



Team Leadership: A theoretical study of essential characteristics of leadership factors within a professional learning community (PLC) as perceived by public school principals in western Pennsylvania.

By

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ABSTRACT

Teams function best when the leader is both an active member of the team and is recognized as the leader. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of co-workers learning together and sharing ideas for the organization's betterment. The PLC leader plays an essential role in managing the PLC members and guiding them through the PLC process. This study gathered data from principals who lead PLCs and gain their perspective of effective PLC leadership. A concentration will be on the leadership of the PLC. This study investigated if the essential characteristics of PLC leadership aligned with the transformational leadership characteristics. In this research study, each school principal completed the Multi-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to measure their transformational leadership traits. This tool is a self-rating questionnaire. Each school principal participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher of this study. Current research on PLCs emphasizes the group mindset. This study will examine the leaders of PLCs and determine the essential qualities of PLC leadership. This study has identified five types of PLC leaders (a) safety agent PLC leader, (b) trust designer PLC leader, (c) community creator PLC leader, (d) anticipatory designer PLC leader (e) results-orientated PLC leader.

Keywords: professional learning communities, MLQ (Multi-Leadership Questionnaire), transformational leadership, PLC leadership, team leadership.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

DEDICATION

To my wife Jane, the love of my life and the one who completes me. “Never forget who was there for you when no one else was”

To my daughter Gracie, my future teacher and the most caring little girl I know. “You’re capable of far more than you know. Don’t be afraid to unleash your greatness.”

To my son Ethan, the strongest and most courageous little boy I know. “When life gets harder, challenge yourself to be stronger.”

To my Father, who is the most outstanding educator I have ever known. “To live in the hearts of those left behind is never to die.”

To my Mother, who is the most outstanding teacher of life I have ever known. “When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure.”

To my sisters Robyn and Peggy, who are the guardians of my character and reputation. “The best way to appreciate someone is to imagine your life without them.”

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

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ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF TABLES.....	ix
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Significance of the Study	4
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Delimitations/Limitations.....	8
Operational Definitions	9
Organization.....	10
Professional Learning Communities.....	12
Essential Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities	17
Historical Findings of Transformational Leadership.....	21
Essential characteristics PLC leadership.....	25
Summary.....	30
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	32
Methodology/Research Design.....	34

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Population/Sample	34
Instruments for Data Collection	35
Reliability and Validity.....	37
Data Analysis.....	38
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	42
Introduction.....	41
Data Presentation.....	46
CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS.....	32
Restatement of Purpose of the Study	65
Application to Theory and Practice	66
Impact on Leadership.....	73
Implications for Policy and/or Practice	76
Recommendations for Further Research.....	78
APPENDICIES	93
Appendix A. Permission to Use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ).....	93
Appendix B. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY	94
Appendix C. Consent to participate in research study.....	95
Appendix D: Research Instrument: Demographic Questions for participants	98
Appendix E. Research Instrument: Interview Questions for Participants	99
Appendix F. IRB APPROVAL	100

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1: *Research questions that align with transformational leadership theory*

Table 2: *Pre-study survey data from western Pennsylvania (school districts that responded)*

Table 3: *Participants Demographic Information*

Table 4: *Multi-Leadership Questionnaire Scores (MLQ) compared to the universal norm*

Table 5: *Themes and Operational Definitions*

Table 6: *Safety Agent PLC Leader*

Table 7: *Trust Designer PLC Leader*

Table 8: *Community Builder PLC Leader*

Table 9: *Anticipatory Advisor PLC Leader*

Table 10: *Results Developer PLC Leader*

Table 11: *Frequency of themes in principals by educational level*

Table 12: *Descriptors from interview data of each PLC leader*

Table 13: *Classification of K to 12 principals from this study*

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: *Professional Learning Community (PLC) leadership Scale/Continuum*

Figure 2: *Study's Impact on Leadership*

Figure 3: *Study's Impact on Policy and Practice*

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Team leadership is leading by being part of the team and knowing how to manage that team. Northouse (2016) states that the team's effectiveness relies upon the leadership strength amongst the group. PLCs are groups of co-workers learning together and sharing ideas for the organization's betterment (Dufour, 2004). This study intends to discover essential characteristics of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) leadership. It looks to determine what school principals in western Pennsylvania think are crucial characteristics of PLC leadership that make the PLC useful. This study will examine the perceptions of school principals who are involved with implementing PLCs in their districts. Will the study consider the significant characteristics he/she can exhibit to engage the participants? Data (essential elements) will be collected by interviewing principals who lead PLCs. The researcher in this study will collect the interview data and compare it to the transformational leadership theory. The researcher interviewed principals to determine if there is a correlation between these principals who lead PLCs and transformational leadership.

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), there are six characteristics of PLCs that create an effective climate. These characteristics help the group function as a cohesive group. They recommend there must be a shared mission, vision, as well as shared values. Active participants in a PLC cannot just be a voice; PLC participants must take action to fulfill this vision/mission. The second characteristic is collective inquiry. PLC members have to be willing to “think outside the box” and take the risk. Collaborative teams are another characteristic of PLCs. Team members must be willing to work together. They must be ready to learn from one another for the organization to grow. The fourth characteristic is action orientation. The vision should

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

be authentic (DuFour & Eaker, 1998); do not just leave it as a statement; work toward accomplishing the vision.

Continuous improvement is the fifth characteristic. Members of the PLC should achieve the mission and abide by it daily. The last feature is result-oriented. The PLC's vision should be assessed by all participants involved. When a format is implemented to measure the vision, mission, or values, it provides the PLC with meaning. Once there is meaning, PLC members know what they are accomplishing is significant. The PLC leader needs to understand this before the implementation of the PLC. The PLC leader plays an important role that can have a substantial impact on a PLC's success.

The majority of Professional Learning Communities leaders that will implement PLCs are principals. PLCs need effective leadership. In a case study at a secondary school done by Bezzina (2006), the findings resulted in a “visionary principal who serves as a role model and steward” (p.162). The facilitator must model the appropriate behavior. This visionary principal must include and encourage teachers in shared decision-making responsibilities (Bezzina 2006). The more the teachers are involved in the decision-making process, the more collaboration will take place. The extensive partnership creates one of the six characteristics of PLCs DuFour & Eaker (1998) mentioned, “collaborative team.” The PLC leader's presentation can significantly affect the PLC's success is considered a role model. If the PLC members do not have effective leadership, the PLC can become a source of frustration for teachers. School districts for teachers and administrators must develop professional development to collaborate effectively in PLCs (Thessin and Starr 2011). If teachers in PLCs are not trained on collaborating within a PLC by the PLC leader, the PLC will become ineffective.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

The researcher in this study tries to establish a direct correlation between transformational leadership theory and PLC leadership. According to Northouse (2016), transformational leadership changes and transforms people. PLC leadership should transform teachers. The results from this study could establish that being a transformational leader while facilitating a PLC could create a resourceful, practical, and well-organized PLC. In combination with PLCs' six effective characteristics, these results could add another aspect to effective Professional Learning Communities. This research study produced five types of PLC leaders and generated a leadership continuum for PLC leaders that parallels Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1943).

Problem Statement

The research for Professional Learning Communities (PLC) is focused on essential characteristics of the active group of people within the (PLC). The majority of the literature describes crucial elements of the PLC as a group. The research guides the PLC's learning by demonstrating a successful PLC that will benefit teachers, knowledge, and student achievement. There is limited research on PLC leadership. This research study is attempting to provide literature on essential characteristics of PLC leadership.

The literature gap regarding the existing research on PLCs is that the more significant part of the research concentrates on group dynamics. The study describes how PLC's function as a group to be valid. The research regarding the leadership of PLCs describes the roles or responsibilities of PLC leadership. This study will examine the literature gap and discover PLC leaders' leadership styles and explore if transformational leadership draws a parallel with PLC leaders' essential characteristics. Transformational leadership is concerned with enhancing followers' performance and growing followers to their most total ability (Avolio, 1999; Bass &

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Avolio, 1990a). Principals that are leaders of PLCs should be concerned with improving their teachers' performance in the PLC. Improving teacher performance will also help student achievement. When teachers learn, students learn.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify the essential characteristics of principal leadership for a Professional Learning Community and determine if this leadership correlates with the transformational leadership theory. According to Cherkowski (2016), more research is “needed to understand what it means for principals to work with teachers as adult learners in PLCs” (p. 524). The principal must create an engaging, structured, organized, and ongoing environment for the PLC participants. The principal must be aware of behaviors of effective leadership within the PLC. If they are not mindful of these behaviors, the PLC will breakdown. When the PLC breaks down, we have a group of teachers not collaborating and not focused on a common goal, helping students learn. The PLC is not effective when this happens. Principal leadership can either make or break the effectiveness of the PLC.

This research study will focus on the school principal, who is the individual frequently assigned to the role of leading the PLC. This study will determine what the essential characteristics of principal leadership of a PLC are. This research study produced five types of PLC leaders and generated a leadership continuum for PLC leaders. This study will also determine if transformational leadership is a practical leadership type to guide PLCs by examining each of the principal participants' Multi-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) results.

Significance of the Study

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

The significance of this study is to understand what makes Professional Learning Community leadership effective. When educators understand the essential characteristics of effective PLC leadership, we can create a universal leadership structure to implement PLCs in schools. “Off-site” professional development may not be motivating enough for teachers to change their reasoning or teaching methods. Even when professional development is introduced “on-site,” it can still be ineffective. There may be excellent leadership for the PLC, but it may not be ongoing. Once that training is complete, there is no way to measure what participants have learned (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012).

Teachers spend a significant amount of time in their classrooms not collaborating with their colleagues (Nivens, 2021). Principals should understand this and try to create effective professional learning communities but do not make the right connections to implement the PLC. Not understanding effective PLC leadership is a problem with the research on PLCs. There is not much emphasis on the direction of the person leading the PLC. This study will focus on that problem. Once they comprehend the principal leader's essential characteristics in a PLC, they can expound upon them and create effective PLC leadership.

Easton (2016) argues that creating effective PLCs is very simple. “Strategic accountability” is the factor that “distinguishes effective from ineffective PLCs” (p.44). As a principal leader of a PLC, what does this mean? The principal should understand that the members of the PLC need to be held accountable. If they are not held responsible, the PLC will be ineffective. For the principal to bring to mind strategic accountability to the PLC members, he/she must focus on three factors, something they do to themselves, for themselves and others in the PLC, and not a top-down approach (Easton 2016). Essentially, members of the PLC have to want to become

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

better educators, help others become improved instructors, improve student achievement, and this cannot be an initiative that is just a “requirement.”

The overall significance of this study is to collect principal perspectives of essential characteristics of PLC leadership. Research from the past on PLCs has mainly focused on PLCs' valuable attributes as a group, not the PLC's leadership.

Theoretical Framework

This study's framework looks through a theoretical lens using Benard Bass' (1985) transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory is the theoretical framework of the study. This theory has four factors: the “4 I’s” of transformational leadership, including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four factors guide the research questions of this study. Transformational leadership theory was selected by the researcher of this study to determine if transformational leadership draws a parallel with PLC leadership (Bass 1985).

Bass (1985) describes idealized influence as guiding and inspiring subordinates to self-growth. This factor focuses on leaders as solid mentors. The followers want to replicate their leader (Northouse, 2016). Idealized influence comes with two measurement components: attributional and behavioral. Attribution is the view followers have of their leaders, and behavior is observing the leader’s behavior by their followers (Northouse 2016).

The second factor of the transformational leadership theory is inspirational motivation. This factor inspires followers to be committed to the shared vision of the organization. The followers feel very motivated by the leader. The leader is outstanding at “pre-game” speeches that motivate the followers to perform for the organization's betterment (Northouse 2016).

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Intellectual stimulation is the third factor of transformational leadership theory that Bass (1985) discussed. This factor encourages followers to be imaginative and innovative (Northouse 2016). This factor also empowers followers to challenge the leader's philosophies and the organization for its betterment (Northouse 2016).

The final aspect of the transformational leadership theory is individualized consideration. In this factor, the leader treats each follower in a thoughtful and particular way (Northouse 2016). The leader cares about his/her followers and accepts them for who they are as a person. This type of leader is a good listener and provides a supportive climate for the followers.

The worldview that the researcher for this study will identify is social constructivism. This worldview aligned with interpretivism (Creswell, 2007). Social constructivism's objective for research purposes is to trust as much as possible the participants' beliefs of the situation (Creswell 2007). This study will rely on the participant's views of essential characteristics of effective PLC leadership. The researcher of this study will identify if these beneficial characteristics correlate with transformational leadership. The researcher of this study will also establish a leadership continuum for PLC leadership. The researcher's essential attributes from the data in this study will describe five different PLC leaders. Each PLC leader will have a significant description based on the data collected. A leadership continuum has been developed according to the coding by the researcher of this study.

Another aspect of the worldview the researcher will take regarding this study is interpretivism. According to Butin (2010), interpretivism is an answer to positive views of the world. The researcher is investigating positive perspectives of PLC leadership. The results will lead to PLC leadership themes' essential characteristics and determine if they correlate with

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

transformational leadership. These positive results can establish practical leadership skills for PLC leaders.

Research Questions

The research questions that are guiding this study are based on Bass (1985) transformational leadership model:

1. What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning communities?
2. How does the building principal or other leadership influence the work of the PLC?
3. How do leaders and participants describe what motivates them to be part of the PLC?
4. How do leaders and participants describe what intellectually stimulates them to be creative and innovative as part of the PLC?
5. How do leaders and participants describe an effective PLC climate?

Delimitations/Limitations

The delimitations are the number of school districts in western Pennsylvania that implement Professional Learning Communities is limited. A pre-study survey was sent to one hundred and ten superintendents in western Pennsylvania in December 2018 to determine which school districts use PLCs. Thirty-two superintendents responded to the pre-study survey. Once the researcher received the results, a selection process was completed with school districts that met the criteria. For a school district that implements the PLC process in western Pennsylvania

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

to meet the requirements for this study, they must use PLCs and have sufficiently trained principals who lead the PLC.

The limitation is selecting principals that are influential leaders of PLCs. This study is seeking essential characteristics of effective PLC leadership. In the pre-study survey, the superintendents were asked if they have a principal who is an effective leader of PLCs in their district. The superintendent's opinion is a perception by the superintendent in the selection process of influential PLC leaders. Other participants involved in PLCs may have a different perception of the PLC leadership by the principal. The superintendent could believe the principal is an effective PLC leader. Another PLC member could have a different opinion of that principal's leadership skills within the PLC.

Another limitation of this study is the population sample was only the principals who lead PLCs. They were evaluating their leadership characteristics. The people they manage in these PLCs may have a different perspective of their leadership. The PLC members were not involved in this study. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire was only a self-assessment of their leadership skills.

Operational Definitions

The operational definitions of this study are listed below. These definitions are not universally recognized and sometimes misinterpreted (Roberts, 2010). They will be defined based on how they are used in this study.

Team leadership-the need to distribute the task and responsibilities of leadership up, down, and across the hierarchy (Pearce and Conger, 2003).

