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Supporting Public High School Teachers in a Context of Multiple Mandates: A Social Justice Approach to Professional Learning Communities

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SUPPORTING PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN A CONTEXT OF
MULTIPLE MANDATES:
A SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
COMMUNITIES

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

To all those who suffer from social injustices and oppression, for those in the schools and everywhere who struggle to end those realities; and especially to my Higher Power, who guides, empowers, and sustains me throughout this journey.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have made contributions to this research. I am especially grateful to Dr. Maurianne Adams, dissertation committee chair person, for her agreement to work with me even after her retirement from teaching, and for her invaluable conceptual and editorial feedback. I also extend my special thanks to dissertation committee member Dr. Linda Tropp, for her insightful suggestions. I am especially grateful to Dr. Craig Wells, who served both on my Comprehensive Committee and Dissertation Committee, for his excellent instruction in class, his expert assistance in statistics and for his encouragement and support throughout this entire process. The contributions of Drs. Bailey Jackson and Ximena Zuniga are also appreciated. I greatly appreciate the expert assistance of University of Massachusetts professionals like Linda Guthrie, researcher Dr. Steve McGinty, and the invaluable formatting assistance from Dr. Elisa Campbell.

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ABSTRACT

SUPPORTING PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN A CONTEXT OF
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COMMUNITIES

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Although public school teaching by its inherent nature presents numerous classroom

challenges, the public high school teacher today is faced in addition with multiple

external mandates from several outside stakeholders. Given the established track record

of professional learning communities (PLCs) to provide teacher support and

development, I created a PLC that would serve as an intervention designed to support

teachers in their classroom work and with their multiple mandates as well. This enhanced

PLC was informed by interviews with administrators, researched best practices of

traditional PLCs, and uniquely, by what teachers told me they needed in an optimal PLC

experience. The PLC was facilitated and based on inclusive, holistic social justice

principles that provided a framework for and experience of inclusive teaching practice,

while specifically addressing ongoing teacher concerns and issues raised by the multiple

mandates.

The PLC intervention I designed was for participants only, and I studied them along a

range of outcomes that were compared to a control group of teachers identified from the

same general population, but who did not experience the intervention. I used a multiple methods, predominantly qualitative approach, that included closed and open field questions taken before and after the intervention. I concluded by conducting in-depth end of term interviews with the participants in the intervention, enriched by my own field notes and observations.

Findings included participants unanimously reporting this PLC uniquely satisfying, both professionally and personally. Professionally, they reported a significant gain across a range of knowledge, skills, self efficacy, and classroom management; an enhanced understanding of student diversity, and of the complex interactions between their choices of pedagogy and curriculum within the learning experience between and among students and teacher—leading to more effective professional interactions. After closely examining a published holistic teaching and learning model, participants exercised their professional power by creating one organizing tool to help them personalize and connect the apparently disparate mandates, and another organizer that schematically designed their future professional development requirements.

Post-PLC, participants felt affirmed, empowered, less stressed, more closely affiliated, and spiritually supported by the PLC. Many continue to meet since the study's conclusion.

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CHAPTER 1

DAUNTING CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Teaching Challenges and Teacher Mandates

Teaching and learning in public school systems involve layers of complexity that continue to defy complete comprehension and measurement. Teaching is a complex phenomenon which involves numerous elements that interact simultaneously (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) and "learning is a complex, effortful, and often painful process" (Sizer, 1984, 150). When that inherently complex enterprise is conducted within the public trust and under the auspices of the government, those stakeholders' combined interests further complicate matters.

Despite considerable effort on the part of teachers and education-researchers, the public finds fault with the public education system. According to a 2010 Gallup Poll, 79% of the Americans polled graded the public school system at "C" or lower. When asked in an open ended question what needs to be done to score an "A," the most frequent response (34%) was, "improve the quality of teaching" (Lopez, 2010, August 25)[1]. Pundits and politicians routinely deplore the state of public education. Regardless of the validity of each stakeholder' claim, one observation is indisputable: voices demanding reform create a scrutiny of public school teachers seldom seen in U.S. history.

One indication of this dissatisfaction, at the policy level, has been the proliferation of federal, state, and local mandates—often contradictory--which complicate the role of the

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[1] Interestingly, in the same poll, 49% of parents and non-parents graded their own school systems as an A or B, with 33% grading it as a C. I believe that this shows that the public is generally swayed by media messages, including allegations of U.S. schools' "failure," and by documentaries such as the recent *Waiting for Superman* (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012, 29.; See also Palmer & Rudnicki, 2009; Wagner, 2002).

teacher. One such policy mandate is the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, an expansive educational reform mandate which, among other objectives, seeks to "ensure that public education offers all children a chance to succeed at learning by holding educators accountable for their success" (Palmer & Rudnicki, 2009, 194)[2]. The law stipulates that in order to achieve greater student learning and skills acquisition, teachers must change from their presently underperforming and failing actions. Public schools must now assure that their current teachers, and all new hires, are "highly qualified," and administrators must professionally develop teachers to attain and maintain that status.

I am aware of these current realities not merely because I am observing the situation, but also because I am a teacher in a public high school. I currently teach high school English in a public, suburban school in the Northeastern United States. I am also a social justice education doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In this dissertation, I conducted an intervention I designed that was based on a social justice perspective that I believed would enable teachers to manage more effectively the inherent challenges to teaching, the current intense scrutiny, and the external demands. I also studied that intervention's effectiveness for those teachers who participated with the intervention.

Before I describe the intervention, I must note that the situation that I introduced is even more complex and daunting not only because teachers are struggling with multiple mandates, public scrutiny and school politics, but also because the demographics in the

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[2] NCLB can be seen as the federal government's legislated response to its earlier commissioned findings published in 1983, called *Nation at Risk* (Members of National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

classroom are changing. In the classrooms, teachers are working with students who look very different than they, and for whom English may be a second, third, or fourth language. Demographic diversity increases the types and frequency of dynamic interplay between students, and between teachers and students. Many teachers are not adequately trained to identify, and effectively incorporate into the learning process, the different kinds of student diversity. In response to these new demographic realities, some outside stakeholders have created further mandates that teachers equitably address diversity in their classroom. It is only one of many directives.

Let me provide the reader with a list of mandates from one school with which I am most familiar. Based on my local research, which included interviewing a number of administrators, and running two focus groups with teachers, I compiled the following list of expectations of teachers, as of June, 2010:

*The following were the then-current mandates from the Federal Government***:**

1. Comply with "Scientific Research-Based Interventions" (SRBI)
2. Comply with NCLB legislation, including school improvement in test scores

The following were then-current mandates from the State:

3. Demonstrate competency and skill of each of state's identified teacher competency areas
4. Address each student's social and emotional learning

The following were then-current mandates from this site's local school district:

5. Demonstrate culturally responsive teaching;
6. Address the "Common Core of Learning and Teaching" (Hargreaves, 2001) which is the interaction among curricula, teacher, and student (Personal interview with district Language Arts Curriculum Specialist, 2010)

The following were then-current local mandates from within this high school:

7. All teachers must employ Differentiated Instruction in the classroom[3]
8. All curricula for all courses must be rewritten in the Understanding by Design format (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)
9. School will collapse lowest academic tracked level into existing college-bound level, and create new "levels" within some existing courses (e.g., creating a college bound British Literature course, which has only been offered in the Honors level)
10. Create new Advanced Placement and Early College Experience classes
11. Assure that graduating students have met student performance standards, which includes demonstration of communication, citizenship, collaboration, and information acquisition and processing
12. The high school community and classrooms will adhere to a school-wide social behavior norm, for which all teachers are responsible to enforce
13. The high school community will adopt a learning program named Tribes Learning Communities[4]
14. Teachers will produce a new grade reporting system which will add to current grade reporting by codifying student approaches to learning, skills acquisition, and the like.

However, as I write this today, some 21 months after compiling this list, only one of the 14 mandates has been put on hold, and urgency is further heightened as four entirely new mandates from the state have since been added, and must be implemented by July, 2012.

Yet what I have represented so far is not an exhaustive list of the professional duties required of the public high school teacher. Teachers must also perform a multitude of

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[3] As understood in this school, Differentiated Instruction requires the teacher to perform frequent assessments of the learners to determine their individual levels of skills and content acquisition and mastery, then to tailor instruction methods to meet the needs of each learner. This requires both re-teaching and presenting the material in a ways that match the individual needs of the students. Results of all efforts, student scores, etc. must be kept in a file that is always accessible for administrative review.

[4] TLC was first formulated in the 1970's by Jeanne Gibbs. It is a research- and practice-based teaching and learning process designed to build an inclusive, student-centered, collaborative learning community, and focuses simultaneously on academic, individual, and communal learning. Formal training takes 24 hours. Disclosure: I am a certified TLC trainer of teachers, having received that training in July, 2008. I also have trained approximately 30 teachers at this site in 2009.

assigned clerical duties, such as supervision of students when in hallways and while eating, and frequently contacting parents for issues like class absences, behavior, grades, missing work, and the like.

To summarize, the inherently difficult enterprise of teaching and learning within the public schools has come under especially intense scrutiny. The public and the politicians have determined that the way to improve the public schools is to improve teachers. Teachers are now being directed to change their methods, and more is being added to their professional duties.

I conducted an intervention designed specifically to help teachers to balance their inherently complicated teaching and learning enterprise, made more challenging because of the changing student demographics. Beyond the classroom, however, is the reality of the add-ons of multiple mandates from various stakeholders. My intervention included an organizing heuristic that, because of its flexibility, can help teachers account for the range of complex interactions within a classroom and help them in organizing the numerous, competing outside demands. In subsequent chapters, I will also discuss if that heuristic helped teachers organize and better manage their clerical duties.

Teacher Morale

As overwhelming to teachers as that list of external mandates might appear, there is more to understand. In addition to those internal and external factors, unlike other professionals, teachers are further challenged by their relative powerlessness over essential issues within their school/work environment.

