a school assists in shaping a culture supportive of PLCs.

Participants perceived a number of leadership practices as influencing collective learning. Of note is the involvement of central office in creating a structure to support collective learning. Nonetheless, consistent modelling and communication of the cycle of collective learning was not predominant. Participants identified a number of leadership practices which are moving in the right direction, yet these practices have not entirely succeeded in changing the culture of schools in relation to teachers reflecting and discussing student learning, identifying the professional learning necessary, applying the learning to practice and finally, returning to reflect and discuss student learning.

To support collective learning, participants identified the existence of a number of structures necessary to the development and sustaining of PLCs. However, these structures could be complimented by careful consideration of the way in which they impact school culture. Leaders cannot assume that because the appropriate structure is in place, the culture of the school will allow for its effective use. Moreover, in the dimension of human capacities, participants highlighted the importance of building trust and celebrating the learning and risk-taking of teachers. This requires leaders to attend to the underlying assumptions of school culture. Providing opportunities for teachers to build and possibly reform or extend their levels of trust is imperative. Additionally, celebration of success and the achievement of goals gradually moulds school culture to one that reflects success in the various PLC dimensions.

Finally, participants perceived the need for overt modeling and involvement to support the dimension of shared personal practice. The existence of this dimension is largely dependent on the levels of trust in a school. While participants recognized the benefits of shared personal practice it appears that more work needs to be done in

supporting teachers in this area. Leaders must help develop a new understanding of observation—one that is not evaluative but reflective.

## Chapter 6: Implications for Practice and Research

PLC implementation is a complex and taxing endeavour for all levels of educators as both district and school staff members play central interrelated roles. Myriad variables influence the successful introduction and sustainability of PLCs and must be attended to in a careful and strategic manner. The focus of this study has been to discover the leadership practices teachers perceive as influencing the development and sustaining of PLCs.

Hord's (1997) framework for PLCs was used to analyze the findings. This framework was essential in the development of a clear understanding of the leadership practices necessary to shaping school culture and developing and sustaining a PLC. The emphasis on the cyclical nature of collective learning and by extension the remaining PLC dimensions was specifically important in understanding the influence of leadership practices. Furthermore, the identification of the pivotal role played by human capacities in developing a PLC was also revealed in the findings of this study. While other researchers have also explored dimensions which relate to PLCs, Hord's established dimensions encompass the requirements of school culture and extend to the development of a community of learners.

Leadership practices related to the development of shared leadership and decision-making, shared vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice were perceived by teachers as being central to developing and sustaining PLCs. The effects of school size, configuration, teaching experience, and both individual and team leadership experience are potential areas of further study. Additionally, research into the influence of district structures and support for both leaders and schools when developing and sustaining PLCs would be beneficial.

Connected to some of the findings from this study, there is potential for further study into administrators' perceptions of leadership practices impacting the development and sustainability of PLCs. Additionally, the findings revealed teacher acknowledgement of the additional pressures put on administrators. What supports and structures do administrators perceive themselves as needing in order to demonstrate the leadership practices teachers held to be central in the creation of PLCs? It would be enlightening to see if similarities exist between teacher and administrator perceptions of leadership practices.

The conclusions and recommendations in this study are meant to highlight the reality of PLCs in a school district, and to question and explore further areas of research necessary to the continued effective implementation of PLCs wherein teachers and leaders identify PLCs as something they 'are' as opposed to 'do.' This requisite shift in thinking may require some backtracking on the part of leaders at all levels. Nevertheless, in the case of some schools this would be a far more valuable use of time rather than continuing on the current path of superficial checklist improvement. The findings revealed that a necessary starting point is that of an established shared vision embedded into the every day decisions and activities taking place in schools. Formal leaders must reflect on their individual school context and staff composition and then move forward in addressing issues such as this in a manner that will encourage further growth and a change in the theory in use.

I believe a distinct tension exists for administrators as they must be able to take an action research approach to the strategic analysis of their school culture and context, yet the findings and the literature underscore the need for leaders to build and refine supportive and encouraging relationships with their colleagues. The central need for

teachers to be able to trust their administration and fellow colleagues is paramount to the development of shared personal practice. This ability to switch between concrete and relational data is no doubt incredibly challenging, and I suggest something which does not come naturally. Yet teachers recognized the human variable where professional decisions and activities must also be supported by human understanding and care.