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Professional Learning Community (PLC)-A community of professionals emphasizes learning rather than teaching, working together, holding yourself responsible for results (DuFour, 2004).

Collaborative Learning-A small group, class, community, or society discovering something, problem-solving, or learning from lifelong work practice together (Dillenbourg 1999).

Transformational leadership-leadership that changes and transforms people (Northouse 2016)

Essential characteristics- a unique trait or feature of the school principal who leads the PLC

A pre-study survey-a survey done before the study to determine which schools in western Pennsylvania use Professional Learning Communities

PLC Leadership-this is the school principal that leads or facilitates a professional learning community. The PLC leader is a situational leader who evaluates and responds with determination to all circumstances with optimism and clarity with all followers in every event continually (Kanold 2011).

Qualitative Research- The research design gathers non-numerical data by using methodologies such as interviews and document analysis (McEwan and McEwan 2003).

The multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) instrument was used to measure three leadership styles by the researcher of this study: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Hauserman and Stick 2013).

Organization

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Chapter 1 of this study describes why the research on leadership of Professional Learning Communities was studied. The problem statement of the study is intended to acquire more research on the direction of PLC leadership. The research on this leadership is scarce. The study aims to identify principals' essential characteristics related to PLC leadership and determine if it correlates with transformational leadership. The significance of the study is to conclude if transformational leadership creates effective PLC leadership. The theoretical framework is based on Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory. The research questions in this chapter are based on Bass's model of the transformational leadership theory. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985). A limitation of this study is determining which PLC leaders are transformational. Chapter 2 is a review of literature that has four themes. Those themes are professional learning communities, essential characteristics of professional learning communities, historical findings of transformational leadership, crucial aspects of professional learning communities' leadership. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research study's foundation is to determine a professional learning community (PLC) leader's effectiveness.

A professional learning community is an extended learning opportunity involving a group of colleagues in a particular field or workplace. The group members meet regularly to collaborate (work with one another), share their expertise, learn from experts, and raise the whole group's skill and knowledge levels (Keenan, 2016)

This literature review is grounded in two main topics. The first is an in-depth look at the essential characteristics of a PLC as a group. The second is the effective leadership styles of the

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

PLC leaders within the PLC group. This literature review will be concentrating on these two areas. The first one will be transformational leadership. Northouse (2016) suggested that transformational leadership is the practice that alters and transforms people. This type of leadership style can inspire its followers to work beyond expectations (Northouse 2016). The second area of concentration of this literature review will be literature describing how leaders function within the PLC.

Professional Learning Communities

There are influential studies on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that started the research and implementation of these collaborative teams. The connoisseur for PLCs is Richard DuFour. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), there are six characteristics of effective PLCs. The first one is shared mission, visions, and values. These characteristics are what educators value and strive to establish (DuFour and Eaker 1998). Everyone must “buy-in” to the mission of the PLC.

The second characteristic of effective PLCs is collective inquiry. In this stage, group members examine and adapt the organization's principles to make changes that are momentous in cultural change (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). The PLC must function as a team examining and evaluating circumstances that can change the culture for a more efficient organization.

The third characteristic is collaborative teams. PLCs are organized this way. They are teams that work together for a common goal. All team members must collaborate and have the same focus or vision for the organization (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

The fourth characteristic is action orientation and experimentation. PLCs are concentrating on the issues and engaging in the obstructions of the organization. PLCs are reluctant to allow

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

inaction (DuFour and Eaker,1998). The ultimate goal of a PLC is to be a change agent for the betterment of the organization.

The fifth goal of PLCs effectiveness is continuous improvement. Four questions propel this characteristic DuFour and Eaker (1998): (a) what is our fundamental purpose? (b) what do we hope to achieve? (c) what are our strategies for becoming better? (d) what criteria will we use to assess our improvement efforts? These questions should drive the PLC toward improvement within the organization. The mission and vision of an organization should be an emphasis on improvement.

The last characteristic of a PLC is results orientation. These six characteristics are based on actions, not plans (DuFour and Eaker,1998). Collaborating with team members for the betterment of the organization must show some results. The problem the PLC is converging on must be a positive, measurable outcome. Results from working and learning together can be intrinsically motivating. These six characteristics are an excellent foundation for a PLC implementation.

PLC Learning

The main concentration in school districts should be learning and academia. Students should always be learning in many different aspects. Also, teachers should continue to be life-long learners. A PLC foundation is an excellent initiative for teachers and administrators to understand. According to DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010), “members of PLCs are action-oriented: they move quickly to turn aspirations into action and visions into reality” (p.12). Members of PLCs realize they must apply the knowledge they have gained from PLC collaboration and “do” differently if they want effective results (DuFour et al. 2010). The results

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

will not change if things are not done differently, and the effectiveness of the PLC will diminish. The more they “learn by doing,” the better results will be.

According to DuFour (2004), three questions guide PLCs when professional educators collaborate. The first one asks, (a) what do we want each student to learn? The second one is (b) how we will know when each student has learned it? Finally, (c) how will we respond when a student experiences difficulty learning? When implementing the design of PLC, educators must consider that this will help the students learn. Administrators cannot just assemble groups of teachers. The content for teachers must be effective strategies for teachers to help improve student achievement or organizational improvement. If the content is meaningful, there will be more collaboration. With more collaboration, teachers will learn strategies to help their students improve their achievement. Once teachers bring to fruition that what they are using their training for will help their students learn, they will be more engaged. Administrators should create communities to promote a shared culture (DuFour, 2004). Once a collaborative culture is established, teachers can take place, who then transfer it to students. A collaborative culture will lead to improved student achievement.

The second question is, “how will we know when each student has learned?” (DuFour, 2004). If the PLC is collaborating on increasing keystone biology test scores, the PLC leader can create a PLC that concentrated on remediating students who were not proficient. School improvement can increase with collaboration by the teachers. The partnership gives teachers an environment where they can share ideas and discuss topics to help students learn more effectively. In this case, looking at data that shows student weakness on specific anchors in biology could be the area of focus for this PLC. Teachers could work together on remediation strategies to strengthen students’ skills in those weak areas.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

The last question DuFour focused on is “how will we respond when a student has difficulty learning?” (DuFour, 2004) Each student within a school learns differently. Student's learning differences can be a challenging task that is very consuming to remedy. The answer to this last question separates learning communities from old-fashioned schools (DuFour, 2004). Schools have a vision for all students; PLC's have a focus on a specific problem. Teachers and administrators should collaborate on this particular problem. Teachers need to collaborate more. PLC's can help teachers collaborate. Teachers need to stop avoiding collaboration (DuFour, 2004). Collaboration helps students. An educator's main job is to assist students. Teacher preparation programs should concentrate on PLCs for training purposes. It could be a valuable experience for student teachers.

Creating a meaningful collaboration culture may be the most significant aspect for enduring functional school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). PLC's should always be motivated by school improvement. The emphasis in any PLC should be an intricate part of the school culture that can help school improvement. Some examples of this could be a book study on dealing with difficult parents, developing an instructional model, or coping with Data-Rich/Information Poor DRIP models. However, they must apply the six principles of effective PLCs to these examples (Dufour, 2004).

Richard DuFour has also gathered a tremendous amount of data on PLCs. He consults school districts on how to implement a PLC process within their district. He has found the five areas of implementation that assist these districts in creating a culture of collaboration—the district functions as a PLC. DuFour (2012) believes that initially, districts must explore the process of PLC implementation. “Rely on dialogue and conversation” of the PLC process. It is not just a “how-to” or power-point presentation to implement a PLC. Second, distribute leadership,

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

working with the principals to find teacher leaders for the PLC process. The following recommendation by DuFour (2012) would be to clarify the vision of the PLC. There are sub-categories for this: (a) Collaborate on the shared vision of the PLC (b) create a viable curriculum (c) monitor student learning with balanced assessments (d) analyze evidence of student assessment (e) create a system that supports struggling students, so there is no loss of new instruction. These five sub-categories create a vision that is measurable and attainable. The fourth area in building a district that functions as a PLC is training and developing PLC leaders. The leader must be helpful in the PLC to operate successfully within the district. The last area of concentration for creating a culture of collaboration through the PLC process is maintaining the focus on the PLC process itself. The PLC process should be a “check and balance” to ensure the PLC process keeps the essential characteristics for optimal functioning.

School districts are continually trying to improve for the betterment of the students. DuFour and Marzano (2011) affirm that the best plan for improving school culture is designing educators' shared role to operate as members of a professional learning community (PLC). If students need critical instruction to create high-order thinkers, there must be an engrained job-embedded learning process for adults that support their learning (DuFour and Marzano, 2011). For PLC to be functioning at a high-level, people within the organization must be willing to change traditional practices (DuFour and Marzano, 2011).

Two words in PLC are learning and communities. They emphasize on learning is twofold. Staff members learn how to deal with student learning needs through effective instructional strategies or new materials. The group knows how to learn collaboratively incessantly (Hord, 2009). An example of this could be a group of math teachers reviewing state exam scores and realizing together that the overall low exam scores are not due to mathematical computation. In

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

the prompt writing, students had to answer on how they solved each problem. Together these math teachers develop a writing exercise to incorporate in their daily lessons.

The word community is known to many people as a group of people. In this educational setting, the PLC is the organization defined as staff members who have a united purpose, common concern for the learning, and act with honesty (Hord, 2009). The staff that is part of this community wants to continue learning together, resolving student needs problems together.

Essential Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Teachers today have essential data, which is positive, but many do not know how to access it or even use it. A PLC where teachers collaborate regarding data could be valuable and practical. According to DuFour (2004), learning” is the key to establishing an effective PLC. If teachers learn from their collaboration with other teachers, they can help their students learn. It not only will spark an interest for teachers to learn, but it also models appropriate instruction. When candidates are engaged in group learning, they can acquire ways to apply what they are learning to their teaching (Hoaglund et al., 2014). As educational leaders incorporate PLCs within a school culture, we make sure that PLCs will be applicable for teachers and students.

Administrators guiding PLCs can use many strategies. Kruse and Gates (2016) examined “Applying a High-Reliability Organization Perspective” to PLCs. There are five crucial characteristics of high-reliability organizations (HRO) (Kruse & Gates, 2016). Utilizing these characteristics can outline a model for a successful PLC. The first characteristic of an HRO is a concern with failure. Leaders of PLCs should find ways to minimize the risk that will produce ineffective PLCs. PLC leaders should apply the second characteristic from HRO’s to PLCs to simplify the risk to PLCs. Getting teacher input about what can make a better PLC. What do they want to learn? Collaboration must be engaging and fulfilling to the teachers in the PLC. A

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

partnership that is fulfilling and engaging will help avoid failure. Third, how can this help students? Teachers need to see results. What they learn needs to transfer into products when they are working with their students. There has to be a measurement of effectiveness. The fourth characteristic of an HRO that should align to PLCs is learning from failure. Learning from failures establishes a strong culture for learning (Krause and Gates, 2016). Teacher discussions within a PLC teach others how to deal with similar situations. The final HRO perspective that PLC leaders can apply to PLCs is the team approach to problem-solving. Educational leaders should emphasize this when designing a PLC. They should identify scenarios or resources that can encourage healthy discussions regarding similar problems within their classrooms. If leaders consider strategies or resources that encourage discussions, the team approach can be used by these PLC leaders to solve issues that teachers are dealing with as a whole. PLCs are for adult learning.

Student learning improves when teachers in PLCs have a constant emphasis on their education. The design of PLCs should enhance adult learning, and according to this literature, specifically DuFour (2004), they will improve student learning. The data proves that PLCs were effective at Adlai Stevenson High School in Chicago, Illinois. For instance, if we look at one aspect of PLC implementation improvement, ACT scores improved at Stevenson High School. In 1990 the mean composite score on the ACT increased from 22.0 to 26.5 (DuFour, 2014). It even propelled past the mean composite score for Illinois students by 5.9. Invaluable professional development promotes learning amongst PLCs, schools, and districts, developing a school culture where collaboration can benefit the organization (DuFour, 2014).

Student-teacher candidates learned from practitioners; it is evident that these practitioners or veteran teachers make group teaching a positive experience within a PLC. These veteran

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

teachers can provide valuable skills, instructional methods, and classroom management techniques for new teachers. Nevertheless, induction programs for new teachers are not the same as PLCs. PLCs have a more guided approach. They are more focused on the teacher instead of learning (Hoaglund et al., 2014). That is the difference between teacher induction programs and PLCs.

PLCs share some common characteristics. The first one being shared visions and beliefs. For the staff to focus on student learning and improve or grow, they must expand their knowledge. The second characteristic is shared supportive leadership. Administrators and faculty make collaborative decisions. The third characteristic is collective learning and application. The community will decide what to learn together and apply it to student learning. The fourth characteristic is supportive conditions. Supportive conditions divide into structural factors and relational factors. The physical space and time must be designated for the PLCs by the PLC leader. The relational aspects must project openness, caring, interpersonal connections, and trust. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), the fifth and final fundamental characteristic is a mutual personal practice. In this joint personal practice, all members of the PLC apply feedback to one another. PLC members provide and accept feedback from one another and the PLC leader. Then conclusions are made based on collaborative learning. The vision placed into action, and the results are measured (Hord and Sommers, 2008).

PLCs are used all across the world in schools. Superintendents, principals, and teachers internationally have their perceptions about essential PLC characteristics. In Chen's (2012) study, findings indicated Israeli superintendent's, principal's, and teachers' perceptions of PLCs. All fifteen superintendents in this study considered the principal the most significant influencer of PLCs. The principal should be open, accommodating, continually developing, and provide

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

resources and space for the PLC members (Chen, 2012).

According to the ten principals in this study, there should be a receptive environment where PLC members learn together. These principals believed that shared leadership defines involving others in learning. Involving others in this process means “the principal has a great responsibility to enable people to express their opinions and encourage them to share their knowledge” Chen (2012) (p.725). The principals also stated that there should be a collaboration in learning (Chen, 2012).

There were ten teachers involved in this study. All these teachers felt that the principal was paramount in leading the school in the direction of a PLC (Chen, 2012). The teachers credited excessive importance regarding the relationship with the staff and the principal that helps create an atmosphere that inspires and challenges them to work effectively in the PLC (Chen, 2012).

Brown and Isaacs (1994) describe professional learning communities as a school establishment where PLC members plan collaboratively, take action, and evaluate student achievement and school-wide enhancement. These three aspects of PLC characteristics seem to be universal across the research of PLC characteristics. The PLC should work together to address school problems to improve the culture and climate of the school. They should work together but take steps to solve these problems and evaluate these problems.

Harris (2003) defined a professional learning community (PLC) as places where the PLC leader created a shared appreciation of purpose. Teachers participate in collective work and recognize dual responsibility for the action they take together for their work. Harris (2003) emphasizes “collective” work for members of the PLC. Decision-making is a shared responsibility when the PLC concludes what the solution to the problem is.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

PLC characteristics emphasize collaboration among the PLC members. Mitchell and Sackney (2001) noted a need for teachers to collaborate and reflect that is engrossed a “learning-oriented approach that addresses the problems of teaching and learning” (p.2). Teachers spend too much time isolated in their classrooms. If they learned together, they could become more effective teachers. Teachers learning together is why Mitchell and Sackney (2001) stress teacher collaboration. Teachers can work through classroom problems together.