Quite recently, the New York Times reported that our nation's public teacher morale was at its lowest point in 20 years, "with more than half of the teachers expressing some

reservations about their jobs. Approximately one third said they were likely to leave their profession in the next five years" (Santos, 2012). While that article cited the insecurity of the economy and a national movement to curb the power of unions as contributing factors in the teachers' attitudes, I believe the dissatisfaction transcends current economic and political trends. Elsewhere (Harak, 1988) I have written about the lack of public recognition of teachers as professionals, and the public school teacher's relative lack of professional autonomy and the toll those take on their morale. The power to decide practically all important matters related to teaching and learning lies outside of the teacher's hands, and within those of outside experts, politicians, and elected lay people. In most pubic schools, local boards of education dictate to teachers about the content of their curriculum, their pedagogy, their class size and composition, frequency and duration of class time, etc. As "public *servants*," the teachers are expected to enact the stakeholders' and experts' directives, which are disseminated to them via their organizationally-empowered superiors—the school administration. The hierarchy above the teacher includes, locally, the curriculum coordinator or department chair; the assistant principal and principal; the district superintendent; and local education boards, comprised of elected officials. Some of those board members' sole qualification as an education expert consists of having attended school. And it is they who vote to decide on the range of essential educational practices and teacher and student work conditions. Those local boards are ultimately under the governance of the state board of education, who in turn must decide the extent to which the state will comply with the federal mandates and incentives, like the "Race to the Top." The public teacher, then, is in essence an actor

playing the role written and directed by the real experts. And the teacher learns his new part in the ongoing "professional development" that is also constructed by other writers.

In-Service Teacher Training

Consistent within the power paradigm of outside-expert-directing-compliant-teacher, the traditional formula for in-service teacher development followed a top down dissemination of knowledge, where teachers enact what outside experts and stakeholders mandate (Nielsen, Barry, & Staab, 2008). NCLB now increases the prescribed behaviors for teachers, indicating that "policy makers do not trust teachers to make responsible, educationally appropriate judgments…[they] do not view teachers as uniformly competent" (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012, 31). That observation is not new.

Thirty years ago, educator and researcher Ted Sizer (1984) observed that "Teachers are rarely consulted, much less given significant authority, over the rules and regulations governing the life of their school" (184). A mere surface analysis of this typical organizational practice immediately raises another obvious question: granting that teachers certainly should be held accountable, it is true that in other arenas, like business, "leaders talk about the people 'closest to the problem' being the most qualified to find better solutions. Why doesn't this same principle apply [to teachers in public schools]?"(Wagner, 2002, 104). I believe that teachers' lack of power over the issues they are most closely familiar with is not only a significant challenge to them, but is a core issue that is emblematic of a larger social inequity, or social injustice, regarding public education. I will discuss that in Chapter 2. Here, it is important to understand that teachers also do not have power to decide what they need to learn (knowledge) or to do

better (skills) in order to teach better. Determining their system-directed professional development[5] is also left up to supervisors or outside experts to decide.

Appearance versus the Reality of Professional Learning Communities

While supervisor-assigned training of the teachers is not new, the format and exterior appearance of the training is evolving. A recent design of this professional development paradigm, for a growing number of school systems, is the formation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC), billed as a "ground-up" alternative to the former top-down paradigm. Currently in education, people use the term PLC to describe a wide variety of combinations of individuals which may included an administrative team, a high school department, a classroom, a school district, and so on (R. DuFour, 2004). PLCs, as is understood within my school and research site, are structured by administrators or their representatives to consist of small groups of teachers, sometimes led by an administrator or supervisor (who can be a teacher), who regularly meet and collaborate on a specific educational challenge or mandate, use readings or other support materials, with the express purpose of improving teacher instruction, so as to improve student learning. Most PLCs are designed to address specific mandates or school-based issues (R. DuFour, 2007; R. DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Gajda & Koliba, 2008; S. M. Hord, 2004; S. M. Hord, 1997). Proponents cite growing evidence to suggest that when PLCs are structured and operated effectively, they can provide excellent professional development and improve student learning (Connolly & James, 2006; R. Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005; Gibbs & Ushijima, 2008; S. M. Hord, 2004).

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[5] Of course, many teachers have sought individual courses of professional improvement, and many still do. My focus is on the "official" organizational professional development tracks assigned by others to teachers.

But as currently designed, I assert that today's PLCs are essentially administrative-assigned groups of teachers who are gathered to learn the mandates, enact them in the classroom, collect data on student performance, and return to the PLC to revise their methods of instruction to match the requirements set by the outside experts. The current design is merely a different format of the same top-down, expert-to-teacher power dynamic. That PLC construction does not provide a comprehensive answer to teachers' challenges, and it especially does not mitigate their sense of powerlessness over their work conditions.

Clearly, overall systemic power does not lie equally within the public educational system. Among the advocates for educational reform and teacher improvement, there are no identified teachers' voices to speak of their experiences within their work environment, to ascertain and assert what they need for their own professional development, and to advocate for autonomous decision making within their work conditions.

Practitioner-as-Researcher

If a public high school teacher chooses to stay in the environment I have depicted[6] , she will need to navigate through a cluster of overwhelming factors. The teachers who stay will need knowledge, skill, institutional and collegial support, and professional empowerment in sorting through the many issues and multiple mandates. I strongly believe that teachers' voices should be included in the discussion of education reform[7].

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[6] Novice teachers report higher levels of burnout than experienced teachers, and between one third to one half of novices will leave teaching by the fifth year of teaching (Fisher, 2011).

[7] Some may argue that teachers have national and state unions that champion teacher interests. While this is partially true, unions are subject to the standard exigencies of any

That belief, coupled with the range of withering challenges, led me to put into practice in this dissertation what I espouse. Before I designed this study, I listened closely to what practicing teachers told me that they needed to help them perform their duties. After researching available existing learning models, I selected a flexible, inclusive and holistic learning and teaching model that I anticipated would help them. And equally important, as I will discuss, I decided to facilitate the seminar in a way that empowered the teachers. Finally, I utilized the currently-popular PLC model so as to construct a more authentic, collaborative "professional development" experience.

Design of Intervention

In summary, I conducted an intervention that was designed to

➢ help teachers to recognize and account for the inherent complexities of teaching and learning

➢ address the changing student demographics

➢ provide a heuristic that makes sense of classroom and workplace challenges and external mandates of stakeholders

➢ finally empower teachers to make decisions relative to their work domain, through the intervention's learning process and facilitation style.

In keeping with the notion of teacher empowerment, I emphasized to all participants that their participation in this study was entirely voluntary, and that they could leave it at any time, for any reason, as this seminar was in no way affiliated with the official administrative-directed PLCs, and would not satisfy their required PLC attendance. If

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bureaucracy, and do not typically conduct the kinds of rigorous studies that are accepted into the lexicon of the education research on which much reform is theoretically based.

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they were to participate in this intervention, it would be on their own time, and in addition to all of their current duties.

I have designed an intervention that is, as far as I can tell, unlike the standard professional development experience for high school teachers. The standard professional development seminars are conducted by experts who tell teachers what they need to know. Recently, this traditional style of instructing has involved teachers working in small groups, and has involved teachers in collaborative activities designed to meet the experts' learning agenda. My intervention is based in large part on what teachers told me that *they* need, and I selected a published, holistic teaching and learning model that I believed would help teachers to better organize teaching challenges and external mandates. Also, I facilitated in a way that helped the participants create a safe, supportive, inquiry-based learning community. This PLC was entirely voluntary; was not administrative-designed or directed; was based on social justice education principles and practice; and I sought to empower teachers by inviting them to identify and to gain the knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy they thought they needed to better meet the classroom and external demands of teaching. I also asked teachers to take an honest self-inventory so that they could be more grounded in identifying their responsibilities and what they can—and cannot—control in order to contribute to a more equitable, fair learning environment for all. I fully describe this experimental intervention in the next chapter.

The data I collected and interpreted from this PLC will add the in-service, practicing teacher's "voice" to the discussions of education and teacher reform.

Discussion of Research Questions

The difficult challenges of teaching and learning, the increasing legislated requirements, increasing public scrutiny, and growing pressures on the disempowered teacher have led me to conduct the intervention I just introduced. My research questions sharpen the outcome dimensions I studied.

The first research question asks how a PLC can help teachers to face their professional challenges, and the best ways teachers can identify, then work to gain, the knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy *they think they have or need* to meet or to enhance their ability to meet all those demands. The second research question examines the extent to which this *differently-facilitated, voluntarily-attended, social justice-based* PLC helps teachers to reexamine all of their challenges, using a holistic teaching and learning model. That question examines the real-classroom applications in teachers' practice of a social justice education perspective, as well as challenging them to examine their relative positions of power and powerlessness.

<u>Research Question One</u>

My experimental PLC intervention was intended to address ongoing teacher needs and to incorporate external mandates in a holistic model of teaching/learning so that they no longer appear to be "add-on's." I also sought to determine if this social-justice based and facilitated PLC provided participants with knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy they determined as necessary to more effectively organize and meet their teaching duties.

My first research question, then, addresses the usefulness of a PLC in broad terms as well as specific outcomes:

1) How can a voluntarily-attended PLC, facilitated in a holistic, socially just manner, and using a holistic model also based on social justice principles, help public high school teachers face the challenges of the school year? In particular, how can a volunteer, teachers-only PLC help teachers regarding the following outcome dimensions of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy?

This question focuses on the usefulness of PLCs to teachers regarding specific outcomes, namely the dimensions of their self-reported knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy relative to their professional duties. To perform those duties, teachers need a range and depth of content and teaching/learning knowledge areas, a broad set of teaching and learning skills, and the personal belief in their capability to apply their knowledge and skills at the appropriate times in varying classroom situations. I also sought to understand what teachers thought they already possessed and needed to gain or improve upon within those dimensions.