Further to the leadership practice of analyzing the many facets of school culture and the underpinnings of PLCs, formal leadership must have the background knowledge in both the theory and practice associated with these areas. The connection between research and practice needs to be made in the continued development of formal leaders. Professional learning necessary for these leaders should be in place through the consideration of university and school district partnerships, along with district wide structures promoting opportunities for leaders to explore and discuss research on leadership practices and PLC development. In this way, administrators can model their own learning, participate in a meaningful way in the learning of PLC groups, and thereby establish further accountability between the professional learning of teachers and its intended effect on student learning.

Collective learning is parallel to the necessary professional learning of administrators. Although teachers identified a wide variety of leadership practices as influencing and supporting collective learning, there seems to be a significant systemic disconnect in the way in which this collective learning is facilitated in the long term. Slowly, schools are moving towards the development of whole school instructional goals which may even go so far as to coincide with the district wide school plan rather than the most convenient and/or publicized professional development available. Nonetheless, administrators should consider the role of a long range professional development and

learning plan for individual schools. If the fundamental goal of collective learning is to impact student learning and achievement, it would be logical to assert that professionals assessing the needs of all students should focus on the instructional theory and assessment relating specifically to the goals of the whole school.

This approach is even more logical when taking into consideration the constraints that funding imposes in the area of professional development. Equitable distribution of these monies is a challenge and in the short and long run, may not be spent in a manner that best meets the needs of all students. I recognize the potential for teachers to perceive whole school, long range professional development plans as infringing on personal professional growth plans, yet the big picture of the support of a clear professional practice combined with useful data on student learning and achievement outweighs this short term concern.

A feasible, focused, and strategic plan for collective learning should be considered in light of professional development funding constraints, and the addition or retraction of funding according to the whim of politicians. The financial investment in obscure or extremely specialized learning for one teacher at one school may not be the best choice. Administrators must also consider teacher retention and transfers along with what I call knowledge capital. Does this influence the way in which professional development funding is spent? Should it? By considering a whole school or grade specific professional development and learning plan, schools within a district could develop partnerships and in this way potentially explore professional development typically beyond individual budgets.

The reference within the findings to PLC “training” for first year teachers and teachers new to the district raises questions regarding the content in undergraduate

programs as well as the implementation of PLCs within Alberta and across Canada. Are the undergraduate education programs providing instruction and opportunities to explore and discuss the nature of PLCs as they relate to the Albertan and Canadian context? How much variance exists within school districts in Alberta and even across Canada when examining the theory behind PLCs?

Administrators must also take into consideration community perceptions of the impact of PLCs on student learning and achievement. In the case of the school district in this study, major changes were made to the school schedule for the purpose of providing embedded time for teachers. How is this perceived in the community? Individual schools and whole school districts must ensure that all stakeholders understand and can see the ultimate benefits of restructuring and reculturing schools to become PLCs. Public pressures placed on school boards faced with shrinking budgets and increasing costs may influence this process. Consequently, administrators should pay heed to public perception, explore various avenues of communicating the purpose of PLCs, potential challenges, and resultant successes, and recruit community involvement in the support of PLCs.

Willingness on the part of administrators to reflect on their own current leadership practices is integral to developing and sustaining PLCs. One of the results of establishing PLCs should be increased collaborative and reflective practice. What might this look like for administrators? While they should be closely engaged in the collaborative and reflective practice occurring within their schools, is the same model being applied at a district level? Do administrators have the same levels of support from fellow administrators in the district? Or is the perception of teachers scurrying off to the protection of their own classrooms applicable to administrators as well? What levels of transparency and sharing take place regarding leadership practices and school decisions

and activities? In the same way that the revelation that nondiscussables can be addressed within a school staff is freeing, so too should the understanding and development of shared leadership and decision making be freeing to administrators, for ‘we’re all in this together’ as a district as well and administrators, by extension should be able to reveal the missteps, the successes, and the data to support it all at the central office table.