There are core beliefs regarding PLCs. Most researchers or educators have a similar view of what the essential characteristics are of effective PLCs. The most common framework for PLC features was created by Richard Dufour and Robert Eaker (1998). Servage (2008) describes the attributes in three ways. Staff development is essential to student learning. Teachers working together in collaboration create the most effective PLCs. The PLCs' collaborative work should investigate and solve problem solves in day-to-day teaching (Servage, 2008). Servage's (2008) definition meets the fundamental beliefs of Dufour and Eaker's (1998) PLC framework.

Historical Findings of Transformational Leadership

The roots of transformational leadership began in 1947. Weber (1947) used the words charisma and direction simultaneously. Weber (1947) stated that “a certain quality of an individual personality under which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (p.358). He described this as “charismatic authority.” Having these qualities of leadership can transform the followers. Weber (1947) focused on three areas within this study: from a sociological perspective, that attributed to the rise of organizations, growth of laws, development of markets, and a change in authority. A change in the character of management is where charismatic leadership originated. This lead to more research on transformational leadership.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

The term transformational leadership originated in the work of (Downton 1973). The term transformational leadership was first cited in this work by (Downton 1973). Downton (1973) recognized that the trend is to reflect on leadership due to the environmental influences, particularly group standards and follower anticipations. He mentioned this as an emphasis on the followers.

Another early study that expanded the research on transformational leadership was (House, 1976). In his study, in which he concentrated on charismatic leadership theory, three areas were related to transformational leadership, charismatic leaders' personalities, actions of charismatic leaders, and conditional factors associated with charismatic leadership's effectiveness. In House's charismatic leadership theory, he suggests that leaders perform in unique ways to influence their followers positively (Northouse 2016). Effective charismatic leadership's unique ways were being a robust role model, showing competence, articulating goals, communicating high expectations, expressing confidence, and arouses motives (House, 1976). At the end of this study, he concluded or proposed eight areas for further research (House, 1976). The research then advanced on transformational leadership.

Political sociologist James M. Burns attempted to connect leadership and followership (Northouse, 2016). According to Burns (1978), leadership is multiple persons engaged with others so that leaders and followers endorse one another to greater levels of enthusiasm and values. Burns believed that the followers' needs are more important than the leader's power (Northouse, 2016). Followers' needs being more important than the leaders' ability is one of the seminal studies that started the research on transformational leadership. Burns (1978) established a difference between transformational leaders and transactional leaders. Transactional leaders are familiar. Transactional leaders supervise organization and

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

performance. A reward system for performance incorporated by the leader motivates the follower to participate. Transformational leaders are exceptional. Charisma by the leader inspires the followers to participate.

Another contributor to the perception of transformational leadership was Bennis and Nanus (1985); in their seminal study, *Leaders-the strategies for taking charge*, they interviewed 90 leaders and asked them, “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”, “What past events most influenced your leadership approach?” and “What were the critical points in your career?” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). They developed four areas from the data they collected: attention through vision, meaning through communication, trust through positioning, and self-deployment (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). The idea must be reasonable and measurable. Interaction and clear communication produced importance and significance for people (Bennis and Nanus 1985). Getting a message or vision across is crucial at every level in the organization. Trust is one of the main factors in all leadership. Trust is the bonding agent that sustains organizational integrity (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). According to Bennis and Nanus's (1985) research, the final strategy is self-deployment. As a manager, the leader must take care of themselves to lead effectively; if they do not, this may harm the followers. Effective leadership is about who the leader is as a person. (Bennis and Nanus, 1985).

A framework for transformational leadership

According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders motivate followers to do more than expected in three interrelated ways: (a) raising our level of awareness about designated outcomes and ways of reaching them (b) transcending our self-interest for the sake of the team or organization (c) moving followers to concentrate on high-level needs.” There are four leadership factors in Bass's (1985) transformational leadership model. They are the four “I’s” of

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence (charisma), (b) inspirational motivation (c) intellectual stimulation (d) individualized consideration. These four factors are grounded in this current research study. These four factors developed the research questions for this current study.

The first factor of transformational leadership, idealized influence, is an emotional factor. It spotlights charismatic leadership. Bass (1985) stated, “charismatic leaders are transformational in that they, themselves, have a much to do with the further arousal and articulation of such feelings of need among followers” (p.46). This factor measures two components, an attributional component and a behavioral component (Northouse, 2016). These two components emphasize follower’s perceptions they have of the leaders and the leader’s observable behavior.

The second factor is inspirational motivation. In this leadership factor, leaders are transformational because they can inspire followers through encouragement and dedication to their vision and values. Transformational leadership creates an appreciation for team spirit (Northouse, 2016).

The following leadership factor of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation. This factor of transformational leadership produces followers that are creative and inventive. The transformational leader is pre-emptive in their thinking rather than spontaneous (Bass, 1985). Being proactive and not reactive creates equivalent followers. The culture of the organization becomes collaborative.

The final leadership factor for transformational leadership is individualized consideration. Individualized consideration is a focus on the follower's needs. The leader provides an understanding atmosphere in which they listen compassionately to each follower's needs

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

(Northouse, 2016). The leader shows he/she care about the followers and their needs. The leader knows how to use the follower's strengths, encouraging self-assurance in the follower, developing the follower's unique talents, and offering learning opportunities (Bass 1985).

In, *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner (1987) maintain that their work is “how leaders accomplish remarkable things in their organizations. They interviewed 1300 managers and asked them to describe their “personal best” experiences as leaders (Northouse, 2016). Kouzes and Posner (1987) developed a model of leadership that had five fundamental factors of leadership. Those five factors were: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way and encourage the heart. An effective leader challenges the process to get new procedures, policies, and amenities adopted (Kouzes and Posner, 1987). The leader challenges the process to make the organization better. Creating a shared vision influences people's behavior (Northouse, 2016). When leaders enable others to act, they make the followers feel resilient, efficient, and loyal (Kouzes and Posner, 1987). When leaders model the way, they must have a clear vision. They must be clear about their “own principles and viewpoints (Northouse, 2016). The last part of their model is encouraging the heart. Leaders must recognize and reward the people of the organization for their valuable work. It is the leaders' job to steer their followers in the right direction to show them they can succeed (Kouzes and Posner, 1987). This leadership model has transformational leadership influences.

Essential characteristics PLC leadership

Professional Learning Community leaders have to be well-organized to manage a helpful learning community of educators. According to Kanold (2011), there are five disciplines of PLC leadership for effective PLC implementation. The first discipline a PLC leader must have is vision and values. Well-trained PLC leaders can create an image that leads to the future success

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

of the PLC. This vision helps the PLC members become a cohesive unit focused on improving school and district systems. The PLC leader must be skilled at identifying PLC values. The PLC leader should concentrate on achieving the vision. The vision should be measurable. The concept should produce an outcome that yields progress.

The second discipline of PLC leadership is accountability and celebration (Kanold, 2011). These leadership disciplines are complexly coordinated and self-reliantly united. PLC leaders must hold PLC members accountable for student results and actions toward the school's vision (Kanold, 2011). The PLC leader must celebrate the success for continual effectiveness when the PLC accomplishes the results. The leadership of the PLC must recognize this.

The third discipline of PLC leadership is service and sharing. The PLC leader must exhibit individual responsibility to the collective vision and influence the PLC by language, actions, and inactions. Within the PLC, it is the leader's job to collaborate and construct a collective knowledge that will create a substantial shared vision (Kanold, 2011).

The fourth discipline of PLC leadership is reflection and balance. This leadership discipline is deliberately and purposefully involving in and freeing from inspiring activities (Kanold, 2011). A PLC leader must manage their time well and reflect on that time management. The reason for this is to keep the focus on the PLC. The PLC leader wants to focus their energy on the PLC to maintain effectiveness. Other leadership distractions can reduce that personal energy on the PLC, which will lead to the PLC's ineffectiveness.

The fifth and final leadership discipline of the PLC leadership is inspiration and influence (Kanold, 2011). Your efforts as a PLC leader “inspire, notice, and develop others to become your PLC legacy” (Kanold, 2011) (p.180). PLC leaders are passionate about inspiring others to

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

focus on a purpose far more significant than themselves. This type of leadership parallels transformational leadership.

In “The Role of the Principal in Leading Professional Learning Communities” (2009), principals should also understand each PLC member's sensitive issues. Developing trust can help members of the PLC realize that the PLC leader is meeting their emotional needs. Once PLC members realize this, they are very willing to take a new route in constructing their teaching practice (The Role of the Principal in Leading Professional Learning Communities, 2009). Understanding each PLC member’s emotional needs as a PLC leader can be a crucial characteristic of PLC leadership. Effective leadership of PLCs can lead to effective PLCs. PLC leaders must be the right influencers for the maximum effectiveness of a PLC.

In *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*, Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, and Switzer (2013), there is a description of four tactics to help people enjoy what they dislike. These tactics would be supportive for PLC leadership and effective implementation. The first tactic would be to allow for choice. “Concentrate on what people are saying and then structure the change process into their conditions (Grenny et al., 2013). As a PLC leader, listen to PLC members and then focus on the PLC's objective in their terms.

The second tactic would be generating life-like experiences (Grenny et al., 2013). The purpose of this current study is to discover effective characteristics of PLC leadership. Allowing PLC members to lead a PLC “creates a direct experience.” The results of this study could guide the PLC members to effective PLC leadership.

The third tactic to “help people love what they hate” is to share inspiring stories (Grenny et al., 2013). To influence PLC members, the PLC leader could share stories that are meaningful

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

regarding PLC implementation. The leader could easily find research data that has results of successful schools that implement PLCs. This research could inspire a culture of PLCs within the school district. It has to be meaningful data.

The final tactic is to make it entertaining (Grenny et al., 2013). If part of the PLC process is enjoyable, the PLC leader will likely create an effective PLC. There are four elements for producing an enjoyable game (Grenny et al. 2013):

1. Keep Score-This gives people frequent feedback
2. Competition-satisfaction you are achieving a goal.
3. Constant improvement-how are you progressing.
4. Control-game players have all the control.

As a PLC leader, one can easily create activities or games that can influence PLC members to participate and “buy-in” to the vision, values, and objects of the PLC.

Steele and Whitaker (2019) believe principals should encourage knowledge in their buildings among staff. Some vital realities for principals are establishing a culture of collaboration where teachers discover and influence one another (Steele and Whitaker 2019). If the principal considers these crucial realities regarding collaboration, a PLC can be successful in their districts.

Not only can principals lead Professional Learning Communities, but teachers can guide PLCs. According to Vanblaere and Devos (2018), teachers think of their department head as someone who wants them to unite and work together as a whole rather than focus on faculty and student growth. This study concentrates on the group dynamics of the PLC. Teachers who lead PLCs as department heads are more engrossed in how teachers collaborate within the PLC.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Their concentration is on the group, not the student achievement. Department chairs that lead PLCs believe that student achievement is essential, but the PLC that collaborates efficiently is valuable.

Supportive leadership is a characteristic of PLC leadership. Owens (2016) gave an example of supportive leadership in his study. The PLC was engaged in professional learning conversations regarding feedback given to students. Other staff members would observe and videotape the situation where students were getting feedback from their teachers. The PLC leadership intentionally created conditions allowing teachers to encounter other teachers based on how they did their work (Owens, 2016). This supportive leadership characteristic gave PLC members decision-making power and shared leadership. Shared leadership created a positive emotion for PLC members (Owens, 2016).

Principal leadership of PLCs can concentrate on decision-making. Principals that lead PLCs can make decisions that affect the PLC. Rowe and Mason (1987) described four types of decision-making styles that could parallel PLC leadership. The four decision-making styles are directive, behavioral, analytical, and conceptual (Rowe and Mason, 1987). Directive decision-making focuses on practical decisions, using insufficient data, and rarely have any resolution. Behavioral decision-making focuses on collective decisions, support, and allowing simple control. Analytical decision-making focuses on practical decisions, wants as much information as possible, and considers numerous solutions. Conceptual decision-making has a focus on social judgments and displays an emphasis on people. There is shared decision-making.

Williams (2006) performed a study of principal's leadership qualities to gather data before implementing PLCs in a school district. Williams (2006) implemented a survey for a leadership reform initiative in New Brunswick. The study's purpose was to determine if Rowe and Mason

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

(1987) decision-making styles reflected a collaborative approach and determine if patterns occur based on school type or gender. According to this study that monitored the principal's decision-making styles at a partial elementary school, elementary school, elementary/middle school, and senior school, the preferred decision-making style was conceptual decision-making styles. This type of decision-making style is big picture thinkers who like to take a risk. The sample size for this study was 166 principals. The data collected from this study would help principals understand how their decision-making styles would affect PLC implementation.

Summary

After analyzing and synthesizing the literature regarding Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and PLCs leadership, the researcher concludes that educational leaders must create engaging PLCs. It has to be information that is valid for teachers to learn. What teachers are learning in a PLC must be measurable. They have to see results from their students. Teachers should have input. Their voice matters, or it will be a waste of their time. If it becomes a waste of their time, teachers will find reasons not to collaborate.

After reviewing transformational leadership and transformational leadership's essential characteristics, some conclusions are that a PLC leader must have a clear vision. The PLC leader must be charismatic, but not completely necessary. The PLC leader must listen to their followers and be willing to put the organization's vision above their self-interest. The content or objective of the PLC must be intellectually energizing. Set goals and achieve them as a PLC. The PLC leader should monitor and show the progress of the plan the PLC is working to change.

Overall, this study will discover essential characteristics of leadership in PLCs. By creating a successful leadership PLC model, organizations can become highly effective at solving problems and collaborating. PLC's are a valuable instrument for school culture. There are so many

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

notions that PLCs can improve. The one objective it should always focus on is school improvement. Teachers learning together can create a school of excellence. Without effective leadership of the PLC, none of this can be possible. The literature for effective PLCs is abundant. This study will uncover the essential characteristics of a PLC's effective leadership and determine if transformational leadership can be a concentrated leadership style to lead a PLC. The literature gap is that effective leadership of PLCs has not been a vast consideration for PLC research. This gap is because research suggests that principal leadership does not affect student achievement because they do not directly teach students. According to Dufour and Marzano, 2011, “traditionally there has been no way for principals to interact directly and concretely with teachers in a manner that influences their actions in a classroom” (p.52). PLCs give principals a pathway to interact with teachers. Then teachers interact with students, which has an impact on student achievement.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study will focus on a PLC's leadership's essential characteristics and determine if transformational leadership is the most suitable leadership model for PLCs. This qualitative study will apply the principles of social constructivism. According to this worldview, people are searching to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell 2007). This study is seeking to understand the world in which educators work. If an educator is a participant in a PLC, their views of essential leadership characteristics are crucial. The researcher's objective is to be reliant on the participant's views of the situation (Creswell 2007). The following research questions will guide this study based on the four factors of the transformational leadership model Bass (1985):

1. What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning communities?
2. How does the building principal or other leadership influence the work of the PLC?
3. How do leaders and participants describe what motivates them to be part of the PLC?
4. How do leaders and participants describe what intellectually stimulates them to be creative and innovative as part of the PLC?
5. How do leaders and participants describe an effective PLC climate?