I then sought to discover from the teachers what they thought they needed within the domains of knowledge, skills, and self efficacy. The need for particular content knowledge is a given. But knowledge in the following areas is critical, I believe, in helping teachers understand the interdynamics—including the power dynamics--of teaching and learning in the classroom as it has come to be framed by new demographics, public scrutiny and political mandates: knowledge of themselves; about their students; of the impact of their curricular choices; of the pedagogies they select; and of the challenges and mandates they face. I thought that if I could help those participating in the intervention to broaden this kind of knowledge base, it would help them to understand complex interactions in the classroom. In theory, increased knowledge increases the

capacity and application of that knowledge in a skillful way, by increasing a teacher's flexibility and resiliency in coordinating on a daily basis a number of competing internal and external demands. A more knowledgeable, flexible teacher can better transfer the knowledge *of* someone or something into useful and appropriate application of that knowledge *for* particular indentified ends. Finally, a group of teachers embarking on a journey of knowledge and inquiry together will help each individually during this challenging endeavor (M. Cochran-Smith, 1999; S. Nieto, 2000; North, 2009). In Chapter 2, I will highlight relevant research concerning teacher knowledge domains.

Another important element teachers need is a skills set that allows them to deliver and perform their professional functions and duties in the classroom, as classroom dynamics reflect new demographics, and as the classroom is impacted by public scrutiny and political mandates. "Skill" is commonly defined as a person's acquired ability to perform various types of cognitive or behavioral activities effectively. For teachers or others in a domain-specific field such as medicine, "skill" is defined as "the ability to produce solutions in some problem domain" (wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn). I theorized that the PLC model I conducted would assist teachers in identifying both knowledge areas and skills necessary to address particular duties and functions respective to teaching. In Chapter 2, I will introduce the overlap of skill with knowledge.

Knowledge and skill, while necessary, are not always sufficient to help the teacher act. Efficacy belief, or a belief in one's own *competence*, is a major impetus for action. Perceived self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (A. Bandura, 1997, 3). During my pre-dissertation research, teachers told me that they felt extreme stress, and had

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confusions and doubts about what the new mandates actually were requiring of them, and if they could do *everything* now required of them competently, while meeting all deadlines. That is why I included the self-efficacy dimension in my study. Teachers might conceivably possess the knowledge and skills to act in a given situation, but lack the self-efficacy to act, since in part, people's motivations to act are based more on what they believe to be true about their own capacities rather than what may be objectively true. Also, some organizational development researchers have written about the "knowing/doing gap," exploring other factors that inhibit the actions that they know needs to be undertaken (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). In the next chapter, I will report on that, and the current research on teacher self efficacy.

Those three essential aspects to effective teaching, then, are the first outcomes I wished to investigate in my first research question. But that question alone does not take into consideration another pressing reality for teachers. As noted, teachers face a daunting array of challenges, mandates, and clerical duties that vie for urgent and timely attention, and often compete with their focus on teaching and learning in the classroom.

Taking a Holistic, Inclusive, Social Justice Approach to PLCs

In addition to the basic triad of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy, I sought to empower teachers by providing a holistic teaching and learning model that had the strong potential to enable them to re-frame, or re-organize the challenges and mandates they face. On the basis of my pilot, or pre-dissertation research--as well as my own experience and observation (described in Chapter 3)--I designed a holistic, inclusive, social justice-facilitated approach to the existing PLC format. My intention was to provide to teachers learning experiences and readings that would help them explore essential categories and

factors of teaching and learning. This approach linked into a single model the interactions among teacher, subject matter, students, and pedagogy, together with the diversity that increasingly characterizes school demographics, curriculum, and pedagogy (M. Adams & Love, 2005). In the PLC, I planned to employ a holistic, inclusive model of teaching and learning, proposed by two social justice education practitioners and researchers, Maurianne Adams and Barbara Love (2005). This holistic model was designed to provide a foundational and unifying structure that is currently absent in PLC designs, thereby allowing teachers to work with the understandings that link the challenges and mandates. It also directly addresses the confusion about how the directives and mandates had any connection with each other, which I learned from teachers during my in my pre-dissertation study, and will discuss more fully, below.

As a specific example of connectivity of mandates issued separately to teachers, at different times, consider the following directives to teachers from the state and local administrators in this Northeastern public high school, the site of this dissertation study:

➢ From the state and district: teachers in the near future must employ "culturally responsive teaching"

➢ From the school administration: teachers must use differentiated instructional practices to meet the educational and learning needs of each student

➢ From the behavior code adopted by the district: teachers must construct their classroom community to provide "mutual respect" for all

I determined that these directives are concerned with issues of equity among the diversity that humans present, and are reflected in educational systems. In this case, the focus is entirely on the teaching/learning enterprise within the classroom. A social justice

education perspective can help address the underlying issues that manifest themselves in these apparently separate, but actually connected mandates. A social justice approach can also help teachers first recognize, then better deal with the challenges of diversity in the classroom, while conforming to the mandates to address diversity from outside stakeholders. In other words, intentionally seeking to know more about the power, privilege, and positionality within the classroom's dynamics will help teachers understand and organize the apparently disconnected mandates listed above. I will more fully discuss social justice education tenets in Chapter 2.

Essentially, my pre-dissertation research, which included teachers' frank assessments of their prior experiences with professional development, provided me with additional justification for the type of holistic intervention, based on social justice education and practice, which I decided to create.

In response to my questions about the teachers' experiences with the PLC professional development model at this school, teachers told me that they had difficulty in determining the connections among the mandates, and their application to their lived experiences and challenges in the classroom. The teachers stated emphatically that while they mostly enjoyed working with other teachers and talking about what they did in the classrooms, the current PLC approach of individual, separate professional development sessions had not worked well for them. They said that approach actually led to confusion about the connections to previous sessions, and questions about their practical application to their classroom realities and challenges. This lack of connection led me to explore whether there could be a mechanism to help teachers to make the educational connections, and even to better organize all of their additional professional duties. During the interviews, I

also privately wondered why these teachers had not expressed their needs and experiences outside of the room, or acted in meaningful ways to mitigate their circumstances. I soon realized that both of those issues were ones addressed by social justice education.

During the focus groups sessions, teachers told me that they would welcome an organizational tool to help them categorize and organize current and future demographic challenges and outside mandates. I wondered how participants would respond to the greater power they would have in the PLC intervention I was envisioning.

My research and personal experience as a professional development provider in this school has led me to conclude that to date, the local application of the PLC model has mirrored the previous use of the isolated outside expert. That is, the PLC has been used by administration to have teachers figure out together how to accomplish the separate, apparently-unrelated tasks they assign to the teachers.

In summary, my pre-dissertation research had shown that PLCs could be effective in meeting the agendas of stakeholders outside the actual classroom. I sought to determine if the empowering principles of a social justice education perspective could be infused with already-effective PLCs, thereby converting the current "top-down" PLC to one that is genuinely a "bottom-up" collaborative group. My second research question explores that, in addition to potential practical applications in meeting the current mandates.

Research Question Two

My second question asked, How do teachers report, find or believe that a voluntarily-attended PLC, facilitated in a holistic, socially just manner, and using a holistic model also based on social justice principles, helps them to respond to the range of challenges

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they face? In particular, I asked whether teachers report, find, or believe that such a PLC helps them recognize and deal with (a) challenges of student diversity within the classroom; (b) mandates from external stakeholders that address student diversity; and (c) the entire range of competing demands teachers experience from the multiple sources.

As noted earlier, the teachers in my pilot study reported to me that they failed to understand how the singly-presented mandates are connected to each other, let alone provide long-term assistance for the teaching issues they experience within the classroom. In fact, because they are told to quickly employ each new mandate, teachers often reported that coordinating them with their regular classroom responsibilities simply makes it more difficult to teach. Teachers also stated that it was very difficult for them to coordinate and rank in order of priority the entirety of the challenges and mandates.

But upon deeper analysis, it became clear that some mandates attempt to acknowledge and address the changing demographics and scrutiny public high school teachers face, so that it would be irresponsible and inaccurate to reflexively dismiss all mandates as inane directives.

There is no denying the reality that the demographics of the students facing high school educators are becoming increasingly diverse. The Census Bureau predicts that by 2050, our population to be at 420 million, about a 40% increase from now. The white population will drop from 69% to 50%---but over 85% (some predict higher) of the teachers will be white (U.S. Government Workers, 2000).

How, then, can teachers effectively teach students with such different social identities and backgrounds? This is not only a daily classroom issue, this is also a policy issue addressed by mandates from multiple stakeholders.

The inherent issues of diversity raise their own particular challenges about teaching and learning and self-efficacy. Teachers must find ways to authentically connect curriculum and pedagogy with the student's cultural and social realities. The social justice education approach that I ascribe to, and incorporated into this PLC, helped teachers explore those intersections.

Another important and novel element of my study, therefore, is its holistic, inclusive social justice approach to teaching and learning. The model I presented to participants in my study was meant for them to explore meaningful ways to begin to reorganize all the challenges and mandates—even ones outside the classroom. This was in sharp contrast to previous focuses of PLCs.

As stated earlier, current PLC practice in this location has focused on single mandates, such as increasing literacy, sharing differentiated instruction practices, or rewriting curriculum in UBD format. I conjecture that administration and education theorists have sought to isolate tasks in order for teachers to practice acquisition and to attain and maintain sharp focus. However, the nature of teaching and learning is that it is extremely dynamic, and teachers must coordinate their own awarenesses of self, with student(s) interactions, curricular content, and teaching methods---all the while being responsive to what presents during the particular class meeting time. Therefore, an artificial "assembly line" approach to professional development that does not concurrently account for the genuine, dynamic interactions of teacher and pedagogy, student, and curriculum is necessarily flawed and presents limited practical application.

In Chapter 7, I will discuss a significant and unique aspect of my research: specifically how this intervention involving a holistic, inclusive social justice analysis of

teaching and learning provided for the participating teachers a practical, comprehensive

approach to the variety of challenges and mandates they face as public high school

teachers. The social justice approach to teaching and learning is also adaptive and

flexible, so that teachers can more readily apply it even during the dynamic interactions

of the classroom. I will also discuss how the participating teachers discovered how the

holistic model I used and the one they created could also serve in helping teachers

organize future challenges and mandates. This connectivity can conceivably relieve stress

because teachers will be able to reorganize existing mandates and challenges into a

logical construct, and to assign the inevitable new mandates into their respective

categories. And as we will see in Chapter 2, relieving stress is an important step in raising

teacher self-efficacy.