Administrative structures need to change to effectively address the needs of the teaching profession and in the greater picture—student learning (Elmore, 2006). Elmore goes on to say that administrators should deliberately gather, organize, and understand data and information based on their professional knowledge for the purpose of creating and supporting a professional community of practice as a group rather than as individuals. However, the current political landscape may have some influence over the amount of collaboration and reflective practice at district levels. School ratings according to standardized testing, inconsistent provincial funding, and the consequent budget pressures placed on individual schools may have some bearing on administrators’ reticence to openly share the challenges with which they may be faced. PLCs could be a major jumping off point in the restructuring of professional practice where it is not about the individual teacher or administrator preference, but rather the established group practice. However, this will require that educators undertake a close and in many cases lengthy analysis of current assumptions of personal professional practice in addition to being a part of a community of practice.

Nonetheless, “professional learning communities are post modern organizational forms struggling to survive in a modernistic, micromanaged and politicized educational world” (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006 p. 153). The continuous challenge for educational leaders at all levels will be to employ and reflect on the leadership practices which shape

and sustain a community of learners for the purpose of improved student learning. Here is an undertaking faced with challenges from outside the educational field and from within, yet the continuous evolution and growth of the professional practice of teaching can move forward provided those leading within the field hold on to this vision: “a way of working where staff engage in purposeful, collegial learning. This learning is intentional and its purpose is to improve staff effectiveness so students will be more successful learners” (Hord, 2007, p. 5).

## References

- Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003). *Every child learns, every child succeeds: Report and recommendations*. Alberta Learning.
- Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (2005). Retrieved September 16, 2005  
[http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k\\_12/special/aisi/ClearingHouse/report\\_cycle2](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/aisi/ClearingHouse/report_cycle2)
- Alberta Teacher's Association (2007). Retrieved April 18, 2007, from  
<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/About+the+ATA/Policy+and+Position+Papers/Policy/Educational+Policy/Professional+Growth+Supervision+and+Evaluation.htm>
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Barth, R. S. (1990). *Improving schools from within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Barth, R. S. (2001). *Learning by heart*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Barth, R. S. (2002). The culture builder. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 6-11.
- Bennett, N. D. (1998). *Creative leadership and the culture of effective schools: Evidence from english primary schools*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April.
- Bezzina, C. (2001). 'The road less traveled:' Professional communities in secondary schools. *Theory into Practice*, 45(2), 159-167.
- Blase, J., & Kirby, P. C. (2000). *Bringing out the best in teachers: What effective principals do*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Bloomer, M., & James, D. (2001). *Educational Research in educational practice*. Paper presented at the Regional Conference of the SouthWest of England Learning and Skills Research Network, Dartington Hall, Totness, July.

- Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- de Campo, C. (1993). Collaborative school cultures: How principals make a difference. *School Organisation*, 13(2), 119-127.
- Carmichael, L. (1982). Leaders as learners: A possible dream. *Educational Leadership*, 40(1) 58-59. October.
- Cavanagh, R. F., & Dellar, G. B. (1997). *Towards a model of school culture*. Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.
- Cavanagh, R. F., & Dellar, G. B. (1998). *The development, maintenance and transformation of school culture*. Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April.
- Center for Improving School Culture (2002). *The school culture audit process*. Retrieved on March 23, 2005 from <http://www.schoolculture.net/process.html>
- Cheng, Y. C. (1996). *The transformational leadership for school effectiveness and development in the new century*. Paper presented at the International Symposium of Quality training of Primary and Secondary Principals toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Nanjing, China, January.
- Childs-Bowen, D., Moller, G., & Scrivner, J. (2000). Principals: Leaders of leaders. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NAASP Bulletin*, 84(616), 27-34.
- Conley, D. T. (1993). Managing change in restructuring schools. *Oregon School Study Council Bulletin*, 36(7), 2-32.

- Cunningham, W. G., & Gresso, D. W. (1993). *Cultural leadership: The culture of excellence in education*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational Research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Deal, T., & Peterson, K. (1999). *Shaping school culture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Deal, T., & Peterson, K. (2002). *Shaping school culture fieldbook*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dufour, R. (2004). What is a professional learning community? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6–11.
- Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & Burnette, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.
- Elmore, R. (Presenter) (2006, November 28). University Council for Educational Administration, Keynote Address [Podcast] Austin, TX. Retrieved September 3, 2007, from <http://www.ucea.org/podcasts.html>
- Fullan, M. (1990). Staff development, innovation and institutional development, In Joyce, B. (Ed.), *Changing school culture through staff development*. Alexandria, VA: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (1994). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Bristo, PA: Falmer Press.