This study aims to identify if the transformational leadership model's four factors are essential characteristics of a PLC leader. The researcher will be using the four elements of the transformational leadership model from (Bass's 1985) model. The chart below illustrates how the research questions from this study align with the four "I's of Bass (1985) leadership model:

Table 1: *Research questions that align with transformational leadership theory*

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Bass (1985) Transformational Leadership Factors	Research Questions guiding this study
Idealized influence	<p>Research question #1: What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning communities?</p> <p>Research question #5: How do leaders and participants describe an effective PLC climate?</p>
Inspirational motivation	<p>Research question #2: How does the building principal or other leadership influence the PLC's work?</p>
Intellectual stimulation	<p>Research question #3: How do leaders and participants describe what motivates them to be part of the PLC?</p>
Individualized concentration	<p>Research question # 4: How do leaders and participants describe what intellectually stimulates them to be creative and innovative in a PLC?</p>

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Methodology/Research Design

The researcher will use a phenomenological approach for this qualitative research study. The researcher will use an interview protocol to gather data. Qualitative research focuses on assumptions, worldviews, theoretical lens, and the analysis of a research problem that questions individuals or groups' meaning attributed to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007). This study will describe several individuals' purpose of a concept's lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). The research concentrates on the principals' lived experiences leading the Professional Learning Community (PLC).

The research design is on the four factors outlined by (Roberts 2010). The first factor investigates the problem. This problem is collecting non-numerical data about PLC leadership that is limited in the research of PLCs. The next factor is the purpose of this study. This study aims to determine essential characteristics of PLC leadership and decide if transformational leadership is a suitable leadership style for the PLC leader. The third factor is theory-based. Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory is the theoretical framework for this study. The researcher compares the transformational leadership theory to non-numerical data collected by interviewing principals who lead PLCs in western Pennsylvania. The final factor is the nature of the data. The data collected will be from interviews of principals who lead PLCs. The interviews will be descriptive, give intricate details of the phenomena, and gain new knowledge about PLC leadership.

Population/Sample

The participants chosen will be selected using a criterion sample (Creswell, 2007). The study will focus on principals who lead Professional Learning Communities from school districts in

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

western Pennsylvania. The participants are principals in high school, elementary schools, and middle schools. The geographic region of western Pennsylvania was selected for this study because it was convenient for the researcher who is from the area.

There were eight principals chosen for this research study. These principals lead PLCs in their districts. The district superintendent considers these principals' influential leaders of PLCs and well trained in PLCs.

The researcher created the criteria for selecting this population sample were done with a pre-study survey. The researcher sent the pre-study survey to over one hundred schools in western Pennsylvania. The survey asked the superintendents the following questions:

1. Does your district use Professional Learning Communities (PLC)?
2. Has the principal that leads the PLC had sufficient preparation regarding leading the PLC?

After collecting and analyzing the data from the pre-study survey, the researcher identified participants who meet the criteria. For this population sample, eight principals participated. They will be asked to complete the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio 1995) and participate in a twenty to twenty-five-minute interview with the researcher.

Instruments for Data Collection

For this qualitative theoretical study, there will be three types of instruments utilized for data collection. The first instrument is a pre-study survey. The pre-study survey was designed with google sheets. It was an online survey distributed to school districts in western Pennsylvania. This survey is collecting baseline data. The baseline data collected is school districts that use Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in their district. This study's researcher sent one hundred and ten pre-study surveys to the superintendents of these school districts. The

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

researcher of this study used two methods to increase response rates for this study. The first method being a brief pre-study survey. The survey was short and had four questions (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, & Lowden 2011). The second method was a follow-up request (Menter et al., 2011). The researcher sent out three to four-request to the school district superintendents regarding the pre-study survey. The data was collected in an excel spreadsheet. The researcher could see which school districts responded.

The second instrument for data collection is the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio 1995). This questionnaire evaluated three different leadership styles. Those leadership styles are transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. There are two types of measurement forms. The first is a self-rater. The individual rates how they perceive themselves as a transformational leader. A second-rater form is a feedback form. This rating is on the people whom the principal leads. This study's researcher used the self-rating form from the MLQ for the eight principals in this research study. This data collection instrument will give the researcher data on which principal displays transformational leadership characteristics.

The researcher of this study will purchase the MLQ form from Mind Garden psychological publishing company. The company provides assessments for leadership. The company can deliver fast results in PDF forms for this study.

The third instrument used for data collection is structured interviews with open-ended questions. The researcher needs to listen carefully to the participants about their perceptions of the leader of the PLC. The natural setting is the activity within the PLC by the members of the PLC. How PLC members behave or function on the PLC is the independent variable. The dependent variable is the behavior of the leader within the PLC. Regarding the PLC leadership, the researcher interviewed all the principals who participated in or are currently

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

participating in PLCs. These questions were “formulated ahead of time by the researcher” (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010) (p.264). The researcher of this study asked ten total questions to the eight principals during data collection. The researcher created the interview questions grounded on the five research questions.

Reliability and Validity

This study will use three techniques to ensure reliability and validity. The three methods are triangulation, bracketing, and member checking. The researcher of this study will explain the processes of reliability and validity in this section. These techniques will help produce the most dependable results.

Triangulation uses an assortment of data from different sources to ensure the integrity of the study’s findings (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin & Lowden 2011). The combination of data (triangulation) used in this study is a pre-study survey, structured interviews, and the Multi-leadership questionnaire (MLQ). The researcher of this study used the pre-study poll to gather baseline data on PLCs in western Pennsylvania. The baseline data will help identify which school districts in western Pennsylvania use PLCs and how prepared they lead these PLCs. This data will create a selection process for the focus group. Once the focus group is selected, the following two data collection processes can take place.

The second technique in triangulation for this study is the semi-structured interviews. Eight principals were interviewed that lead PLCs by the researcher of this study. These eight principals will be selected based on if they meet the criteria from the pre-study survey. This criterion was determined based on the pre-study survey gathered from the school district superintendent.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

The final technique in triangulation for this study is a questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed by (Bass and Avolio 1994) to measure the characteristics of transformational leaders. Researchers, corporations, school districts extensively use it to identify transformational leaders. The name of the questionnaire is Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Northouse 2016). The questionnaire is used for self-perception by the leader and the member of the PLC's (rater's) perception. This research study will be a self-rating by all eight principals selected by the researcher.

The following method used to establish reliability and validity beyond triangulation is member checking. This technique was used to validate the interview data in qualitative research. Once the interview is complete with the principal, it is returned to the principal to check for accuracy or errors (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter, 2016). This technique helps with respondent validation.

The final technique used to institute reliability and validity outside of triangulation is bracketing. Bracketing attempts not to link personal experiences to this study's phenomenon or lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenon in this study is the lived experience of the principal who leads PLCs. The researcher must not consider his experiences as a principal that leads professional development. The researcher's concentration must be on this study's theoretical framework, not the researcher's experiences when leading professional development. Bracketing eliminates any bias for PLC leadership experienced or facilitated by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The researcher for this study will analyze the data by transcribing the principal's interviews. While transcribing these interviews, the researcher will use two types of coding. The two types

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

of coding are open coding and axial coding. According to Jaccard and Jacoby (2010), open coding creates categories for paragraphs, words, phrases, or sentences in the interview transcript. Axial coding is identifying the categories from open coding (Jaccard and Jacoby 2010). Axial coding categorized words and phrases that described each of the five types of PLC leaders. According to Saladana (2016), first cycle coding is a way to condense information fragments first. When beginning to analyze the data from the interview transcriptions, first cycle coding was employed by the researcher of this study. The specific type of first cycle coding was initial coding. This type of coding helped the researcher of this study reveal the substance and distinctions of the data to take ownership (Saldana, 2016). The second cycle coding that was used for this study was pattern coding. Pattern coding identifies emerging themes, patterns, and descriptions (Saldana, 2016). Pattern coding helped the researcher identify five PLC leaders and create a progressive leadership continuum for PLC leaders.

To increase the reliability of this study's findings, the researcher used triangulation. Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin, and Lowden (2011) describe triangulation as a combination of data from three different bases to strengthen the study's integrity. This study's three triangulation grounds are a pre-study survey, semi-structured interviews, and a multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ).

A research bias that the researcher of this study will try to be aware of is the halo error. Muchinsky (1997) explains that the halo error is an assessment based on the interviewee's general opinions. The multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) will rate the PLC leader as a transformational leader. The researcher of this study considers himself a transformational leader. While interviewing the subjects for this study, the researcher will be aware of the research bias halo error.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Summary

This qualitative study was conducted to examine participants' perceptions of principals' essential characteristics that lead Professional Learning Communities. The researcher will analyze the data and determine if it connects with transformational leadership theory. Identified participants were public school principals in western Pennsylvania. Participants all had acquired substantial training on PLC facilitation. The data collection consisted of a pre-study survey to determine which schools in western Pennsylvania use PLCs. Schools with well-trained PLC leaders, an interview protocol to examine these well-trained PLC leaders, and a multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) determine which PLC leaders exhibited transformational leadership characteristics. The researcher directly administered all interviews, conducted all member checks, analyzed and interpreted the data, and concluded that it was connected to transformational leadership. The researcher's credibility of findings increased through member checking, bracketing, triangulation, and coding the interview protocol transcripts.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative study assessed the lived experience and defining moments of eight public school principals in western Pennsylvania who lead Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The researcher of this study is exploring the essential characteristics of PLC leadership are. PLC leaders must understand the crucial attributes of PLC leadership so they can lead an effective PLC. The literature on critical team characteristics leadership stresses similar importance to the findings of this study. According to Johnson (2019), interdependent solid relationships encourage employees to work harder, cooperate, and collaborate. If PLC leaders identify this characteristic, they will understand what it is to be a community creator PLC leader. This type of PLC leader is one of the PLC leaders produced by the researcher of this study.

Sanfelippo & Sinanis (2016) have teachers create a passion project before any professional development. They have their teachers discuss goals, needs, and readiness levels before professional development. This passion project guides future collaboration opportunities for professional learning. This literature aligns with this study's anticipatory advisor PLC leader.

The subsequent literature related to this research study is *Motivating and Inspiring Teachers* (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2013). They discuss a zone of indifference or the level of questioning everyone in the organization does. This notion is that the more trust the people have in the organization's leader, the lower the indifference level. The organization's

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

people second guess the leader less if the trust level is higher than the indifference level. This concept supports the trust designer PLC leader from this study.

Another example of literature that coincides with the PLC leaders developed in this research study is (Kanold 2011). This literature emphasizes the disciplines of PLC leaders. A domain Kanold (2011) speaks about is accountability and celebration. He believes that as a PLC leader, the leader must move vision into action. Moving concepts into action is accountability. As a PLC leader, the leader must ask themselves if they link the vision action to measurable data. The vision action idea supports the results developer PLC leader. The results developer PLC leader is a PLC leader created from this research study.

The bottom level or foundation in this study's leadership continuum that this researcher designed is the safety agent PLC leader. According to Axtell (2019), when people feel others will hear their ideas in the group and are held in respect, they are more likely to be susceptible and speak their minds. When PLC members feel they are heard, PLC members feel safe speaking their minds within the group.

This study's researcher developed the following research questions:

1. What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning communities?
2. How does the building principal or other leadership influence the work of the PLC?
3. How do leaders and participants describe what motivates them to be part of the PLC?
4. How do leaders and participants describe what intellectually stimulates them to be creative and innovative as part of the PLC?
5. How do leaders and participants describe an effective PLC climate?

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Overview of Context

The researcher reviewed the pre-study data to determine which school districts would qualify for this study. For the school district to meet this study's qualifications, the school district had to implement PLCs in their district. The PLC leadership had to have sufficient training on leading/facilitating the PLC. A critical factor in the districts' selection process that implemented PLCs was the adequate leadership training facilitating PLCs. The districts that met these criteria had (a) superintendent verify their principals had been trained (b) an out-of-district consulting company to train PLC leaders (c) PLCs were implemented district-wide. The pre-study survey was sent to 110 school districts in western Pennsylvania by this study's researcher. The number of schools that responded was 31. The response rate was 28%. Of the 31 school districts that responded, fourteen districts did not have sufficient training for their PLC leadership. The researcher eliminated those fourteen schools from participating in the study. Six schools responded to the survey that "maybe" they have had sufficient training for PLC leadership. Ten school districts responded that they did have adequate training for PLC leadership.

The researcher contacted the superintendent of those sixteen school districts, who met the qualifications for this study from the pre-study data, to ask for permission to contact the K-12 administrators via email at each school district. The *Invitation to Participate in Research* consent form was sent to all principals at each district once the district superintendent permitted this study's researcher to contact them.

Table 2 includes all the pre-study survey data. It has the school districts that responded to the researcher's pre-study survey. The survey collected data in 3 areas: (a) school district (b) PLC implemented (c) sufficient training for leadership facilitating leading a PLC. The researcher was able to specify five districts that implemented PLCs and experienced adequate leadership

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

training to facilitate/lead a PLC. The superintendent of the district determined sufficient training. Two of the districts selected for this study had outside consulting companies come in a train their faculty.

Table 2: *Pre-study survey data from western Pennsylvania (school districts that responded)*

** Denotes school districts selected for this study.

School District	PLC Implemented	Sufficient training for leadership facilitating/leading PLC?
School #1	Maybe	No
School #2	Yes	No
School #3	Yes	No
School #4	Yes	No
School #5	Yes	No
School #6	Yes	No
School #7	Yes	No
School #8	Yes	No
School #9	Yes	No
School #10	Yes	No
School #11	Yes	No
School #12	Yes	No
School #13	Yes	No
School #14	Yes	No
School #15	Yes	Maybe
School #16	Yes	Maybe
School #17	Yes	Maybe
School #18	Yes	Maybe
School #19 ** Principal C	Yes	Maybe
School #20	Yes	Maybe
School #21 ** Principal A; F	Yes	Yes
School #22	Yes	Yes
School #23	Yes	Yes
School #24	Yes	Yes
School #25	Yes	Yes
School #26 ** Principal D; H	Yes	Yes
School #27	Yes	Yes
School #28	Yes	Yes
School #29 ** Principal B; G	Yes	Yes
School #30 ** Principal E	Yes	Yes

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Table 3 includes the demographic information collected from the eight participants in this qualitative study, including participant's role, gender, PLC leadership experience, and overall experience in education.

Table 3: *Participants Demographic Information*

Principal	Participants Role	Gender	Years of PLC Leadership Experience	Total years of Experience in Education
A	High School Principal	male	2	10
B	High School Principal	male	4	24
C	Middle School Principal	female	4	13
D	Elementary School Principal	male	5	27
E	Elementary School Principal	female	15	20
F	Elementary School Principal	male	5	13
G	Elementary School Principal	male	5	23
H	Elementary School Principal	male	5	32

A summary of the eight participants' Multi-Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) scores is presented in Table 4. The scores are from five categories related to Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory. The participants in this study self-rated themselves on the multi-leadership questionnaire (MLQ). According to Barron & Byron (1993), groups create norms to standardize their behavior. There is a universal norm for each MLQ behavior related to

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

transformational leadership theory. The universal standard for building trust, encouraging others, and coaching and developing people is 2.9 on a 4.0 scale. The universal norm for acting with integrity and encouraging others to think innovatively is 2.8 on a 4.0 scale. If the participants in this study scored at or above the universal norm in each of the five categories, they were above the research benchmark. According to their self-rating, three of the eight participants scored at or above the research benchmark in all five types. Letters A through H represents each principal participant. The maximum score is 4.0 for all participants.