There is potentially great value to teachers who employ a holistic, inclusive, social

justice model because it will help them to deal with the range of ever-increasing

challenges pertaining to social/cultural/academic diversity and inclusivity. Additionally,

this kind of PLC interrogates issues of power and subordination in the educational

setting, thereby offering teachers the opportunity to explore themselves in relation to

those dynamics.

Although the PLC did require an additional time commitment of those who

volunteered, it in itself did not present an additional, disjointed thing to add to the "to-do"

list, but rather provided a comprehensive, inclusive, logical, and practical way to both

provide research-based structure and to reduce the complexity created through *apparently*

unconnected isolates. As we will see, participating teachers felt quite the contrary about

the usefulness of my PLC intervention, as many opted to continue meeting voluntarily *after* this dissertation study concluded.

To reiterate, I provided an *enhancement* to the effective PLCs reported by researchers such as Hord, Tobias, DuFour, and others. By operating the PLC in a socially just manner, which necessitates a constructivist, democratic environment that is responsive to individual teacher needs and learning styles, I anticipated that participants would more intentionally engage in the life-long examination of themselves, and seek to better determine how they can better uncover and more skillfully redress the classroom dynamics and curriculum that mirror or reproduce social inequities (M. Adams & Love, 2005; M. Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007).

In the next section, I will offer my hope of the application of this study to other readers interested in applying these local realities to their own high schools.

Bringing the Teacher's Voice to the Teacher Improvement Reforms

In the beginning of this chapter, I outlined how the PLC has grown as a new method for teacher professional development. Most often, pundits, politicians, and researchers cite research in education as the basis for improvements in policy and practice. However, how often does educational research actually shape policy and practice? At least one scholar, William Reese (1999), observes that while much writing on the history of education has been oriented on "reform," the studied relationship between education-related research and changing and improving school practice is ambiguous, to the point of nonexistence. Exactly how education research relates to practice, therefore, is an understudied subject in itself (Reese, 1999). I assert that a main reason for this lack of

empirical support lies in the dearth of research from practicing high school teachers who are engaged in the enactment of the mandates while teaching and performing other clerical duties. My study will begin to fill that void in the literature in that it provides the attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings of practicing teachers engaged in the complex task of teaching and helping teens learn in a public school.

My hope is that my grounded, research-based findings in this study, which will include the often-neglected voices of the practicing teacher within a newly-designed professional learning community, will be utilized by both practicing teachers and others interested in enhancing the learning experience for all.

In my literature review presented in Chapter 2, I will show an absence of studies that provide data from teachers regarding what *they* indicate they need to know more about. My study will add to the literature voices of teachers', concerning their stated professional needs for knowledge, skills, and personal expectations from PLCs. Teachers' voices from this study will counter the reproduction of the current dominant paradigm in education reform movements that positions teachers as the voiceless, passive recipients of experts' or authorities' directives for professional and teacher development. The lack of data on teacher-initiated PLCs is evidence of that continued inequity, and my literature review will reveal that there are no data on voluntary, teacher-designed PLCs. Few studies even include significant excerpts from teachers within the PLC, and of those, all were originally externally designed. Also, I have yet to find studies that measure the benefits to teachers of a voluntarily-attended PLC grounded in a social justice approach to learning—the type I have designed for this study. Nor have I found studies that

examine the effects of a PLC designed to address specific needs teachers themselves identify and collaborate on. My study will fill those voids in the literature.

Grounding this PLC on a social justice perspective makes it a PLC that is very different from the ones currently used in the latest teacher reform movement. I wanted to intentionally interrupt and challenge the trend that I both witnessed in this school site, and discovered in my research on PLCs. But both my past experience in leading PLCs and my research indicated that PLCs can be effective and valuable. I decided to take advantage of the facts that the PLC format was part of the local staff development strategy, and that community collaboration can be effective and supportive. And in this study, I sought to enhance the effective PLCs by grounding it in a social justice perspective which would require teachers to experience and then to examine the foundations of the essential aspects of teaching and learning and equity and justice.

After presenting the research foundations in Chapter 2, I will discuss in detail the background of my research design and the PLC intervention I created, in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I present the mixed methodology design and data analysis procedures. In Chapter 5, I present the findings from the pre and post closed and open field data from all participants in my study. In Chapter 6, I present my findings from the individual interviews with Participants within the PLC. In Chapter 7, I discuss and interpret the data, and in Chapter 8, I offer implications for practice and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS

In this chapter I present research literature relevant to my study within these three areas: (1) teacher knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy; (2) the emergence of PLCs as teacher professional development, and characteristics of effective PLCs; (3) teaching from a social justice perspective; and by extension, facilitating and learning within a social justice perspective. After reviewing research for each, I will present the understanding I used for this study. I will also justify my decisions to facilitate my PLC consistent with a social justice perspective, and my use of a holistic educational model based on a social justice perspective.

Although this research informs my understandings and provides theoretical and some conceptual foundations for my study, my primary research purposes are: (1) to discover and interpret what the Participants in my PLC experienced; (2) so as to provide research data useful to practicing high school teachers within this and other high schools; and (3) to add the voices of in-service teachers participating in a social justice-based PLC to the existing literature on educational reform and professional development. Consistent with those ends, and with the tenets of Grounded Theory, I will seek to understand how the participants define these researched terms, and use those understandings when reporting the findings in Chapters 5 and 6, and in interpreting them, in Chapter 7.

Teacher Knowledge, Skills, and Self-Efficacy

How humans come to know and to act has been the subject of philosophy and other epistemological disciplines for centuries. It is useful for us to remember that learning from others is an ages-old dimension of the human experience. American public

education is a formal, increasingly scrutinized subset of that dynamic and complicated relationship among learner, teacher, what is being learned, and the purpose and methods of learning. Public education is most often conducted in isolation from society, in constructed spaces for prescribed periods of time. But for purposes of this study, I must narrow the focus in this expansive inquiry only to the different dimensions of knowledge, skills, and the self-efficacy that *teachers* need to be competent in the classroom. I have found that studies often overlap teacher knowledge with teaching skills. We begin by considering what researchers have determined that teachers need to know in order to teach, noting the absence of what in-service teachers themselves say they need to know in order to do so.

Types of Knowledge Teachers Need

Much of the academic research regarding teacher knowledge and skills in the high school is written by teacher educators, university professors, and administrators. Most observe that it is highly challenging to effectively accomplish the dual tasks of developing and growing the necessary knowledge and skills for teachers to function in an effective manner (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012). Predictably, there is a range of discussion about the domains of knowledge that is necessary for effective, competent teaching. Berliner (1986) reports that some scholars argue that teachers require only a content knowledge domain, while others assert that a teacher's knowledge of self is the key to understanding pedagogy. We will return to the latter idea when we consider teaching from a social justice perspective.

Berliner, however, asserts that expert teachers require two domains of knowledge: subject matter knowledge and knowledge of organization and management of classrooms

(Berliner, 1986; 1988). Incidentally, according to Even (1993), there is little research evidence to support and illustrate the relationship between subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, although the relationship is generally assumed.

Desimone (2009) supposes that "teacher learning may be the most difficult aspect to measure in professional development," and concludes that an essential step for future research is reaching consensus on which aspects of teacher knowledge are critical, and to seek to understand more completely how "teacher knowledge enables practice" (191).

A scholar who had advocated for the formation of a national teachers standards board, Lee Shulman (1987) asserts that teaching reform should center on a learning exchange that emphasizes comprehension and reasoning, transformation and reflection. For that learning exchange to be optimally conducted, it is essential for teachers to acquire a strong content knowledge base, regardless of which of the two main pedagogical approaches the teacher employs. Shulman believes the content base is more important for those who employ the student-centered, inquiry-oriented classroom than for those who still employ the traditional, didactic classroom. He believes that the central premise of the teacher's role is to help students learn "how to understand and solve problems, [learn] to think critically and creatively as well as [to learn] facts, principles, and rules of procedure…learning a subject matter is often not an end in itself, but…a vehicle employed in the service of other goals" (Shulman, 1987, 7, footnote 2). As we shall see below, inquiry-based learning, Socratic dialogue, and democratic learning are hallmarks of the socially just classroom (e.g., M. Adams et al., 2007, Chapter 5; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1996). They also are specific parts of the facilitation choices I used in my PLC, which I will further discuss in the final section of this chapter and in Chapter 3. However, the

notion that learning a skill or subject matter is a learning scaffolding technique leading to broader learning and synthesis is in opposition to some current federal mandates and many high stakes tests, which focus solely on students' skills demonstration.

Regardless of what the standardized, high stakes tests measure, in-service teachers are expected to have a very broad knowledge base. Shulman states that at minimum, the following categories of that knowledge base for teachers are:

➢ Content knowledge

➢ General pedagogical knowledge…[including] strategies of classroom management…that appear to transcend subject matter

➢ Curriculum knowledge, with particular grasp of the materials and programs that serve as "tools of the trade" for teachers

➢ Pedagogical content knowledge; that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers; their own special form of professional understanding

➢ Knowledge of learners and their characteristics

➢ Knowledge of educational contexts, ranging from the workings of the group or classroom, the governance and financing of school districts, to the character of communities and cultures

➢ Knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds (Shulman, 8).

This is a daunting list of knowledge requirements, and is well beyond the preparation that most pre-service teachers receive in their training. However, knowledge of self is

missing from this list, and from my lens as a social justice educator, that personal exploration will be a vital component of my designed PLC intervention.

Additionally, I believe that some of the mandates from outside stakeholders are implicit acknowledgments that teacher knowledge bases need to be extensive, and ongoing, in a teacher's professional development. But by not eliciting the teacher's own reflective assessment of what she needs to gain in knowledge, the guessing—and disempowerment—continues for the teacher via the current "banking method" (Freire, 1970) of professional development.