- Fullan, M. (1997) Emotion and hope: Constructive concepts for complex times. In Hargreaves, A. (Ed.), *Rethinking educational change with heart and mind*. Alexandria, VA: The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Fullan, M., & Hargreaves, A. (1992). *Teacher development and educational change*. Washington, DC: The Falmer Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gibbons, T., & Sanderson, G. (2002). Contemporary themes in the research enterprise. *International Education Journal*, 3(4), 1-22.
- Giles, C., & Hargreaves, A. (2006). "The sustainability of innovative schools as learning organizations and professional learning communities during standardized reform." *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42, 124-156.
- Goldman, C., & O'Shea, C. (1990). A culture for change. *Educational Leadership*, 47(8), 41-43.
- Goodlad, J. (1990). *Teachers for our nation's schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Goleman, D. (2006). The socially intelligent leader. *Educational Leadership*, 64(1), 76-81.
- Greer, J. T., & Short, P. M. (2002). *Leadership in empowered schools: Themes from innovative efforts*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Gruenert, S., & Valentine, J. (1998). *School culture survey*. Retrieved May 2, 2006. from University of Missouri-Columbia, Middle Level Leadership Center Web site: <http://www.mllc.org/index.php?page=13>
- Hall, R., & Lord, R. (1995). Multi-level information-processing explanations of followers' leadership perceptions. *Leadership Quarterly*, 6(3), 265 - 287.

- Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (1998). Effectiveness, improvement and educational change: A distinctively Canadian approach. *Education Canada*, 38(2), 42-49.
- Hipp, K., & Huffman, J. (2003) *Professional learning communities: Assessment—development—effects*. Paper presented at the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Sydney, Australia, January.
- Hoerr, T. R. (1996). Collegiality: A new way to define instructional leadership.” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(5), 380–381.
- Hopkins, D. (1994). *School improvement and cultural change: An interim account of the ‘Improving the Quality of Education for All’ [IQEA] Project*. Paper prepared for a symposium on ‘School Improvement and National Reform’ at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, April.
- Hord, S. (1997). Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hord, S. (2004). Professional learning communities: An overview. In S.M. Hord (Ed.), *Learning together, leading together*. p. 5 - 19 New York: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hord, S. (2007). What is a PLC? *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory Letter*. April, 3–5.
- Huffman, J. (2001). *The role of shared values and vision in creating professional learning communities*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Huffman, J., & Jacobson, A. (2003). Perceptions of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 6(3), 239–250.

- Joyce, B. (2004). How are professional learning communities created? History has a few messages. *Phi Delta Kappan*, September, 76–83.
- Kruse, S. D., Louis, K. S., & Bryk, A. (1995). An emerging framework for analyzing school-based professional community. In K.S. Louis & S.D. Kruse (Eds.), *Professionalism and Community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools* (p. 23 – 42) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lambert, L. (2002). A framework for shared leadership. *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, 59(8), 37-40.
- Leech, D., & Fulton, R. (2002). *The leadership practices of middle and high school principals*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Burlington, VT, August.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1996). Toward an explanation of variation in teachers' perceptions of transformational school leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(4), 512-538.
- Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). *The effects of transformational leadership on organizational conditions and student engagement with school*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, QC, April.
- Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. London: Open University Press.
- Lieberman, A., Darling-Hammond, L., & Zuckerman, D. (1991). *Early lessons in restructuring schools*. New York: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching.

- Little, J. W. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19, 325-340.
- Little, J. W. (2002). "Professional communication and collaboration." In W.D. Hawley & D. L. Rollie (Eds.), *The keys to effective schools* (p. 43 – 55) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lord, R., & Maher, K. (1993). *Leadership and information processing*. London: Routledge.
- Lucas, S. E. (2002). *Transformational leadership: Principals, leadership teams, and school culture*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview*. London, England: Sage Publications.
- Mitchell, C., & Sackney, L. (2001) Building capacity for a learning community. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*. 19, Retrieved December 10, 2005 from <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/mitchellandsackney.html>
- Moller, G. (2004). Building teacher leadership in a traditional school structure. In S.M. Hord (Ed.), *Learning together, leading together*. p. 140 – 150 New York: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Newmann, R. M., & Wehlage, G. G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report of the public and educators by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.
- Newton, R. Fiene, J., & Wagner, C. (1999). *Teacher perceptions of leadership: How do they emerge?*" (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED436817).