Table 4:

Participant Multi-Leadership Questionnaire Scores (MLQ) compared to the universal norm

MLQ Score compared to the Universal Norms	MLQ Score (A)	MLQ Score (B)	MLQ Score (C)	MLQ Score (D)	MLQ Score (E)	MLQ Score (F)	MLQ Score (G)	MLQ Score (H)
Transformational Leadership self-rating <i>** Green denotes above the Universal norm.</i>								
MLQ Behavior: <i>Builds Trust</i> <i>Universal Norm 2.9</i>	3.8	2.8	3.3	3.5	3.0	3.3	2.5	3.3
MLQ Behavior: <i>Acts with Integrity</i> <i>Universal norm 2.8</i>	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.0	4
MLQ Behavior: <i>Encourages Others</i> <i>Universal norm 2.9</i>	4	3.0	3.5	3.8	4	3.3	2.8	3.0
MLQ Behavior: <i>Encourages Innovative Thinking</i> <i>Universal norm 2.8</i>	3.8	2.8	3.0	2.3	3.5	2.5	3.3	2.5
MLQ Behavior: <i>Coaches and Develops People</i> <i>Universal norm 2.9</i>	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.8	3.3	2.3	2.8
At or above Research Benchmark	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	no

Data Presentation

This research study's objective was to understand principals' lived experiences who lead and facilitate professional learning communities. The researcher is seeking essential

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

characteristics of PLC leaders through the eyes of the principals who lead them. Butin (2010) describes qualitative methods as a technique for the researcher to pay close attention to details while considering the research participants' opinions and viewpoints. The researcher concentrated on data from the structured interviews. The researcher of this study evaluated the perspective of each principal.

The researcher of this study gathered qualitative data by interviewing eight principals who have lead PLCs. All eight principals expressed an interest in participating and met qualifying criteria through the pre-study survey. Following this, the researcher conducted eight structured interviews, including samples from two high schools, one middle school, and five elementary school principals. The purpose of the interviews was to identify PLC leaders' essential characteristics through the principals' lived experience and viewpoint that lead PLCs.

The interviews varied in time from approximately twenty minutes to thirty minutes. The average time was roughly about twenty-one minutes each. The researcher used a phone application to record the phone interviews. The researcher also transcribed field notes during all eight interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed through the app on the smartphone by the researcher of this study.

The researcher hand-coded the data from the interviews. The data came from the hard copies of the transcripts and the researcher's field notes. In Vivo coding was the initial coding that was applied. According to Saldana (2016), this type of coding prioritizes and respects the participant's voice. The researcher then transitioned to eclectic coding. Saldana (2016) proposes using this type of coding after In Vivo coding because it will help the researcher identify other codes not found during In Vivo coding. This type of coding could include values codes, emotion codes, and other pertinent codes that emerge.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

The next part of the coding cycle was pattern coding. The researcher used group codes, which categorized the data into a smaller number of categories and ideas. The pattern coding procedure resulted in presumed codes that acknowledged emergent themes in the data. The themes that emerged in the final coding process and aligned with the research questions are listed below in table 5. Table 5 aligns the research questions with the themes derived from interview data. After the researcher coded the data from the ten interview questions, the emerging themes created types of PLC leaders. This table gives specific answers to the research questions that are driving this study. The answers to the research questions are the essential characteristics of PLC leadership. Types of PLC leaders group the vital features.

Table 5: *Research questions aligned with themes and operational definitions*

Research Questions	Themes/Operational Definitions
1. What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning community?	Safety Agent PLC Leader: The leader creates an autonomous or self-governing workspace for PLC participants. The PLC participants feel supported, guided, and valued. They think it is a safe place to have discussions and share freely without repercussion. The leader creates an environment where disagreements are ok. These characteristics help with collaboration.
2. How does the building principal or other leadership influence the work of the PLC?	Trust Designer PLC Leader: The leader is a relationship constructor. There are mutual trust and respect with the participants of the PLC. Conversations are not one-sided. The leader creates a culture of collaboration. The participants can build their professional development.
3. How do leaders and participants describe what motivates them to be part of the PLC?	Community Builder PLC Leader: The leader creates a community where the participants see value in what they are doing. The deal is ultimately beneficial for all students. The leader models the expectations and encourages growth opportunities for participants to create a healthy community.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

	Essentially the leader is a community creator. The leader keeps the group on task and shares participant's strengths to motivate them to be part of the PLC.
4. How do leaders and participants describe what intellectually stimulates them to be creative and innovative as part of the PLC?	Anticipatory Advisor PLC Leader: The leader is a pre-planner and looking for time to meet because it can be a challenge. This leader establishes rules and norms before any meetings. There is a focus on identifying common goals. The leader can take this opportunity to challenge the PLC participants and be well prepared with research for discussion and collaboration.
5. How do leaders and participants describe an effective PLC climate?	Results Developer PLC Leader: This leader has a results-oriented focus. The results from improving practices, procedures, and policies to improve the school organization describe a PLC's effectiveness. The results are obtained through assessment and data analysis. These results give teachers and administration a better understanding of the students. The leader needs to communicate these results as something used going forward. These results can help hone teaching skills. The PLC leader needs to establish that the PLC is the engine for the school that generates results and improves practices, procedures, and policies.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis of Research Question One

The first research question addressed in the findings is: "What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning communities?" The researcher asked two interview questions based on the lived experiences of the principal leading the PLC. The lens of perception used in these semi-structured interviews was the principal's perception and the principal's perception of the follower's views. By using this approach with these interview questions, the following themes emerged: (a) feeling safe, (b) feeling supported, (c) feeling

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

valued, (d) fear of failure is eliminated (e) share freely without repercussion (f) safe place to have discussions.

Theme One: Safety Agent PLC Leader. After interviewing all eight principals, all eight shared a characteristic of making the PLC participants feel safe within their learning community. Some of the descriptive words were “safe place to have discussions,” “feeling of value,” and “fear of failure is gone.” The safety agent PLC leader is an autonomous space builder. This PLC leader supports the members of the PLC group. He or she guides PLC members to the answers in collaborative inquiry. Members of the PLC have no fear of repercussion if there is a disagreement. In turn, being able to share without repercussion makes the PLC members feel safe within the PLC. They don’t feel restrained to a program.

When asked to share about their experiences regarding PLC characteristics, Principal H remarked:

I tell my teachers all the time, if something does not work, do not do it. They look at me like I am crazy, but even if it is part of the new program we bought for a math series, do not do it. Be creative and find another way (Personal Communication, June 24, 2020).

When asked about PLCs' essential characteristics, Principal B focused on conversations PLC participants had during the collaborative inquiry. Principal B explained: “It is ok for teachers to disagree about things during conversations. Disagreements are ok.” (Personal Communication, July 7th, 2020). Principal B continued to explain that disagreements are part of the learning process. Looking at different perspectives can aid in the learning process.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Principal F’s philosophy can also align with Principal B. Principal F believes that mistakes and risks are part of learning and collaborating in a PLC. When PLC members feel that they can make mistakes and disagree, it creates a safe environment.

I think the biggest thing I try to instill in my teachers is their ability to take risks. I want them to take risks, and I wanted them to know that it’s ok not to be perfect every time.

(Personal Communication, June 29th, 2020)

Principal E talked about how she believes in making her teachers feel valued in the PLC. She believed that when they feel valued, they are motivated to work toward the PLC's vision. Their input helps the PLC function at a high level. The PLC is efficient. The PLC members are more accepting of challenges and have a very positive outlook when they feel valued. During the interview, here is what Principal E stated:

I think the teachers here are willing to accept challenges, and they’re eager to try new things. They’re willing to pilot an experiment. When they feel that they are valued and there are no “gotchas” or there is no recourse for somebody who tried something and it didn’t work. (Personal Communication, June 30th, 2020)

Table 6 lists additional participant statements that indicate the principal's examples as a safety agent in support of the PLC.

Table 6: *Safety Agent PLC Leader*

Principal Participant	Statement
Participant A	If you appropriately describe what you want as a PLC leader and how to get there, it allows PLC members to understand and have buy-in and see what support they need.
Participant C	I believe teachers should be able to have a say in selecting their PLC group members.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Participant D	Teachers in the PLCs in my school see me as a collaborator, not just a leader. I am part of the team. They can share freely.
Participant G	I see myself as a supportive PLC leader. I don't tell them what to do; I build the capacity to take the next step.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis of Research Question Two

The second research question addressed in the findings is “How does the building principal or other leadership influence the work of the PLC? The researcher of this study asked two interview questions regarding this research question to collect data. The theme from the first PLC leader that emerged from the interview data concentrated on relationship building. A culture of collaboration is established.

Theme Two: Trust Designer PLC Leader. The participants responded to the interview questions by concentrating on mutual trust and respect for all members. The conversations between PLC participants are not one-sided, according to the principals interviewed. The PLC leader has confidence in the members that they can create their professional development.

Principal F talked about the conversations he had with his faculty during their PLC time. The focal point of all his discussions was discussions, not directives. Having meetings is one of the ways Principal F builds trust within the PLC: “When I have conversations with teachers, the conversations are not one-sided. It is a discussion like two colleagues. “ (Personal Communication, June 29th, 2020)

Trust was a key factor with Principal D. He mentioned mutual trust on several occasions throughout the interview. It was a foundation for him as a PLC leader. A key statement from his interview is below:

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

If teachers feel they don't have that mutual trust, the PLC will not go anywhere. So you have to develop mutual trust. You have to make people think they can share freely. My job is to make sure it is a secure place to collaborate. (Personal Communication, June 29th, 2020)

Principal C concentrated on collecting staff input on topics for PLC discussions. It is a way to build their professional development. Her foundation of effective PLCs starts with gathering staff input. It gives the PLC members ownership of the PLC. It keeps the PLC members engaged and motivated. During the interview, Principal C stated the following:

I think a functioning PLC is one that the staff has input on what topics will be. As a leader, you can get them started and facilitate. Then they can take it and run with the PLC on their own. (Personal Communication, July 1st. 2020).

Principal E develops trust and safety by creating an environment of positive thinking. She believes that the power of positive thinking helps PLC members feel safe. Once they feel safe in the PLC environment, they can excel. Safety helps develop trust between members and the PLC leader. The development of mutual trust helps PLCs become efficient. Principal E spoke of her positive thinking in her statement from the interview:

I try to bring enthusiasm and excitement to the PLC, and it seems to be infectious.

Everyone gets excited to be doing what we are doing. I think you need to bring a positive attitude and you will get positive things from it. (Personal Communication, June 29th, 2020).

Table 7 lists additional participant statements that indicate examples of the principal as a trust design leader in support of the PLC.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Table 7: Trust Design PLC Leader

Principal Participant	Statement
Participant A	Teachers who initially had no interest in participating in a PLC then come full circle after participating and then taking time on their own to see how our PLC meetings impacted what they needed to do instructionally and how their instruction decisions lead to better results for students
Participant B	I want my teachers to have a climate of mutual trust and respect. It is ok to disagree with one another.
Participant E	My keys to our PLCs are setting a vision, setting a tone, having a plan, preparing research.
Participant G	I want my teachers to try new things. I encourage them to do things differently.
Participant H	I believe the PLC members must hold each other accountable. There has to be that mutual trust.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis of Research Question Three

The theme that emerged from research question three highlights was building a community from the research participants. The research participants discussed mutual trust and respect. It is ok for PLC members to disagree. Collaborating to improve practice, policy, and procedures is a team effort. Improving practice, policy, and procedures develops a sense of community amongst the PLC members.

Theme Three: Community Builder PLC Leader. The third theme that emerged was a PLC leader that creates a community of learners. This leader models the expectations and encourages growth opportunities for participants in the PLC. Principal A talked about the team approach, how the members depend on each other and are committed to the PLC's vision. Principal A concentrated on a team-first system as he spoke at his interview:

You have to have a group that can rely on each other and trust each other. A group that can communicate appropriately with each other. The group has to stay focused on the

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

task. As the leader, you have to know when we're up against the wall. You have to make sure they work together. (Personal Communication, July 1, 2020)

Principal B ensures community building by involving groups of teachers who typically don't work. He created interdisciplinary teams of teachers. His specialty teachers worked with the content area teachers. One of his interdisciplinary teams had English teachers, history teachers, and fine arts teachers. Principal B stated the following:

Our specialty teachers were immersed with our English and history teachers. These specialty teachers contributed to their units of content. They were not talking content strategy but pedagogic strategies. It makes the specialty teachers feel they are contributing to the more significant cause. (Personal Communication, July 7, 2020).

Principal C uses a collaborative effort as her foundation for community building. She gives her PLC members freedom to work with their topics. She believes that they will be more motivated if they are collaborating, researching, and working toward a common goal if they have the freedom to pick their topics. Principal C communicated the following on how she creates a community of learners:

I think breathing down people's backs or trying to force your opinions or ways isn't productive in a PLC. They (teachers) can drop in and let me know how it is going with their group and topics. Now I know they are feeling comfortable working together. I then go to them and make sure they're doing these things, and it's just not on paper. (Personal Communication, July 1st, 2020).

Principal C made another comment during her interview that immolates community building for professional learners. Professional learners need to know that what they are learning about is

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

useful and relevant to their teaching. Most importantly, what they are learning has to be relevant for students and their learning. Principal C voiced this insight through the following comments during her interview:

The participants need to know that this isn't something that's just an initiative that they need to do and complete and check off a list for the administrator. Still, it's something that the administrator has an intrinsic motivation with as well. Then they know you are part of the team. (Personal Communication, July 1st, 2020).

Table 8 lists additional participant statements that indicate the principal's examples as a community creator leader in support of the PLC.

Table 8: *Community Creator PLC Leader*

Principal Participant	Statement
Participant D	Our teachers are building their professional development by sharing their ideas with their peers.
Participant E	I am trying to build a non-competitive culture within our PLC.
Participant F	I want to create a culture of collaboration. I want my teachers to bring something to the table. We don't have one-sided conversations
Participant G	I want my teachers to see the value of teamwork. They have weekly meetings where they focus on their instruction. They work together for the betterment of the kids.
Participant H	My teachers are motivated by figuring out best practices and sharing them with others. Every meeting makes them creative.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis of Research Question Four

Theme four emerged when the participant emphasized preparing for the PLC meetings. The common theme was setting norms, preparing research for discussions, and implementing the initiative to benefit student achievement. The participant in this research study also discussed facilitating, not necessarily leading and directing.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Theme Four: Anticipatory Advisor PLC Leader. This PLC leader is a pre-planner. The PLC leader has to understand their leadership role. He or she spends time establishing rules and norms for the PLC. This leader provides research for collaboration, discussion, and implementation. The anticipatory PLC leader identifies common goals for the PLC.