While some researchers theorize about what teachers need to know in order to competently perform, others write about how teachers learn, noting the deficits in the literature on teacher learning. As we shall see below, others seek to determine if the teacher can employ ongoing self-reflection as a means of determining if he has acquired what experts determine to be the teacher's necessary knowledge base. Wilson and Berne (1999) reviewed literature concerning teachers' acquisition of professional (content) knowledge through a variety of professional development modes. While many studies indicated that teachers have been given opportunities to learn, few completed analyses of what knowledge teachers acquired, and fewer studies had explicated their theories of how teachers learned and tested those theories. The following researchers examine the utility of the teacher self-reflection in the practice of teaching.

McCormick (2003) investigated the thinking skill of metacognition—thinking about one's thinking--in the learning process of pre-service teachers. Acknowledging that much research has still not clarified this "fuzzy concept," she presents to her pre-service teacher-students helpful distinctions concerning knowledge and metacognition. Those

include "knowledge *about* strategies," which includes the content and pedagogy. She states the importance of "knowing *how* to use strategies, knowing *when* to use strategies, and knowing what you do or do not understand" which can be achieved through the reflective practice of metacognition (82).

Teachers also benefit from understanding what they need to know, and determining when they have learned something, and how well they have applied what they learned. Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) maintain that metacognition is an extremely important principle of adult learning that assists teachers in becoming adaptive experts. They distinguish between the following two aspects of metacognition: (1) metacognitive knowledge, the understanding of one's own thinking and developing strategies for planning, analyzing, and gaining more knowledge, and (2) metacognitive regulation, the ability to define learning goals and monitor one's progress in achieving them (Flavel, in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, 376). Later in this chapter I will consider the kinds of knowledge emphasized within metacognitive, or reflective, practice.

To summarize, researchers generally agree that in order to teach effectively, teachers need to have extensive knowledge bases such as ones of subject matter, pedagogical techniques, of student capacities, and of educational contexts. Teachers also need to be routinely self-assessing so that they can determine what they know and need to know, and then to personally evaluate the extent to which they have learned and applied that knowledge. Applying knowledge in a timely and appropriate manner begins to move the domain from an examination of teacher "knowledge" into one of "skills." Indeed, one could argue that metacognition is in fact a type of skill, without which one cannot

accurately come to know the areas in which one needs to learn more.[8] While knowledge

bases begin in pre-service training, the implications from both research and practice are

that expert teachers must continually learn much during their career, and apply, adapt,

and refine their knowledge and skills through their professional experiences and

professional development.

Anticipating my intervention, described in the next chapter, my research into teacher

learning and PLCs has led me to rely significantly on these next two researchers'

conceptions of teacher learning. Their framework will be foundational to my

understanding and interpretation of the teacher knowledge and learning outcomes

measured within my PLC seminar.

Since my intervention enhances the existing, research-documented, effective PLC

design, I selected work from researchers that most closely parallel my research intentions.

Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) conducted research on teacher learning within PLCs, and

identified particular kinds of knowledge that developed within both teaching and

professional contexts. They distinguish among these three manifestations of teacher

learning that formed within the PLC, and subsequently present a recommended paradigm

for teachers when learning in community:

> 1. "Knowledge-*for*-practice": generally assumed that university-based
>
> researchers generate formal knowledge and theory…*for* teachers to use in
>
> order to improve practice;
>
> 2. "Knowledge-*in*-practice": includes some of the most essential
>
> knowledge for teaching…practical knowledge…what very competent

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[8] I owe this insight to Dr. Adams, who shared it during a private conversation.

teachers know as it is embedded in practice and in teachers' reflections on

practice. Here it is assumed that teachers learn when they have

opportunities to probe the knowledge embedded *in* the work of expert

teachers and/or to deepen their own knowledge and expertise…in the

classroom;

3. "Knowledge-*of*-practice": distinct from the previous two categories in

that this conception cannot be understood in terms of a universe of

knowledge that divides formal knowledge…from practical knowledge.

Rather, …the knowledge teachers need to teach well is generated when

teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional

investigation at the same time they treat the knowledge and theory

produced by others as generative material for interrogation and

interpretation (M. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 250.).

After conducting a three year study of the relationships of "inquiry, knowledge, and

professional practice" (250), they conclude their review by proposing that teachers and

other educators adopt the attitude towards learning they call "inquiry as stance." In this

disposition, teachers continually examine the purpose of learning, underscored by the

premise that "knowing more and teaching better are inextricably linked to larger

questions about the ends of teacher learning" (293). If teachers adopt this perspective of

inquiry, teacher learning is associated more with posing problems and issues than in

solving them, and in questioning and challenging the system, which they postulate would

be exactly the kinds of inquiries that are connected to "more democratic schooling and to

the formation of a more just society" (294). Adopting this stance would serve as an

escape from the trap that teachers are likely to fall into if they merely consume the

professional development material as the end in itself. They warn that when entire groups

of teachers are mandated to learn new initiatives, or when teacher learning is "scripted"

in certain ways, simply learning what is offered becomes a "substitute for grass-roots

change efforts" (293). These researchers' conceptualizations can help us see direct links

between knowledge and empowerment of teachers, and of all learners who decide to use

inquiry as a critical thinking stance. I also visualize their philosophically-based inquiry as

stance approach as a practical way in which teachers can empower themselves. If

teachers learn to continually question not only the content of what they learn, but also

how that learning serves to perpetuate or to challenge existing power structures of the

system, they can then have a more comprehensive knowledge base from which they can

address their own personal agency within that system. Instead of passively consuming

what the experts direct them to ingest, as Freire (1970) depicts in the "banking method"

of education, teachers can interrogate the "knowledge of educational contexts…and

knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values" (Shulman, 1987, 8). Furthermore,

the inherent benefits of a well-functioning professional community can be applied to

support that kind of critical inquiry. That is, rather than just consuming information and

mistakenly believing that their learning has ended because they "know" about the new

mandate and how to execute it, the teachers could use the collaborative learning and

inquiry opportunity to help check each other's critical inquiry positions. They challenge

each other's limitations by asking questions such as, "Whose interests are served within

the system through enactment of this mandate?" And, "Whose voices or perspectives are

silenced, non represented, or mis-represented in its formation and enactment?" (for a

good discussion of other critical inquiries in education, see Kamashiro, 2000). An ongoing PLC that practices such critical inquiry could be a practical way to use various teacher knowledge bases as means for substantive empowerment, and not merely as passive receptacles of information and tactics.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle's research, then, provides a strong theoretical basis for facilitation choices I made for my PLC intervention, discussed in the next chapter. Inquiry as stance, which I concur is a desirable research-based outcome of teachers learning in a PLC, provides contrasting evidence against the current PLC design, which I introduced in Chapter 1.

The knowledge bases discussed in this literature review are the initial frames from which I accessed participants' learning during my 10 week PLC seminar. I will rely mostly on Cochran-Smith and Lytle's conceptualizations of learning in PLCs. But to reiterate, in accordance with Grounded Theory, I will collect data on what the participants tell me that they learn, as well, and analyze what emerges organically from those data, thereby not limiting my discoveries only to that on which I am initially focused.

Skills

The distinction between teacher knowledge and teaching skill is not sharply defined in the literature. Skills and knowledge are so closely interrelated as to be inextricable in actual practice. Skills in teaching are the manifestation of the practitioner's base knowledge and ability. They are also demonstrated through thinking skills such as logical argument, metacognition, and critical thinking. Knowledge helps build the capacity and ability from which teachers may act. Teachers demonstrate a range of skill levels when

performing their professional functions. Teacher actions—and inactions--have wide-reaching effects on student learning, and the self-efficacy of both. Evaluators, such as local administration, use a codified a set of skills and look for them when they evaluate teachers.[9] But again, researchers differ on the set of skills teachers need.

In the discussion on teacher knowledge above, I highlighted Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) assertion of the importance of teacher metacognition. In their book, they also presented what they viewed as important applications of teacher knowledge in the classroom. They view teaching skills as enactments from teacher knowledge bases. They write that teachers need to "develop competence in an area that allows them to 'enact' what they know. Teachers must (i) have a deep foundation of factual and theoretical knowledge, (ii) understand facts and ideas in context of a conceptual framework, and (iii) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and action" (366). In order to effectively and competently perform the "incredibly complex and demanding task" of teaching, teachers must navigate through the "wild triangle of relations--among teachers, students, subject" (366). To teach competently, teachers need to be able to draw from a wealth of skills.

Teachers bring to their work different abilities and resources. Some teachers develop individually through education, training, and reflecting on past experiences, and some are provided through the school district, such as professional development workshops, training in technology and access to resources (Krackhardt & Carley, 1998).

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[9] The Northeastern state in which this study site is located produced a list of teacher skills that must be demonstrated by the teacher in order to retain licensure and remain employed. Consistent with my desire to keep this location anonymous, I will continue to conceal information that helps identify school or state identity.

Joyce and Showers (2002) examined the development of specific teaching skills among in-service teachers. They found that new teacher skills can be supported by skilled coaching in peer support groups, which in turn allows for teachers to explore, strengthen, and try out new skills. They also describe how teachers undergo an iterative process of learning, experimenting and reflecting as they develop new skills to use in the classroom. That finding echoes the theories of the biologist and psychologist, Jean Piaget.

Piaget's classic theories of how humans learn came from his watching children, then proposing the general learning stages of error, success, and refinement. Errors cause discomfort, as noted by other education researchers. Sizer (1984) observed that learning is a complicated process that produces a range of reactions:

> Learning is a complex, effortful, and often painful process. It can be exasperating too and also full of the wonder of new ideas and new skills. It can be painful to open one's mind, to change one's views, to try the unfamiliar. Doing such things is often threatening, even as they may be exciting (150).

Knowing that teachers in a learning situation will be uncomfortable is important information for me to remember while facilitating my PLC because it anticipated the realities that when adults learn and share in community, they are prone to discomfort. Accordingly, I needed to help facilitate an environment that accepted and encouraged trial and error. I believed that the fact that there were no evaluating administrators present, and that I was in no way linking their behavior to personnel evaluations, also encouraged teachers to be comfortable with their gaps in knowledge, skill, and or self-efficacy.