- Norris, N. D. (2004) Staff development: Creating a community of learners. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 8(2) 1-12.  
Retrieved April 16, 2007 from, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~iejll>
- Osborne, B., & Price, J. L. (1997). *An examination of organizational culture in public schools*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Memphis, November.
- Richardson, M., Flanigan, J., Lane, K., & Keaster, R. (1992) *Teacher perception of principal behaviours: A research study*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Knoxville, TN, November.
- Sarason, S. B. (1982). *The culture of the school and the problem of change* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Schein, E. H. (1984). Coming to a new awareness of corporate culture. *Sloan Management Review*, 25, pp. 3-16.
- Schein, E. H. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Senge, P., Roberts, C., Ross, R. B., Smith, B. J., & Kleiner, A. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook*. New York: Doubleday.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1990). *Value-added leadership*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994) Organizations or communities? Changing the metaphor changes the theory. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 30(2), 214 – 226  
May.

- Sheppard, B., & Brown, J. (1999). *Leadership approach, the new work of teachers and successful change*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, April.
- Shils, E. A. (1961). Centre and periphery in E.A. Shils (Ed.) *The logic of personal knowledge: Essays presented to Michael Polanyi and Keegan Paul*. London: Routledge.
- Short, P. M., & Greer, J. T. (2002). *Leadership in empowered schools*. Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Silins, H., Mulford, W., & Zarins, S. (2002). Organizational learning and school change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38, 613-642.
- Stoll, L. (1998). Supporting school improvement. *Education Canada*. 38(3), 14-21.
- Stoll, L., & Fink, D. (1996). *Changing our schools: Linking school effectiveness and school improvement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Stolp, S., & Smith, S. C. (1995). *Transforming school culture: Stories, symbols, values and the leader's role*. Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Swann, J. (2003). A popperian approach to research on learning and method in J. Swann & J. Pratt (Eds.), *Educational research in practice: Making sense of methodology*. London: Continuum.
- Tesch, Renata. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis, types and software tools*. New York: Falmer.

Wagner, C., & O'Phelan, M. (1998). *Improving schools through the administration and analysis of school culture audits*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, November.

Willower, D. J. (1984). School principals, school cultures, and school improvement. *Educational Horizons*, 63(1), 35-38.

## Appendix A – Letter of Introduction and Request of Participants



Dear Colleague:

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled Leadership Practice and the Development of Professional Learning Communities that is being conducted by Joanne Pitman. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact me if you have further questions by phone at (780) 402-3390 or by email at Joanne.pitman@gppsd.ab.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Masters of Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. George Bedard. You may contact my supervisor at (403) 329-2725.

The purpose of this research project is to explore and describe ways in which teachers perceive leadership practices as influencing the development of professional learning communities.

Considering the amount of funding and time being spent on the development and implementation of professional learning communities across Alberta and on a larger scale, North America, it is imperative that further study is completed regarding the reality facing schools and leaders as they look to develop professional learning communities. This research will provide further insight into the influence of leadership practices in developing successful professional learning communities. Additionally, it will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the school culture and structures necessary to building and sustaining successful professional learning communities.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a certified teacher currently teaching in the Grande Prairie Public School District. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include completing an interview consisting of 10 questions. This interview will be scheduled at a place and time convenient for you and is expected to be 30 to 40 minutes in duration.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this study are to the state of knowledge of the influence of leadership practices over the development of professional learning communities. Your participation will also allow for further description of the reality of schools as they continue to build professional learning communities.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the dissemination of results.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, participant, school, or school district names will not be used in the reporting of research. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be

protected by secure storage of all data. Access to all recorded and written data and personal information will be restricted to the researcher and a secure transcription service used to transcribe recorded interviews. Data from this study will be disposed of immediately following the completion of data analysis.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a written thesis as well as a formal oral thesis defense.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

If you are willing to participate in this research please contact me at my home phone number or email. Please contact me indicating your interest in participation no later than Wednesday, October 4, 2006 at which time you will be provided with a formal letter of consent.