Principal C concentrated on leadership for this theme. She stated that as a PLC leader, you have to understand your leadership role.

The PLC leader has to be a manager of people, not a leader of the staff. PLC leaders manage the people within the PLC. At a faculty meeting is where you are the staff leader, informing the team what to do. (Personal Communication, July 1st, 2020).

Principal G was vested in the planning aspect of the PLC. Principal G stated:

Being a PLC leader is about teaching people how to lead and collaborate. Pre-planning is key to the effectiveness of the PLC. You have to concentrate on the ability to plan together (Personal Communication, June 30th, 2020).

Principal E believes that teachers should be able to work with their topics within their PLC. She believes teachers should over plan for those discussions.

I think it's vital for PLC members to be well researched and prepared before coming to PLC meetings. The members need to be honest with themselves and find good research on topics. (Personal Communication, June 30th, 2020).

Principal H has his group concentrate on group norms. They are creating a behavioral uniformity toward the same objective. They establish these norms before any work begins within the PLC.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

As a PLC leader, you have to adhere to whatever norms you establish. We have about 3 to 5 criteria that we show as a group before collaborating and meeting. (Personal Communication, June 24th, 2020).

Table 9 lists additional participant statements that indicate the principal's examples as an anticipatory creator leader in support of the PLC.

Table 9: *Anticipatory Creator PLC Leader*

Principal Participant	Statement
Participant A	I believe that communicating with the group about what the end goals are for the PLC. They need to know what they are doing is effective.
Participant B	We establish roles for each PLC member. The function of each PLC member is how we hold each other accountable.
Participant D	At our daily curriculum meetings, I have my teachers look at student data, proficiency scales with brilliant goals, and essential standards to develop common formative assessments.
Participant F	I describe an effective PLC climate as one that has a plan with a focus. It has to be relevant to the teachers. I use a google doc for the schedule.

Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis of Research Question Five

Theme five was devoted to the results that come from PLC collaboration. These results drive the PLC. PLC leaders that emphasis results measure the PLC effectiveness by this. Results motivate PLC members that what they are doing is effective. This theme emerged when the participants in this study talked about results from implementing the initiative that was the vision of the PLC.

Theme Five: Results Developer PLC Leader. When asked during the interview about the influence a PLC leader has over a PLC, all eight principals noted at least one characteristic that focused on results. They felt their power helped drive results. As a principal, they want to see results through data. This way, they can measure the PLC's success and the objective for change

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

to a policy, procedure, or practice. Participants noted that results orientation is a crucial characteristic of effective PLCs.

Principal A described what he wants as a result of PLCs. Results motivate people and justify if something is working or not working:

I want something we can use going forward as a result of the PLC. The PLC isn't something that is just going to go away. (Personal Communication, July 1, 2020).

Principal D is driven by the results he gets from the PLC. He feels that data drives the PLC. The information is a foundation for the PLC to be efficient. The more data you can generate, the better discussions PLC members can have.

Data analysis is an integral part of the PLC because teachers get all their information from data analysis, helping run the PLC. It helps get students into groups. Data analysis also helps student achievement (Personal Communication, June 29th, 2020).

Data was essential to Principal H during his interview. The data gave him justification on whether the instruction is working or not. PLC members can easily measure it by test results.

When the data comes back, and the students didn't get it, you're going to be willing to dump that lesson you've done for twenty years that is your absolute favorite. (Personal Communication, June 24th, 2020).

Principal E shared the same mindset about data. She looked at test results as a major contributing factor to the effects of instruction. It divulges if instructional strategies are working or not. If it is not working, do not keep doing it; change instruction to increase student achievement. Principal E talked about this during her interview:

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

When we do data analysis and teachers see results, they recognize that value in the work that we're doing improves student achievement. It's improving our school culture, and we see evidence in our student's work that makes a difference. (Personal Communication, June 30th, 2020).

Table 10 lists additional participant statements that indicate the principal's examples as a results developer leader in support of the PLC.

Table 10: *Results Developer PLC Leader*

Principal Participant	Statement
Participant B	I want my teachers to see the results because the results show that things can be getting better.
Participant C	The PLC can help teachers focus on the components that have failed in their instruction or program.
Participant F	I see success as when teachers know what they are getting out of this. The results they get can do that.
Participant G	I think a little positive reinforcement from time to time with my teachers and me encouraging them to do it more because I think it is really working. Also, when they see success from their kids, they see the kids getting it.

Summary of Key Findings

Based on the data collected for this research study, five shared themes emerged: (1) safety agent PLC leader, (2) trust designer PLC leader, (3) community builder PLC leader, (4) anticipatory advisor PLC leader, (5) results developer PLC leader. These five themes are represented in a frequency table (table 11) at each education level (elementary, middle, and high school) and the themes that became known with each comparable principal:

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Table 11: *Frequency of Themes for each Principal by Education Level*

Principal	Level	Theme 1 Safety Agent	Theme 2 Trust Designer	Theme 3 Community Builder	Theme 4 Anticipatory Advisor	Theme 5 Results Developer
A	High School			X		
B	High School			X	X	
C	Middle		X	X	X	
D	Elementary		X			X
E	Elementary	X			X	X
F	Elementary	X		X		
G	Elementary	X	X		X	
H	Elementary	X			X	X

The most dominant theme was theme four. It represented five of the eight principals. It also represented each education level; high school, middle school, and elementary school principals. This theme was the anticipatory advisor. During the interviews, 63% of the principals talked about being a pre-planner. Being a pre-planner included creating rules/norms, identifying common goals, planning together, and being well prepared for the PLC research. This theme demonstrates that principals like to be ready for meetings.

The following emerging theme was theme one. During the interviews, theme number one is represented in four of the eight principals. Theme one occurred with the majority of the elementary principals. This theme is the safety agent PLC leader. The safety agent PLC leader builds autonomous space for members of the PLC. These leaders talked about support,

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

guidance, creating a safe place for discussions, and sharing freely without repercussion. Creating this type of atmosphere helps with collaboration during PLC meetings.

Lastly, based on the interview data, theme number three surfaced as a focal point of four of the eight principals. Three of those four principals were high school and middle school principals. There was one elementary principal in this category. During the interview, which concentrated on research question three, the interviewees emphasized things that are beneficial for all students, creating a community where the PLC participants see value in what they are doing, encourage growth opportunities, and share teacher strengths.

In table 12, there are descriptors of each PLC leader from this study. The descriptors are from the interview data collected from the participants in this study during the structured interviews. The researcher coded all the data and categorized it under each PLC leader that the researcher of this study created.

Table 12: *Descriptors from interview data of each PLC leader*

<p><u>Safety Agent PLC Leader (Autonomous Space Builder)</u> <i>Creates and establishes for participants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support• Guidance• Feeling of value• A safe place to have discussions• Share freely without repercussion• Fear of failure is gone• “Something does not work, do not do it” (direct quote)• Disagreements are ok <p><u>Trust Designer PLC Leader (Relationship Constructor)</u> <i>Creates and establishes for participants:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mutual trust• Mutual respect• No micromanaging• To build their own Professional Development• Culture of collaboration• Not one-sided conversations
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ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

- Freedom to pick topics
- Checks in with Groups
- Fail forward
- Not a check-off for a list of initiatives

Community Builder PLC Leader (Community Creator)

Creates and establishes for participants:

- Keeps on task
- Sharing teacher strengths
- Encourage growth opportunities
- Model expectations
- A focus that is beneficial for all students
- Create a community where they see value

Anticipatory Advisor PLC Leader (Pre-Planner)

Creates and establishes for participants:

- Creates rules/norms
- Identify common goals
- PLC is part of a solution (Direct quote)
- Buy-in
- Challenge
- Ability to plan together
- Manager of people, not a leader of staff (Direct quote)
- Find time to meet
- Well prepared with research

Results Developer PLC Leader (Results Oriented Focus)

Creates and establishes for participants:

- Results through assessment
- Data analysis
- A better understanding of students
- (results) Something used as going forward
- Improve instruction through results
- Growth through results that help hone teaching skills
- Engine for the school (Direct quote)

In this chapter, the researcher presented findings from this theoretical, qualitative study, which included significant quotes from the participants. Chapter five will speak to what the researcher discovered and learned from the data. The next chapter will also have recommendations for further research on PLC leadership fundamentals for leading and facilitating a PLC.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Introduction

This theoretical, qualitative research study presents lived experiences and significant instances that influenced the essential characteristics of PLC leadership through the perceptions of 8 public school principals that have considerable experience in leading/facilitating PLCs. These principals have also had significant training on leading PLCs. This chapter provides a discussion of key findings. The knowledge that was achieved through this study will be presented. The research this study will have on PLC leadership is discussed from a theoretical and practitioner view. Lastly, this chapter will close with recommendations for future research on this topic.

Restatement of Purpose of the Study

This study aims to identify the essential characteristics of principal leadership for a Professional Learning Community and determine if this leadership correlates with the transformational leadership theory. According to Cherkowski (2016), more research is “needed to understand what it means for principals to work with teachers as adult learners in PLCs” (p. 524). The principal must create an engaging, structured, organized, and ongoing environment for the PLC participants. The principal must be aware of behaviors of effective leadership within the PLC. If they are not mindful of these behaviors, the PLC will breakdown. When the PLC breaks down, we have a group of teachers not collaborating and not focused on a common goal, helping students learn. The PLC is not effective when this happens. Leadership can either make or break the effectiveness of the PLC.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

This study will focus on the school principal perceptions of effective PLC leadership.

This study will determine what the essential characteristics of principal leadership of a PLC are.

This study will also determine if transformational leadership is a valuable leadership type to guide PLCs.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What characteristics do PLC leaders and participants use to describe their professional learning communities?
2. How does the building principal or other leadership influence the work of the PLC?
3. How do leaders and participants describe what motivates them to be part of the PLC?
4. How do leaders and participants describe what intellectually stimulates them to be creative and innovative as part of the PLC?
5. How do leaders and participants describe an effective PLC climate?

Application to Theory and Practice

The literature indicates that most of the research on professional learning communities (PLC) is regarding the PLC's effectiveness as a group. A community of professionals emphasizes learning rather than teaching, working together, and holding themselves responsible for results (DuFour, 2004). This community of professional learners is the defining description of a PLC by Richard DuFour. He emphasized the performance of the group and creating results from group collaboration. The research in this study concentrates on the PLC leaders, not just the group's functionality. According to Cherkowski (2016), more research is “needed to understand what it means for principals to work with teachers as adult learners in PLCs” (p. 524).

The current study pursues the lived experiences and defining moments contributing to principals' transformational leadership development that lead and facilitate a PLC. This study

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

helped the researcher to discover essential characteristics of PLC leadership. This study also acquired transformational scores based on the transformational leadership theory and the self-rating MLQ questionnaire. The results of each principal's MLQ score are presented in Table 4 in Chapter 4 of this manuscript. Once these characteristics were identified, through qualitative coding, the researcher categorized five types of PLC leaders. The five PLC leaders are (a) safety agent PLC leader, (b) trust designer PLC leader, (c) community builder, (d) anticipatory advisor PLC leader (e) results developer. The operational definition for each type of PLC leader is indicated in Table 11 in Chapter 4 of this manuscript. The researcher was also able to identify each principal as one of the five leaders based on this research. The five preceding research questions guided this qualitative, theoretical study. The researcher of this study recorded the facts and findings in chapter four; the researcher will reveal the knowledge that transpired and its relation to theory and practice. The researcher will discuss all five research questions and the themes that emerged from the interview process. Figure 1 below is displaying the PLC leadership scale. This scale is the hierarchy of PLC leadership. According to this study's research, PLC leaders can use the PLC leadership continuum's suggested guide to ensure an acceptable PLC practices foundation.

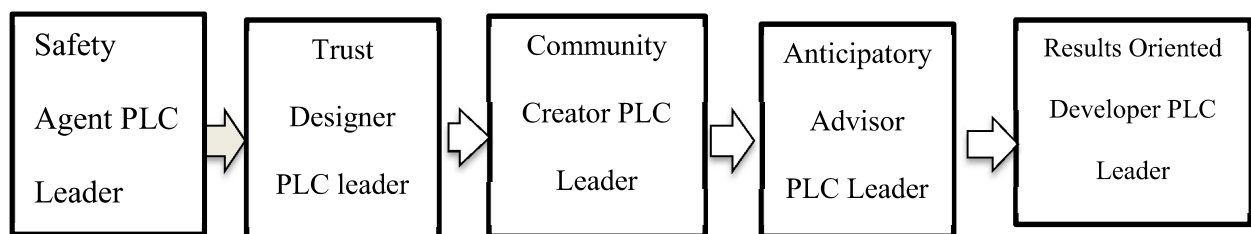


Figure 1: *Professional Learning Community (PLC) Leadership Scale/Continuum*

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Safety Agent PLC Leader

Research question one allowed the researcher to determine what characteristics PLC leaders and participants use to describe an effective PLC. After completing the qualitative coding process, the majority of the principals interviewed describe effective PLCs as supportive. They can freely share thoughts and opinions without repercussion, and it is a safe place to have a discussion. These characteristics parallel the four “I” s of Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory.

One of the “I’s” of Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory is individualized consideration. This leadership factor defines the leader as one who provides a supportive climate in which they listen carefully to the followers' individual needs (Northouse, 2016). The data from research question one links to this leadership factor in the transformational leadership theory. The principal’s perceptions from the data in research question one, align with the transformational leadership theory's individualized consideration component. These characteristics define the safety agent PLC leader, which originated from this study.

Principal C made a statement during her interview that makes the PLC participants in her district feel safe and secure in what they are doing.

We give them a little bit of and point and say here’s kind of where we want our goal to be and then just let them run, and that’s worked effectively for us as a team (Personal communication, July 1st, 2020).

Principal C guides them to the goal as they work together. The guidance from Principal C creates a comfortable PLC environment.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Research Question Two: Trust Designer PLC Leader

Research question two allowed the researcher to understand the participant's perception of how leadership influences the PLC's work. The researcher sought the principal's perception of their leadership and the participant's view on how leadership affects the PLC's work. The data collected from the interviews addressed a mutual trust and respect for each other within the PLC. Leaders and members of the PLC do not just have one-sided conversations. Participants in the PLC do not feel micromanaged, and they have the freedom to pick their topics for discussion and implementation. There is a typical trust with leaders and PLC participants.

The theme that originated after the analysis of the data was the trust designer PLC leader. A trust designer would be the next level in the hierarchy of PLC leadership. After creating an autonomous space for PLC leaders to work (safety agent PLC leader figure 1), the PLC leader helps facilitate relationships with PLC participants to develop trust (trust developer PLC leader figure 1). At this level, the PLC leader's behavior supports the idealized influence leadership factor in Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory. This leadership factor defines the leader as a strong role model for followers. Their followers truly respect this leader, and the followers have a tremendous amount of trust in this leader (Northouse, 2016). Principal F noted that he builds trust with his teachers by failing forward:

The biggest thing that I try to instill in my teachers is their ability to take risks. I want them to take risks, and I want them to know it's ok to make mistakes. It's not going to be perfect every time (Personal Communication, June 29, 2020).