Sizer (1984) also observed that skills are best learned through experience, and are best taught through coaching. He states that until the learner actually *engages* in the activity and receives specific criticism designed to refine and improve the targeted skill, that skill

cannot be completely developed. That learning pattern is one typically used by athletic coaches. Sizer suggests that the often-maligned athletic coach, dismissed by some academic instructors, may actually be the "school's most effective teacher of skills" (Sizer, 1984, 106).

Berliner, Joyce and Showers, Piaget, and Sizer's theories of knowledge and skills acquisition provide additional support for my selection of this PLC model and my decision to have facilitated in a way that mirrors good coaching.[10] I engaged the PLC participants in a variety of activities and dialogic opportunities that encouraged the atmosphere of sharing, experimenting, and refining. As facilitator, I sought to foster a learning environment that was safe, and that had no dominant "expert" that would, by answering all questions, recreate the "expert to novice" paradigm of previous professional development models. Rather, I encouraged shared responsibility for leadership by not providing answers to questions, but rather encouraging inquiry and sharing experience and expertise. In that way, members could learn from each other, and act as fellow "coaches." My facilitation required me to act at different times as coach, as mentor, as model, as a reporter on research, and continually as an inquirer.

For the purposes of this study, I understand and will use the term "skill" to refer to a demonstrated ability that is performed at the appropriate time. Competent, masterful, and expert teaching requires a variety of skills. When teachers effectively integrate and enact the knowledge relevant to teaching, teachers are demonstrating teaching skills.

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[10] I think my previous role as a high school baseball coach for 25 years also predisposed me to relate especially to Sizer's comparison.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teachers can possess the requisite knowledge and skill base, but still not have the self assuredness to employ them. This observation has led a host of researchers to examine what they term the teacher's sense of self-efficacy, and the role it plays in the teaching and learning process.

Current research on teacher's self-efficacy began with Rotter (1966) and The Rand studies of the mid-1970's. They provide the intellectual origins and earliest formulations of teacher efficacy, which were based on the conceptual framework of the theory within personality and social psychology called Locus of Control (Denham & Michael, 1981; Rotter, 1966). A widely studied theoretical framework, the term refers to extent to which individuals believe they can control internal and external events that affect them (Lefcourt, 1991).

Researchers who still use that original framework for understanding teacher self efficacy equate it with a willingness to take responsibility for student success and failure (J. A. Ross, 1995, note 2). However, currently, most understandings of teacher self efficacy rely heavily on Bandura's (1997) research, which emanates from the conceptual framework of Attribution Theory. He asserts that people strive to control events that affect their lives. People's affective states, motivation, and actions are based more on what they *believe* than on what is objectively true, and the belief that one can produce the desired effects provides incentive to act. Efficacy belief, or a belief in *competence*, is a major source of action. Perceived self-efficacy refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (3)**.**

People commonly interchange "confidence" with "self efficacy," but social psychologists define them differently. Bandura (1997) wrote that self-efficacy differs from confidence in that the latter term is nondescript, and

> Refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about. I can be supremely confident that I will fail at an endeavor. Perceived self-efficacy refers to belief in one's agentive capabilities that one can produce given levels of attainment. A self-efficacy assessment, therefore, includes both an affirmation of a capability level and the strength of that belief (382).

Several factors can affect a teacher's self-efficacy. An important influencing element is what the teacher believes about how decisions are made, and who makes them, within their school environment. It is important to recall here that there could be a real difference between what the teacher believes to be factual and what is factual, but self-efficacy is predicated on the power of beliefs as though they are factual and true. Beliefs can be malleable, and one's ability need not be static.

If teachers understand the decisions affecting their environment, meaningful steps can be taken to address teachers' beliefs in their capacity to bring about the results agreed upon (A. Bandura, 1993). Bandura postulates that human ability is a "generative capability" in which knowledge, motivation, social and behavioral skills all need to be organized and managed properly. This synthesis is accompanied by an affective state, and when under distress, cognition and flexibility is impaired. "There is a marked difference between possessing knowledge and skills and being able to use them well under taxing situations" (119). My vision of social justice within education requires me to add to Bandura's postulation that a more comprehensive sense of personal agency should add a more complete sense of self-efficacy. That is, teachers need to exercise their professional knowledge bases and act collaboratively in forming those decisions, not merely

understanding others' decisions that affect teachers' work environment. Those actions would provide a basis from which a teacher would likely believe in her capability to be a decision-maker concerning important education matters.

In addition to its role in teachers' beliefs about their work environment, research strongly indicates that a teacher's self-efficacy is a necessary component needed to enact his knowledge and skills in service to his professional functions. A negative belief can inhibit the enactment of knowledge or skill. Studies have shown that people who perform poorly may do so because they lack the skills or they have the skills but they lack the sense of efficacy to use them well (A. Bandura, 1993, 119). My study examined the possibility that as a result of participating in my PLC enhanced to include a social justice perspective, participants would use their experiences there as a positive source for an improved self-efficacy, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would skillfully enact their knowledge. I will discuss how I plan to do increase participants' self-efficacy in the next chapter, in my discussion of the research method. If a positive experience in my enhanced PLC could help improve teachers' self-efficacy, what does research indicate are other sources for such development?

Further research into Bandura's theories reveals the following as sources of self-efficacy development. Bandura (1994) theorizes that a person's self-efficacy beliefs can be developed by four sources. His theory applies generally to people, and in the following, I have substituted "teacher" where he states, "people":

> 1) Mastery experiences. For teachers, their perception that their work has been successful. This experience is the most powerful source for raising self-efficacy beliefs.

2) Vicarious experiences provided by social models. For teachers, this could mean listening to other teachers' experiences, or observing other teachers. Of special note is his assertion that the impact of the modeling "is strongly influenced by perceived similarity to the models."

3) Social persuasion, or the verbal assurances that the teacher has what it takes to succeed. Bandura believes that it is more difficult to instill high personal efficacy beliefs by this method alone; it is more likely that this method alone will undermine self-efficacy beliefs. It is important to "structure situations for [teachers] in ways that bring success and avoid placing [teachers] in situations prematurely where they are likely to fail often."

4) Reduce teachers' stress reactions and alter their "negative emotional proclivities and misperceptions of their emotional states. Because [teachers] also rely partly on their somatic and emotional states in judging their capabilities, they interpret their stress reactions and tension as signs of vulnerability to poor performance…positive mood enhances perceived self-efficacy, despondent mood diminishes it" (A. Bandura, 1994, 71-73).

Numerous outcomes have been attached to teacher self-efficacy levels. Researchers who define teacher self-efficacy as belief in one's assessment of her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes in student engagement and learning, even among resistant or unmotivated students, have attached the following outcomes to a teacher's self-efficacy belief: Student achievement, motivation, and own sense of efficacy; teacher's effort in the classroom; investment in teaching; level of aspiration; levels of planning and organization; more openness to new ideas and greater willingness to experiment with new

pedagogical methods; to persevere when things do not go smoothly; teachers' belief that their efforts will have a positive effect on student achievement; teachers become less critical of students, and several other behaviors that show teacher resilience in the face of other inherent challenges in teaching and learning (J. A. Ross, 1995; J. A. Ross, Bradley Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996; Sibbald, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The next researchers report on the distinctions between two main types of teacher efficacy beliefs.

Ross (1995) terms the teacher's expectation that she can bring about student learning "Personal Teacher Efficacy." Sela-Shayovitz (2009) uses the same term to include more than student learning. For her, it defines a teacher's attitudes and beliefs with respect to a teacher's knowledge about students, themselves, their content, pedagogy, and curriculum. Ross terms the teacher belief in his ability to effectively teach despite the environmental factors beyond his control as "General Teacher Efficacy" (J. A. Ross, 1995). Sela-Shayovitz does not have a term for that belief. Rather, through her research on school violence interventions, she differentiated among these other two dimensions of teacher self-efficacy:

➢ Teacher's efficacy in the school as an organization--refers to the perception of the extent to which teachers receive support and cooperation from the school organization.

➢ Teachers' outcome efficacy--refers to teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy in dealing with actual student interactions (Sela-Shayovitz, 2009)**.**

For my study, I will adopt the understanding of teacher self-efficacy as follows:

➢ Personal Teacher Self-Efficacy is a teacher's beliefs in her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce desired goals within the interactive domains within the classroom learning interaction.

➢ General Teacher Self-Efficacy refers to the teacher's beliefs in his capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce desired goals within the professional duties outside the classroom, involving mandates and duties assigned to the teacher, and including meaningfully affecting his work environment.

To reiterate, in my study I provided the participants with a holistic, social justice-based teaching and learning model within a PLC that presented a way for them to reorganize their teaching and professional duties. Because the PLC was based on, and facilitated within a social justice perspective, some readings I used suggested an analysis of existing power structures in society, and in schools, so that teachers could explore their own part in perpetuating inequitable power paradigms, and in acting more intentionally in ways that further fairness and equity for themselves, students, and others. I will discuss the research on which I base my decision to facilitate this PLC in accordance with the principles and practice of social justice education later in this chapter.

As with the other dimensions, my definitions of self-efficacy are important for clarity and for analysis, but I will not provide the definitions or distinctions to the participants in my study. Therefore, I will report on their understanding and use of the term, self-efficacy.

We have considered the outcome domains of knowledge, skill, and self-efficacy, and now turn to how outside experts have sought to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills they deemed important for teachers to know in order to develop professionally.

The Emergence of PLCs for Teacher Professional Development

As I discussed in Chapter 1, my study sought to provide useful ways in which teachers, functioning within a particular type of PLC I designed, came to better understand and more effectively deal with the wide variety of challenges and new mandates they face. This site, a suburban Northeastern high school, is subject to many mandates to change what teachers do to produce measurable increases in students' demonstrated skills and, to a much lesser extent, their content knowledge. This school operates within a state that has adopted the federal government's list of required skills of high school students in Math and Language Arts, called the Common Core State Standards Initiative (Staff, 2010)[11]. Why have PLCs emerged as a method for meeting the demands and mandates to teachers?