Thank you for considering my request for participation in this study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Joanne Pitman

## Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

**PARTICIPANT (ADULT) CONSENT FORM****Leadership Practice and the Development of Professional Learning Communities**

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled Leadership Practice and the Development of Professional Learning Communities that is being conducted by Joanne Pitman. I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact me if you have further questions by phone at (780) 402-3390 or by email at Joanne.pitman@gppsd.ab.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Masters of Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. George Bedard. You may contact my supervisor at (403) 329-2725.

The purpose of this research project is to explore and describe ways in which teachers perceive leadership practices as influencing the development of professional learning communities.

Considering the amount of funding and time being spent on the development and implementation of professional learning communities across Alberta and on a larger scale, North America, it is imperative that further study is completed regarding the reality facing schools and leaders as they look to develop professional learning communities. This research will provide further insight into the influence of leadership practices in developing successful professional learning communities. Additionally, it will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the school culture and structures necessary to building and sustaining successful professional learning communities.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a certified teacher currently teaching in the Grande Prairie Public School District. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include completing an interview consisting of 11 questions. This interview will be scheduled at a place and time convenient for you and is expected to be 30 to 40 minutes in duration. Each interview will be recorded.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this study are to the state of knowledge of the influence of leadership practices over the development of professional learning communities. Your participation will also allow for further description of the reality of schools as they continue to build professional learning communities.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be immediately destroyed and will not be used in the dissemination of results.

In terms of protecting your anonymity, participant, school, or school district names will not be used in the reporting of research. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by secure storage of all data. Access to all recorded and written data and personal

information will be restricted to the researcher and a secure transcription service used to transcribe recorded interviews. Data from this study will be disposed of immediately following the completion of data analysis.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a written thesis as well as a formal oral thesis defense.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix C - Interview Protocols and Questions

The purpose of this interview is to gather data regarding the influence of leadership practices in developing professional learning communities.

The working definition of professional learning communities used in my research is:

“A community of professionals exhibiting the following characteristics with the goal of continuous learning for both professionals and students: supportive and shared leadership; collective learning; shared values and vision; supportive conditions; and shared personal practice.”

### **Supportive & Shared Leadership**

*Focus: To find out what teachers think leadership is and if and how widely leadership is shared among administrators and teachers*

Tell me about leadership in this school.

- Who are the leaders?
- What do they do that makes them a leader?
- Is leadership shared? If so, how?
- How do decisions get made?
- How did this decision making process come about? By whom?
- Give an example of how a school decision was made recently.

### **Shared Values & Vision**

*Focus: To find out the leadership practices used to create shared values and vision.*

Tell me about the school’s vision of improvement.

- What process did the school use to create a vision?
- Who decided on this vision? How does the staff feel about it?
- How is the vision communicated?
- How is the vision reflected in the school activities and operation?

### **Collective Learning**

*Focus: To find out ways in which leadership practices assist in having staff members come together to reflect on their work for students and learn from each other.*

Tell me what leadership practices at your school allow for or encourage collective learning?

- How do staff members determine what they want to learn?
- How are staff members encouraged to take risks and be innovative in their teaching?
- How are these experiences shared/celebrated amongst staff?

### **Supportive Conditions**

*Focus: To find out what leadership has put in place (structures) and relationships the staff has with each other that support teachers work together.*

Tell me about the leadership practices in the school that support teachers' work together

- What structures support collective learning?
- When do teachers have time to collaborate?
- Who arranged for those times?
- What resources are available to support teacher learning together?
- What are the leadership practices that encourage cooperation and support amongst staff members?
- What are the leadership practices that build a climate of trust in your school?
- What are the leadership practices which motivate and inspire staff members?

### **Shared Personal Practice**

*Focus: To find out the leadership practices which encourage teachers to share their practice and solicit feedback from each other to improve their teaching (i.e. classroom observation, examining student work).*

Tell me about the leadership practices which encourage teachers to share their practice and gain feedback from one another to improve their teaching.

- Do teachers go into each other's classrooms to observe them at work with students? Why or why not?
- Do teachers work together to examine student work?
- How do you know what to look for in giving peer review and feedback?
- What leadership practices have you observed that assist teachers in increasing shared personal practice?
- How do these processes come about?
- How are they integrated into the school schedule?

### **General**

*Focus: To find out what leadership practices, teachers perceive to be most influential in developing and sustaining a PLC*

In your own opinion, what do you consider to be the most important leadership practices necessary to building and sustaining a PLC?