The first two themes are focused on creating a safe and trusted place for PLC participants to work. The next level of the PLC leadership hierarchy is all about community.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Research Question Three: Community Builder PLC leader

Research question three of this study investigates what motivates PLC leaders and participants to be part of a PLC. The researcher wanted to understand why teachers and administrators want to be part of the PLC and what persuades them to perform as members of the group. The community builder PLC leader needs to understand this to create that sense of community and belonging. This type of PLC leader needs to know how to create an influential community of learners who feel a sense of belonging and have the same goals to develop the students, teachers, and the organization.

Another leadership factor affiliated with Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory is inspirational motivation. In this type of leadership, team spirit is enhanced (Northouse, 2016). This leadership factor describes leaders that have a dedication to creating a shared vision. They motivate the PLC members to be committed to this shared vision (Northouse, 2016). The shared vision is where leaders start their initial community building. Principal G had a beneficial experience with a teacher in his PLC and indicated how a PLC member was motivated to be part of the PLC:

She was motivated by the PLC process as a team leader. There was a teacher in her PLC who hurt the team. She was struggling as the team leader of the PLC because of this teacher. She told me I need your help. So we talked about what the problem was, and I gave her some ways to kind of coach her. The PLC wanted to do what they wanted to do, and the collaborative piece was missing from the team. (Personal Communication, June 30, 2020).

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Principal G encouraged this teacher leader of the PLC to remain committed to the shared vision of the PLC and coached her through the problem. Principal G motivated her to continue the PLC focus and add the collaborative piece. Once they solved this problem, things worked out well. Principal G sustained the community.

Research question three explored what motivates PLC members and leaders. Research question four will examine what intellectually stimulates PLC members and leaders to be creative and innovative. Research question four complements another “I” of the transformational leadership theory.

Research Question Four: Anticipatory Advisor PLC Leader

This type of PLC leader is a pre-planner. A great deal of their work is behind the scenes and before the meetings. These leaders focus on developing common goals for the PLC and finding best practice research to steer the PLC. This type of leader supports Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory aligned with the leadership factor defined as intellectual stimulation. This leadership factor stimulates followers to be creative, innovative and contests their own beliefs and values and those of the leader (Northhouse, 2016). This leader supports the PLC members as they try different approaches to the school district's procedures, policies, and practices. To reach this point, the PLC leader has had to progress through the PLC leadership hierarchy. At this time, the leader has created a safe place for collaboration, trust with PLC members, and a community with a common goal or shared vision. Now the PLC leader can encourage innovation and creativity. Principal C embraced this during her interview:

Suppose they (teachers) can come to me, before the meeting, with adequate rationale as to why this will benefit students or impact learning. In that case, I'm always going to say,

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

let's try it, and if it falls flat, let's look at the components that fell flat and see if we can change them (Personal Communication July 1, 2020).

Principal C is willing to help her staff be more creative and innovative in their choices when collaborating within the PLC. They did not have a fear of failure. Failure is just part of the learning process.

The final research question probes the PLC climate. After building a foundation of PLC leadership with safety, trust, community, and pre-planning, the final phase of PLC leadership is a developer PLC leader. According to the data found in this study, this is the final phase of the PLC leadership hierarchy. This type of PLC leadership reinforces the individualized consideration leadership factor in Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory.

Research Question Five: Results Developer PLC Leader

This type of PLC leader examines results from the implementation of PLC goals to determine the PLC's effectiveness. They believe products give teachers and administrators a better understanding of students. These results can help improve teaching skills. However, before getting to results developer PLC leader, PLC leaders should consider the four PLC leadership styles before becoming a results-oriented PLC leader. The progression of PLC leadership by the PLC leader gradually from safety agent to results developer, as shown in Figure 1, indicates that PLC participants will feel more affluent when participating in a PLC. If the PLC leader follows the PLC leadership hierarchy (Figure 1), it could be a pre-determining factor if the PLC will function as a cohesive group.

This type of PLC leadership connects to the individualized consideration factor in Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory. What is important with this factor is leaders want

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

their followers to become fully actualized. This type of leader may provide particular directives with a great structure (Northouse, 2016). PLC leaders will also become fully actualized as this type of leader (results developer) in this study's PLC leadership hierarchy (figure 1). The followers and leaders of the PLC will turn action into fact. Principal D thought teachers were focused on collaboration. He felt data analysis was a key part of the PLC:

Teachers feel collaboration would be the most critical part of a PLC but closely followed by data analysis. They get all their information from data analysis, helping run the PLC (Personal Communication, June 29, 2020).

Principal D believes that without data or results, there is not anything to drive the PLC. He did believe in mutual trust and respect and felt a very significant factor in an effective PLC. From the data gathered in his interview, he reflected on data as the foundation of the PLC. Each Principal interviewed for this study was categorized by their analysis of their interview data. In the next section, the data from this research study will indicate its impact on leadership.

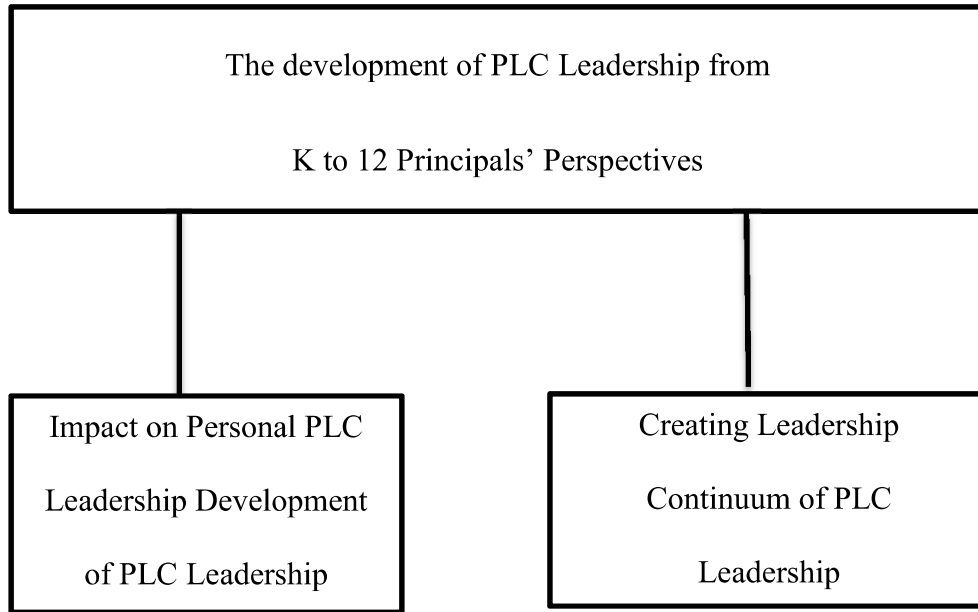
Impact on Leadership

The impact that this study has on leadership is specifically directed at PLC leadership. The perceptions are directly from K to 12 principals at all education levels. Since teachers can also lead PLCs, the data can be useful for teacher leaders of PLCs. Industrial-aged principals and leaders evolve into visionary leaders who develop open and collaborative learning opportunities (Feng, 2016). The PLC can be the engine of the school district that makes it work effectively and efficiently. PLC leaders who can build a safe and trusting PLC environment will create an efficient PLC that incorporates all of the fundamental PLC principles as described by (Dufour

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

2004). The following section, represented by Figure 2, frames two areas of impact on leadership:

Figure 2: *Study's Impact on Leadership*



Impact on personal PLC leadership development. This study will categorize the types of PLC leaders. The eight participants are labeled from the interview data. Each principal is classified as a specific type of PLC leader. The researcher also recommended an area of growth based on the five types of PLC leaders discovered in this study (figure 1). The data from this study can personally impact PLC leaders in four ways: (a) identify the type of PLC leader they are when leading a PLC (b) identify an area of growth for PLC leadership (c) identify where they are on the PLC leadership continuum (d) determine if they are a transformational leader established from their self-rated MLQ score (table 4). Being a transformational leader is concerned with developing how specific leaders can influence followers to achieve extraordinary things (Northouse, 2016). PLC leaders should be mindful that transformational leadership traits can correlate with leading a PLC. The combination of transformational leadership traits

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

measured by the MLQ scores (table 4) and the five types of PLC leadership (figure 2) found in this study are prerequisites before establishing a PLC in your school district. Table 8 below categorizes each principal that participated in this study:

Table 13: *Classification of K to 12 principals from this study*

<p><i>Respondent #3 Principal C</i></p> <p><u>Type of PLC Leader</u> Community Creator/Anticipatory Advisor/Trust Designer</p> <p><u>Area of Growth PLC Leadership</u> Results Developer</p> <p><u>Transformational Leadership Rating</u> At or above the research norm</p> <p><u>Average Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.22 on a 4.0 scale</p> <p><u>Lowest Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (encourages innovative thinking)</p>	<p><i>Respondent #4 Principal D</i></p> <p><u>Type of PLC Leader</u> Trust Designer/Results orientation</p> <p><u>Area of Growth PLC Leadership</u> Safety Agent PLC Leader</p> <p><u>Transformational Leadership Rating</u> Not at or above research norm</p> <p><u>Average Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.32 on a 4.0 scale</p> <p><u>Lowest Transformational Leadership Score</u> 2.3 on a 4.0 scale (Encourages innovative thinking)</p>
<p><i>Respondent #5 Principal E</i></p> <p><u>Type of PLC Leader</u> Safety Agent/Anticipatory Advisor</p> <p><u>Area of Growth PLC Leadership</u> Trust Designer</p> <p><u>Transformational Leadership Rating</u> At or above research norm</p> <p><u>Average Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.56 on a 4.0 scale</p> <p><u>Lowest Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.0 (Builds trust)</p>	<p><i>Respondent #6 Principal F</i></p> <p><u>Type of PLC Leader</u> Safety Agent</p> <p><u>Area of Growth PLC Leadership</u> Results Developer</p> <p><u>Transformational Leadership Rating</u> Not at or above research norm</p> <p><u>Average Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.08 on a 4.0 scale</p> <p><u>Lowest Transformational Leadership Score</u> 2.3 (Coaches and Develops)</p>
<p><i>Respondent #7 Principal G</i></p>	<p><i>Respondent #8 Principal H</i></p>

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

<p><u>Type of PLC Leader</u> Safety Agent/Anticipatory Advisor</p> <p><u>Area of Growth PLC Leadership</u> Community Creator</p> <p><u>Transformational Leadership Rating</u> Not at or above research norm</p> <p><u>Average Transformational Leadership Score</u> 2.78 on a 4.0 scale</p> <p><u>Lowest Transformational Leadership Score</u> 2.3 (coaches and develops)</p>	<p><u>Type of PLC Leader</u> Safety agent/Anticipatory Advisor</p> <p><u>Area of Growth PLC Leadership</u> Community Creator</p> <p><u>Transformational Leadership Rating</u> Not at or above research norm</p> <p><u>Average Transformational Leadership Score</u> 3.12 on a 4.0 scale</p> <p><u>Lowest Transformational Leadership Score</u> 2.5 (encourages innovative thinking)</p>
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They are creating a leadership continuum of PLC leadership. This study should make PLC leaders aware that gradually developing PLC leadership traits through the researcher's PLC leadership scale (Figure 1) will create a proficient PLC that followers want to participate in abundantly. Once a PLC leader is conscious of their standing on the PLC leadership continuum scale (figure1), they will realize that you must follow the continuum's progression as a PLC leader. Suppose PLC leaders recognize this study's leadership scale (figure 1) compares to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs. In that case, they will understand that PLC leadership has a progression to become self-actualized as a PLC leader. Once they reach self-actualization of PLC leadership, which is level 5, the results developer PLC leader, on the leadership continuum scale (figure 1), can effectively implement PLC principles (Dufour, 2004).

Implications for Policy and Practice

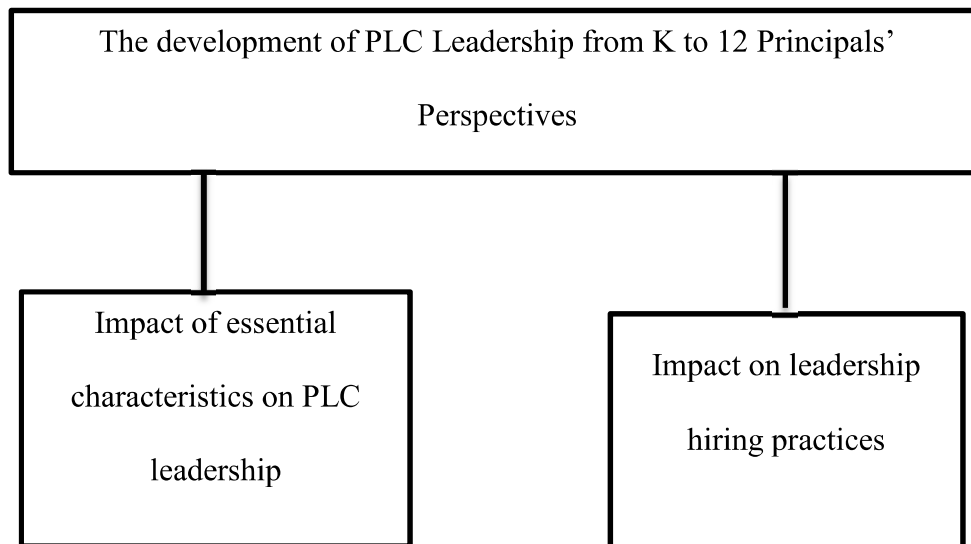
This study's researcher considers principals understand and try to create effective professional learning communities as a PLC leader but do not make the right connections to implement leadership theory. Once PLC leaders comprehend the PLC leaders' essential characteristics, the researcher considers they can expound upon them and become effective PLC leaders. This study can provide the data for school districts to implement a policy and practice that gives the

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

district essential characteristics for PLC leaders. Schools that already use PLCs as a practice in their districts can use this study's data to create influential PLC leaders that lead and facilitate the PLC. Creating influential PLC leaders to lead and facilitate PLCs is one way that data from this study can impact policy and practice.

Another way this study can have implications on policy and method is its impact on leadership hiring practices. School districts could develop the process for hiring district leadership from the data of this study. The essential characteristics from each of the five PLC leaders could be criteria for the interview process.

Figure 3: *Study's impact on policy and practice*



Impact of the essential characteristic on PLC leadership. After the researcher investigated and gathered data for this study, the vital aspects fit into PLC leaders' categories. The researcher of this study generated five types of PLC leaders from this study. The five kinds of PLC leaders are (a) safety agent PLC leader (b) trust designer PLC leader (c) community builder PLC leader (d) anticipatory advisor PLC leader (e) results developer PLC leader. These

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

PLC leaders can impact policy and practice to make PLC leaders aware of two things: (a) there is a leadership continuum. Suppose a school district considers a safety agent PLC leader's progression to a results developer PLC leader. In that case, the district can build a concrete foundation for PLC leadership at their district (b) each PLC leader has specific leadership characteristics that help develop strong PLC leaders. This foundation is just not about the aspects of an effective PLC; it is about the PLC leader's essential features that precede the PLC's functionality as a whole.