Many researchers point out that historically, teachers in the United States have practiced their profession in relative autonomy, including, to a certain degree, their selection of course materials and methods of instruction (e.g., Huberman, 1993; Lortie, 1975). From the early years of our country, when teachers acted as "isolated

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[11] As of this writing, 45 five states and other U.S. territories have adopted the government's required mathematics and English/Language Arts skills for high school students. The 45 states are currently working—in uncoordinated ways—to develop curricula to meet the standards, which are practically entirely skills-based. Of those education researchers, governor committees, and school administrators currently developing student skills assessment measures among all the states, I have not yet discovered one high school teacher, current or former, who is participating. Again, the voiceless, disempowered teachers will be required to enact what these "outside experts" decide in the near future.

entrepreneurs," until about 1970, teachers and administrators remained isolated, with relatively little substantive communication, thereby promoting a kind of cultural insulation (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012, 19).

The 1970s brought "team teaching, open classrooms, and increased student interaction," and administrators and teachers began meeting collectively to focus primarily on administrative and management issues (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012, 19-20). School leadership teams, an early form of a PLC (Fellows, 2005) began, and research began to show that schools that used those teams showed improvements in student learning (Chrispeels & Martin, 2002; Mullen & Sullivan, 2002; Phillips, 2003; Supovitz, 2002).

Other recent trends of teacher's professional development began to counter the isolationist model and replaced it with the collaborative. Education researchers borrowed from business trends. Twenty years ago, Senge (1990) proposed five disciplines that reconceptualized businesses as learning organizations. Those interrelated elements are:

> 1) "Personal Mastery" is a discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively;
>
> 2) "Mental Models" are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures of images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action;
>
> 3) "Building Shared Vision" is a practice of unearthing shared pictures of the future that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance;

4) "Team Learning" starts with dialogue, the capacity of members of a team to

suspend assumptions and enter into genuine thinking together;

5) "Systems Thinking"; which integrates the other four disciplines to reach

optimal potential. Building shared vision fosters a commitment to the long term

(Senge, 1990, 7-12).

While Senge was writing for organizational development and change within the business world, Shirley M. Hord (1997), of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), recognizing the transformative effect of that book on the world of business, began to apply his concepts to the construction of collaborative learning communities within the schools. Hord (1997; S. M. Hord, 2006; S. M. Hord & Sommers, 2009; S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012) is a seminal researcher and theorist in the formation and benefits of professional learning communities in the schools. She proposes five interrelated dimensions of schools that have adopted a professional community model. Schools structured in that way showed: (1) Shared and supportive leadership; (2) Shared values and decision making; (3) Collective learning and its applications; (4) Supportive conditions; and (5) Shared practice (S. M. Hord, 2004, 584; S. M. Hord, 1997). Hers is a vision primarily for transforming entire schools into learning communities with the ultimate goal of enhancing student learning.

Characteristics of Effective PLCs

Purposely constructed PLCs that share norms and practices can be especially powerful influences on teacher learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Hord & Tobia (2012) identify the "clear mandate for educators" to meet the current federal and state

demands that teachers must comply with the standards for instruction and skills delivery

to all students, thus standardizing student achievement across the public schools in the

country. Additionally, as the demographics of the student body are changing, teachers are

faced with the expectation of being successful "with a diverse population of students":

> This requires administrators to support teachers in acquiring a broad spectrum of curriculum content, instructional strategies, and appropriate approaches that fit individual students' learning styles. One size does not fit all. Fortunately, there is a broad base of research and exemplary practice that informs administrators and teachers about effective ways to develop students into successful readers, mathematicians, writers and scientists. To make that a reality adults learn more powerful ways of operating in their schools and classrooms—*educators are the first learners*. (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012, 23. Emphasis in original)

Some researchers, then, acknowledge that as the student body is becoming

increasingly diverse, that teachers working within effective PLCs can help each other to

somehow address that growing diversity. But nowhere in the current literature on the

efficacy of PLCs are there research-based findings indicating what such a PLC would

look like, or how it would be facilitated. My study will enhance the existing, effective

PLC models by adding the social justice perspective as a direct way of addressing

diversity issues first within the PLC, and then within the student body.

PLCs have the potential to be effective adult learning environments, and subsequently,

students benefit from that learning. According to Hord & Tobia (2012), the following

benefits can be expected to both students and staff from effective PLCs:

> 1) Increased staff learning that accesses deep content
>
> knowledge…[resulting in] more effective classroom instruction;

2) A shift in the thinking of teachers and administrators as they become

continuous reflective practitioners…

3) Greater respect, efficacy, and professional identity of the PLC members

for themselves, their colleagues, and the profession; and

Enhanced, enriched, improved student performance (54).

Research indicates that not every PLC group is equally effective. Hord & Tobia (2012) reviewed the most recent research on PLCs, and conducted several on-site assessments of schools that have employed them. They cite two recent, separate teams of researchers that confirmed that when teachers worked in collaborative teams, "their collaborative work focused on solving significant problems they faced with instruction and student learning and they were more likely to seek the *skills and knowledge* they needed" (34. Emphasis added). They delineated three different types of working PLCs discovered in current school practice, ranked from least effective: those that reported to the researchers that "we meet"; those that reported that "we work collaboratively"; and those who functioned optimally reported "we engage in continuous cycles of school improvement." The first group is destined for ineffectiveness as a professional group of learners mainly because there is little shared understanding about activity or purpose. The second group can produce useful output, such as identifying the learning that is needed to improve instruction and student learning. And while it is a step in the right direction, "there seems to be an absence of adult learning that will support educators in adopting new practice and becoming proficient with its use"(41). The last group, though relatively rare, is optimal. The learning of the teachers involves "mastering new content, skills,

behaviors, and/or approaches with their related application…to ensure student learning, the PLC must look first to its own professional learning" (43).

From their observations and interviews, Hord & Tobia presented the following traits of effective PLCs:

➢ Supportive and shared leadership that expresses the school campus and district administrators' sharing of power and authority through sharing decision-making with staff;

➢ Shared beliefs, values, and vision that are grounded in the community's unrelenting commitment to student learning;

➢ Intentional collective learning by the community that is applied in classrooms to benefit student learning;

➢ Physical or structural conditions, and provisions of resources, that support the community in meeting to do their learning work;

➢ Collegial or relational condition that encourage and build the atmosphere for collective learning;

➢ Shared practice in which teachers invite and are invited to visit, observe, take notes, consult with one another about their classroom practice, in the spirit of individual and community improvement, so students learn more successfully (38-39)

These researchers assert that these kinds of research-based conditions require long-term time and effort in developing, and most certainly do not occur "overnight, or over a semester" (39).

I decided to construct a PLC that was predicated on the combined findings of Cochran-Smith's inquiry as stance, with Hord's optimal PLC of initial focus on the continuous engagement in cycles of teachers' own learning. But Hord & Tobia's assertion that such a PLC takes much time to develop was a cautionary warning in my study, as my PLC was merely 10 one hour sessions. And because of my past role of coordinator and facilitator of teacher professional development, I was also keenly aware of teachers' difficulties with change mandates. I sought additional research on effective ways in helping teachers accommodate and implement change.

Recognizing that any learning for humans brings change, and that supporting professionals during the change process is critical to install and to maintain that change, Hall, George, and Hord have constructed an organizational model called the Concerns-Based Adoption Model [CBAM] (G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987). They posit three levels of concern during the change process, which they assert is a process, not a single event, and that change impacts individuals within an organization. Therefore, individuals' concerns must be recognized and addressed. To that end, the first stage of CBAM ranks six "levels of concern." Those are determined through using Likert-scaled questionnaires about attitudes, reaction, and feelings about the changes—the affective domain. The second stage determines the "levels of use of the innovation," and those data are collected through an interview protocol, designed to discover and to assess the degree to which teachers are using the change model. The third stage is the "innovation configuration," which is a tool to identify and to describe what the innovation actually looks like in practice, as enacted by practitioners responding to their particular classrooms, with their own unique set of practitioner knowledge bases and skills sets. Although each stage is

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self contained and can be used separately, the authors recommend they all be used in conjunction with each other (G. Hall, George, & Hord).

This model is one that is currently being considered by the state in which I conducted my study. Their consideration is significant to my study in that it is one of the few implementation paradigms that acknowledges the importance of the experiences, both affective and intellectual, of the teacher, and actively seeks to discover the teacher's perspective and to address it during the change process. While significant in their attention to teachers in the PLC and change process, those authors were not alone in their search for teachers' voices during the change process.

Nielsen, Barry, and Staab (2008) conducted a two year study of K-3 teachers involved in a literacy initiative. Coaches and learning community program directors made changes in the format of the community based on teacher input. Seeking to determine how teachers viewed themselves within the change process, and how teachers were transformed by participating in a sustained learning community, the researchers discovered that when initially engaged with the new learning, teachers see themselves first as learners. Once acquired, teachers progress to seeing themselves as change agents. Changes that did occur for teachers occurred in three stages: movement from curriculum-centered to student-centered practices, increased teacher collaboration, and teacher requests for policy changes, as their sense of ownership and professional autonomy increased. At that time, while stating the resources the teachers determined they needed for their own professional duties, they also advocated more directly for what they thought students needed (1297-1299).

Another pair of researchers sought teacher perspectives when reporting on the benefits of focused PLCs. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) included teacher reflections in their book. They concluded that school-based PLCs that use collaborative learning among groups of teachers who share a vision of what it takes for all students to succeed are the best professional development structures.

At times during systemic change, there is a gap between knowing what needs to be done, and doing what needs to be done. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) theorized about why the abundance of recommendations about how to improve organizations and systems, such as education, have *not* worked. They contend that the "knowing-doing problem," or the dissonance between knowledge about how to improve organizational performance and actions consistent with that change, can be addressed by enacting what is already known by the practitioners within the organization. One of the steps in turning knowledge into action is their observation that fear fosters knowing-doing gaps. This matches with Bandura's admonition to reduce the stress of practitioners in order to build self-efficacy. Before we close our review of PLCs, I return to data I had gathered in preparation for my proposal for this study.