Impact on leadership hiring practices. If a district has implemented or is in the process of implementing PLCs in their district, they could align their interview protocols with the five types of PLC leaders created from this research study. For an interview committee at a school district to avoid halo errors by employing someone based on the interviewer's general feelings about an interviewee (Muchinsky, 1997), districts should link their interview questions for leadership with the five types of PLC leaders produced by this study. They will have data to create an anti-nepotism policy. This research study's data can target specific leadership styles or characteristics that support the district's practice and policy. These leadership characteristics can determine that interviewees are a proper fit for the organization. Once the candidates are selected, they will be trained to follow PLC leadership's progression from safety agent PLC leader to results developer PLC leader. This data from this research study would impact leadership hiring practices with districts that are creating PLCs district-wide.

Recommendations for Further Research

This theoretical, qualitative research study produced data that helped the researcher develop better insight into the lived experiences and defining instances that have impacted PLC leadership's essential characteristics. The researcher was also able to pair these essential

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

characteristics of PLC leadership with transformational leadership development of K-12 principals and investigate how principals develop transformational leadership factors for leading/facilitating a PLC. The results from this study were valuable and resulted in significant learning, and further research would be beneficial in the following areas:

1. Replicate the study on the teacher's perceptions of PLC leadership.
2. Use another leadership theory to guide this theoretical, qualitative study.
3. Develop a quantitative study, researching the five types of PLC leader's impact on test scores at their districts.
4. Develop a quantitative study, researching the average transformational leadership score data above 3.5 on a 4.0 scale from the MLQ (Multi-Leadership Questionnaire) compared to student grade point average at their schools.

Recommendation One: Replicate the current study on teacher's perceptions of PLC leadership.

This research study is exploring principal's perceptions of PLC leadership. The MLQ (multi-leadership questionnaire) from *Mindgarden* was a self-rating taking only by the principals themselves. In a replicated study, the researcher could examine the teacher's perceptions of PLC leadership and what they believe to be the essential characteristics of PLC leaders. The teachers could be the focus group instead of the principals. The researcher could ask teachers, who are the followers in a PLC, the same interview questions in this research study to gather qualitative data. The MLQ leadership questionnaire was administered to the followers in the PLC. In this study, the only rater was the principal, and they were rating their leadership. In a replicated study, the followers could take the MLQ based on their PLC leader's perceptions. The data from

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

the followers' MLQ score could be compared to the data from this research study principal's self-rating leadership score (table 4) to design a quantitative study.

Recommendation Two: Use another leadership theory to guide this theoretical, qualitative study.

The leadership theory that is driving this study is transformational leadership theory. Bass (1985) cultivated the works of Burns (1978) and House (1976) by concentrating on the followers. He wanted leaders to focus on the emotional needs of followers rather than the leaders' needs. He also said that transformational leaders motivate their followers to do more than is expected. The researcher selected this theory based on Bass (1985) transformational leadership theory. PLC leaders need PLC members to be willing to do more than is expected. Suppose PLC leaders identify PLC followers' emotional needs. In that case, they may motivate them to become productive members of the PLC that will go the “extra mile” and utilize Dufour's (2004) six essential characteristics of a PLC. Ultimately, is transformational leadership theory the best leadership theory to implement while leading a PLC? The researcher is anticipating that transformational leadership is a suitable choice for leading a PLC.

Other PLC leadership researchers could replicate this study by using another leadership theory to compare it to transformational leadership. For example, this study could be driven by the servant leadership theory. Greenleaf (1970, 1972, 1977) defined this type of leadership as leaders focused on their followers' interests. They put followers first, inspire them, and help them grow professionally (Northouse, 2016). Instead of using the MLQ (multifactor leadership questionnaire), you could use the SLQ (servant leadership questionnaire) to measure servant leadership in this replica study. The interview questions would be aligned with the servant leadership theory. The questions would parallel Spears (2002) ten characteristics of a servant

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

leader. Those ten characteristics are: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, building community. Another researcher of PLC leadership could use the qualitative data from this research study.

Recommendation Three: Develop a quantitative study, researching the five types of PLC leaders (as defined from this study) on test scores at their districts.

There were eight participants in this study. All eight principals were K to 12 administrators. This study's researcher designated each principal in this study as a type of PLC leader. This researcher's suggestion to replicate this study would be to acquire the districts' test scores. Compare the test scores from the districts these eight principals use and the type of PLC leader they have been labeled in this study. For example, principal F in this study is marked as a safety agent PLC leader. He did not score at or above the norm for his transformational leadership rating on his MLQ questionnaire. His average transformational leadership score was 3.08 on a 4.00 scale. His lowest transformational leadership score was 2.3 on a 4.0 scale under coaches and developed. As a PLC leader, Principal F concentrates on creating an autonomous or self-governing workspace for PLC participants. The PLC participants feel supported, guided, and valued. They think it is a safe place to have discussions and share freely without repercussion. The leader creates an environment where disagreements are ok. Creating a safe environment for PLC members is what makes principal F a safety agent PLC leader. In this replica study, a researcher would take this data and compare it to principal F's districts test scores. The researcher of this replica study could investigate all eight principals from this current study and compare their labeled PLC leadership category to their district's test scores and determine which PLC leader is best suited to help improve test scores.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Recommendation Four: Develop a quantitative study, researching the average transformational leadership score data above 3.0 on a 4.0 scale from the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) compared to student grade point average at their schools.

The MLQ score from each participant in this study is analyzed and categorized by an average transformational leadership score of 3.0 or above on a 4.0 scale. In that case, they will meet the focus group's criteria for this replica study. Seven of the eight participants in this study (88%) would qualify as the replica study's focus group. Principal G would be the only participant from this study who would not be eligible for the replica study. He rated himself at a 2.78 on a 4.0 scale which would eliminate him. The researcher in the replica study would gather student grade point average from seven of the eight participant's school districts. The determining factor in this quantitative replica study would be the higher the average student grade point average, the higher the average transformational leadership score. If the principals in this study scored high on the MLQ in transformational leadership characteristics, their followers would perform better.

Principals not only have teachers as followers, but students are followers of principals. According to Northouse (2016), transformational leadership revolutionizes people. Transformational leaders influence followers to achieve more than they are willing to. These types of leaders evaluate follower's motives and fulfill their necessities. Followers feel as if they are respected as professionals. If a transformational leader leads the leaders of teachers and students, they may perform better. There may be a correlation between this type of leadership a student grade point average. This recommendation can only hypothesis this. That is why this would be a recommendation for further research by the researcher of this study.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated the lived occurrences and defining moments that have contributed to the development of PLC leadership's essential characteristics through the lens of public school principals who have lead and continue to lead PLCs in their school districts. A phenomenological approach was employed to develop themes from eight principals' lived experiences (five elementary, one middle, and two high schools), which permitted the researcher to categorize essential PLC leadership characteristics that support transformational leadership while facilitating and leading a PLC. A phenomenological approach was applied to allow a detailed understanding of the crucial characteristics of PLC leadership and its connection to transformational leadership theory. During the interviews and coding process, five themes materialized that supported the study's five research questions. The five pieces were: (1) safety agent PLC leader (2) trust designer PLC leader (3) community creator PLC leader (4) anticipatory advisor PLC leader (5) results developer PLC leader.

The researcher adopted a constructivist worldview for this study. According to Creswell (2007), it is described as seeking to understand the world in which one lives and works for the researcher to make sense or interpret the meanings others have about the world. In this study, the researcher trusted the participants' interpretations of the phenomenon being studied while keeping in mind his own experience as a k to 12 principal who has lead or facilitated professional development.

This chapter expanded upon further examination of the five themes that the researcher of this study established. These themes identified associations between the learning that ensued and its relation to theory and practice. Included in the discussions of themes were significant quotes from the participants in this study. Also included with participant quotes were practical,

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

theoretical applications from previous research. In addition to this relevant information, this chapter consists of the study's impact on leadership. The research concentrated on transformational leadership and its correlation to essential characteristics of PLC leadership. The researcher discussed three dimensions through which the current study can impact PLC leadership in a K-12 public school setting. Lastly, recommendations for further research were proposed by the researcher of this study for more PLC leadership data.

Transformational leadership is not an unfamiliar leadership theory. As for PLC leadership, this leadership theory could be a suitable leadership style to implement as a PLC leader.

Principal C suggested there are two kinds of leaders:

You have to be a leader of the faculty and the staff's manager at times (Personal Communication, July 1, 2020).

Being a manager of people is what most participants in this study described when leading a PLC. Bass (1985) described transformational leaders as improving followers' performance, acting as strong role models, communicating high expectations, inspiring through motivation, stimulating followers to be creative and innovative, and providing a supportive climate for followers. These attributes of a transformational leader correspond with PLC leadership as described by the participants in this study. Although there are many components to transformational leadership development, research encourages leaders to exhibit transformational leadership. According to Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996), leaders who implement transformational leadership were recognized as more successful leaders with better work results than those who exhibited transactional leadership. Therefore, this research study provides beneficial PLC leadership characteristics and learning for PLC leaders at any point in the PLC leadership/continuum chart (figure 2). As a result, experienced and inexperienced PLC leaders

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

should consider incorporating these PLC leadership styles that align with transformational leadership theory. These PLC leaders should also consider following the PLC leadership progression recognized in PLC leadership progression (figure 2). Following this progression in the PLC leadership can benefit leaders of PLCs. The data from this research study can assist principals or teachers that guide and manage PLCs in their districts.

When examining and explicitly exploring each participant's transformational leadership scores, most of the study participants consider themselves transformational leaders. The average score on the Multi-leadership questionnaire (MLQ) was 3.24 on a 4.0 scale. That is the 87th percentile. This data is strictly from a self-assessment of leadership. According to the data from this research study, transformational leadership does take part in PLC leadership.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

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ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

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ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Permission to Use the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)



www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below. Sample Items:

As a leader

- I talk optimistically about the future.
- I spend time teaching and coaching.
- I avoid making decisions.

The person I am rating....

- Talks optimistically about the future.
- Spends time teaching and coaching.
- Avoids making decisions

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Most", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc. www.mindgarden.com

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Appendix B. CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Professional Learning Community Leader,

I am a doctoral student at Point Park University. As a doctoral candidate, I am required to do a study as partial fulfillment of the doctoral degree requirements in Education. My research is designed to describe the essential characteristics of the professional learning communities' leadership in several public school districts in Western Pennsylvania. I am asking for your help by completing a survey and participating in an interview for my dissertation study: Team leadership: A theoretical analysis of professional learning communities (PLC) leadership perceived by public school leaders in western Pennsylvania.

The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether you want to participate in this study. To participate in this study, you will be asked to complete two tasks. You will complete the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The PLC leader will participate in a structured interview with the researcher of this study. The MLQ survey is designed to measure transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. This survey will be administered electronically. The PLC leader will take this survey one time. The MLQ survey will take you approximately 20 to 25 minutes. The structured interview will take about 25 to 30 minutes. There are ten questions the researcher will be asking.

Your participation is voluntary and will help advance knowledge about effective PLC leadership. Should you choose to participate, your information and answers will be held in strict confidence. There are minimal risks associated with this participation greater than those encountered in everyday life. There will be no compensation for participation in this study, and participation will require no monetary cost to you. Answers from completed surveys will be compiled into data sorted by county with other participants and cannot be specifically identified. The information obtained in this survey may be published, but there will not be personal identifiers within the report. Your answers will be anonymous.

My hope is that this research will produce essential characteristics of Professional Learning Communities Leadership. This data will give these PLC leaders a more focused insight on how to become effective PLC leaders.

Thank you,

Robert Motte

Doctoral Student, Point Park University

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Appendix C. Consent to participate in a research study



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Team leadership: A theoretical study of professional learning communities (PLC) leadership as perceived by public school leaders in western Pennsylvania
- INVESTIGATOR:** Robert Motte, doctoral student Point Park University, assistant principal Aliquippa school district, rmotte@pointpark.edu
- ADVISOR:** (if applicable) Dr. Karen McIntyre, Ph.D., Education Department Chair, Point Park University, kmcintyre@pointpark.edu
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Education (Ed.D.) at Point Park University.
- PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to describe the essential characteristics of the professional learning communities' leadership in several public school districts in western Pennsylvania.
- In order to qualify for participation, you must be a Principal or other leader of the PLC from a participating school district in western PA.
- PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:** To participate in this study, you will be asked to: Complete a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) that measures transformational leadership factors. In addition, you will be asked to allow me to interview you. The interviews will be recorded by audio and transcribed. The interview will take approximately 25 to 30 minutes. You will be interviewed once at a place of your choice.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are minimal risks associated with this participation but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. Participants will contribute to current research in the field of education and, more specifically, data regarding effective PLC leadership.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study and any personal information that you provide will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time by contacting me via email **rmotte@pointpark.edu**

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dr. Karen McIntyre, **412-392-3914**.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may call Dr. Brent Robbins, Chair of Point Park University's IRB, at 412-392-8183.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Appendix D: Research Instrument: Demographic Questions for participants (Pre-Study Survey)

1. What school district are you currently employed with as an administrator?
2. Does your district currently implement Professional Learning Communities (PLC)?
3. Has there been sufficient training for the leadership in leading/facilitating professional learning community (PLC)?

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Appendix E. Research Instrument: Interview Questions for Participants

1. How do you, as a PLC leader, describe characteristics of a functioning PLC?
2. As a PLC leader, what do you perceive as the most valuable characteristics of a PLC from the participant's point of view?
3. Tell me about a time that you feel you influenced the work of a PLC?
4. In your experience as a PLC leader, how does leadership influence the work of a PLC through the eyes of the participants?
5. What motivates you as a PLC leader to be part of the PLC?
6. Tell me about a time you experienced a participant that was motivated by being part of a PLC?
7. Tell me about a time you encouraged creativity and innovation as a PLC leader?
8. As a PLC leader, what have you seen that motivates participants to be creative and innovative in a PLC?
9. As a leader of a PLC, how would you describe an effective PLC climate?
10. How do participants in a PLC that you have lead perceive the PLC climate as effective?

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLC LEADERSHIP

Appendix F. IRB APPROVAL



Office of the Provost

201 WOOD STREET, PITTSBURGH, PA 15222

phone 412-392-3976

facsimile 412-392-4720

www.pointpark.edu

provostsoffice@pointpark.edu

May 31, 2019

REF: Robert Motte IRB Proposal

Dear Mr. Motte:

The IRB Committee has reviewed your proposal to conduct research under the title "Team Leadership: A Theoretical Study of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Leadership as Perceived by Public School Leaders in Western Pennsylvania".

I am pleased to report that the IRB has approved your study, and you may begin to recruit participants to collect data for analysis. At this time, you are approved to recruit participants and collect data for up to one year. If at any time you decide to change your methodology or any other aspects of your IRB-approved proposal, please contact the IRB for review of any such revisions before moving forward with the changes.

We wish you the best of luck with your research.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brent D. Robbins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Brent Dean Robbins, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
BDR:jmr

c: Dr. Karen McIntyre

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