In my pre-doctoral study research with administration, I discovered that this school district had decided to employ the research work on PLCs by the DuFours (e.g., R. DuFour, 2007; R. DuFour & Eaker, 1998; R. DuFour, 2004; R. DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; R. DuFour , Eaker, & National Educational Service (U.S.), 1999; R. Dufour et al., 2005; R. DuFour, Eaker, National Educational Service, & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development,Alexandria, VA., 1998). Indeed, the

administration team had formulated its own PLC based on the DuFours' model. In my research, I discovered that the DuFours are also prominent in the field of PLCs. Writing for the National Education Service, they present their conceptual model of professional learning communities as having these seven elements: (1) collaboration; (2) developing shared mission, vision, values, and goals: (3) focus on learning; (4) leadership; (5) focused school improvement plans; (6) celebration; and (7) persistence. They also maintain that the "Four Pillars of the PLC" are: Mission (why do we exist?); Vision (what do we hope to become?); Values (what commitments must we make to create the school or district that will improve our ability to fulfill our purpose?); and Goals (what goals will we use to monitor our progress?) (R. DuFour et al., 2008, 166).

DuFour (2004) observed that because the term "professional learning community" has now become used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning, these three "big ideas" represent the core, defining principals of PLC's: (1) they ensure that students learn; (2) they embody a culture of collaboration; and (3) they judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. The latter means improving student achievement for each student (R. DuFour, 2004).

What is missing from these researchers are the empirical studies concerning the PLC's outcomes with reference to teacher's knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, own assessments of their experience with PLCs, and the effectiveness level of PLCs in dealing with the entire range of challenges and mandates teachers face.

<u>**Justifying My Selection of a PLC Seminar as the Intervention**</u>

I chose the PLC intervention as the intervention format for several reasons, some of them noted in Chapter 1. First, they are considered to be effective for professional

development of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; L. M. Desimone, 2009; R. DuFour, 2007; R. DuFour, 2004; Gibbs & Ushijima, 2008; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Nielsen et al., 2008; North, 2009).

Second, a colleague and I have been engaged in a type of PLC for the past 18 years of our teaching. In it, we have identified curricular, pedagogical, student, and personal concerns as teachers, and have challenged and supported each other. At times, others have joined and have left. I have learned first-hand how professionally enriching such a PLC has been in my practice.

Third, my own past experience as coordinator of professional development through PLCs for teachers and administrators has provided me with both theoretical and practical experience that I will apply to this study. Specifically, I knew that when working with adult learners, I needed to simultaneously validate their expertise and provide immediate relevance for the knowledge and skills we were adding or refining. I also knew that it was extremely important to provide prompt follow up responses to their queries, often listed on the "Parking Lot" poster paper, which I will explain fully in the next chapter. Finally, I also learned that I needed to continually loop back, so as to help them explore and discover the interconnectedness of the content and process of our PLC with their lived professional experience.

A fourth, and perhaps more subtle but necessary benefit of the PLC format rests in its support of individuals doing personally intensive work which often requires its participants to examine their own deeply-held beliefs and assumptions. I agree with other educator-researchers who advise that such an endeavor is often best mediated through a cooperative group of professionals sharing the journey (S. Nieto, 2000; North, 2009).

A fifth reason I have chosen this format as an intervention is that our district has officially adopted the PLC format for its administrators and for its faculty, relying primarily on DuFour's model. PLCs are becoming part of the culture of professional learning. Therefore, selecting that form of professional development fits the current and local school culture.

Sixth, as indicated in Chapter 1, teachers have often stated that "one-shot" collective professional development days do not provide the opportunities to work with the ideas, meet, discuss, revise, and sustain practice. Although not currently used in that way in this site, PLCs provide the format to do just that.

Seventh and finally, I sought to determine if my enhancement of the existing PLC format by having facilitated it in a teacher-responsive, socially just manner would encourage participants to adopt a "critical inquiry stance" towards learning, rather than just consuming information from an expert. I also encouraged their examination of the inequitable power dynamics in social systems, particularly the educational system. We turn next to the research on the philosophy underscoring such a perspective.

Holistic Models of Education

The movement toward holistic education is based on the philosophical premise that humans are most fulfilled when they seek to encompass and integrate the multiple layers of meaning and experience. That translates into an educational approach that seeks to activate connections of people within thoughtful, caring communities, to deeper connections to the natural world and to spiritual values (Miller, 2000). Holistic educational approaches to learning employ whole-brain learning, multiple intelligences,

cooperative learning, metacognition, and attention to individual learning styles (Holistic Education Network of Tasmania, Australia).

Some public schools have adopted aspects of holistic education, utilizing the research from Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which promotes social and emotional learning as a process for students to develop five core social and emotional competencies: (1) self-awareness; (2) self-management; (3) social awareness (4) relationship skills; and (5) responsible decision-making (Zins, 2004).

Another systemized holistic educational model is the Tribes Learning Community (TLC). Developed first as a group developmental process intervention by Jeanne Gibbs in the early 1970's, Gibbs' first direct application of Tribes to education began in 1976, with her publication of an instructional manual called *Tribes: A human developmental process for educational systems.* Since then, she has researched and published books and teacher trainings that address the developmental and social needs of learners from grades 1-12. Gibbs describes TLC as a "process based on a synthesis of a wealth of research on human development, social-emotional academic learning, resiliency, a caring culture, community building, professional development, authentic learning and assessment, reflective practices and systems changes" (Benard, 2005, 4).

Gibbs and Ushijima (2008) have written a text for applying Tribes in the high school setting. This is significant to my study because not only is this a holistic approach to teaching and learning, but it is also currently an external mandate to teachers in this study's setting. Administration has adopted this method as a holistic method of classroom management and differentiated instruction, and currently approximately one half of the teachers in this site have received the Tribes professional training.

Recognizing and celebrating human diversity has given rise to additional educational reform movements designed to reflect that inclusion. Prominent among them is the Multicultural Education movement (e.g., Banks, 1998; Bemak, 2005; Brown & Howard, 2005; Brown, 2006; Gallavan, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1991; S. Nieto, 1999; S. Nieto, 2000). Social diversity education "focuses on appreciating social differences without an emphasis on power dynamics or differential access to resources and institutional support needed to live safe, satisfying, productive lives" (M. Adams et al., 2007, Appendix 3I).

Holistic education, CASEL, TLC, and Multicultural reform approaches to education, and social diversity education all create environments where social justice can flourish. It is that latter perspective to which we now turn.

Social Justice Education

Although social justice education (SJE), as an education reform movement, has become increasingly popular in teacher education and in practice, there is no universally agreed upon definition or shared understanding for it. Proponents link themes of social justice "with commitments to educational reform, such as …critically analyzing inequities of educational access, quality, inclusion and participation…" (M. Adams, 2012). Some theorists and educators conceptualize social justice education as having a dual purpose. For example, Bell (in M. Adams et al., 2007) states that "[social justice education] is both a process and a goal. The goal…is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs…[t]he process for attaining the goal of social justice … should also be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change" (3-4). SJE "also explores the ways education reproduces

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cultural as well as material systems of domination and subordination…is sometimes used by educators to express their aspirations to create socially just schools and classrooms, either as ends in themselves or as preparation for democratic citizenship or social change" (M. Adams, 2012).

Connie North's (2009) research warrants review because of its merging of several fields of justice with practical application in today's public high schools. She has structured social justice teaching around five competencies, which emerged both from her review of the literature and as part of her dissertation, and after having observed and discussed social justice education and practice with four K-12 educators who practiced some form of it. The term "competencies" refers to what she sees as student literacies that go beyond learning to read and write to include what the student needs to manage, to excel at schooling, and to effect positive change in the local and more global levels. The literacies are: functional, critical, relational, democratic, and visionary.

I have used this part of North's research practices to inform my own classroom procedures, and will apply them as well to my facilitation of my PLC. Specifically, when discussing issues of diversity and of social justice and inequity, strong emotions often arise. Managing those, and keeping the learning environment safe, is important. North cites Parker as recommending three strategies for "listening across difference: (1) humility (one's own views are incomplete); (2) caution (moving slowly so as not to inadvertently offend or dismiss other speaker's views or validity); and (3) reciprocity [an attempt to take perspective of the other while recognizing that the speaker understands better than I 'his or her social position, emotions, beliefs, and interpretations]" (North, 2009, 143).

Ayers (2009) limits the definition of social justice curriculum by stating what it is <u>not</u>: dogma or a teacher indoctrinating his own thoughts into the students; and not an "academicizing the project of critical theory and social justice. While critical studies propose to empower the marginalized in the discourse and to shine a light on the real world from the perspective of the former 'other,' a new round of curriculum books propose critical studies as a 'new AP.'" Ayers warns against accepting that relegation of social justice curriculum, as it "misses the main insight, the centrality of the point of view of the marginalized" (Ayers et al., 2009, 657-658).

Referring to Christensen and Karp's introduction to the collection *Rethinking the Classroom,* Ayers lists the following aspects as being indicative of a classroom run with a social justice perspective:

➢ Grounded in the lives of our students

➢ Critical in its approach to the world and itself

➢ Multicultural, antibias, projustice

➢ Participatory and experiential

➢ Hopeful, joyful, kind, visionary

➢ Activist

➢ Academically engaging and challenging

➢ Culturally competent

➢ A demand that the teacher challenge received wisdom about what the students can learn as well as the ritual of assessment and evaluating students (658)

After considerable review, I have adopted the following social justice perspective for use in this study, based on the research and holistic model that Adams and Love (2005)

developed as a heuristic model for in-service K-12 teaching and higher education faculty seminars. Their social justice education perspective is based on the determination that the overarching social structures in society are characterized by domination and subordination throughout different societal, institutional, and interpersonal levels. Socially constructed differences are used to justify and perpetuate the many inequalities experienced both by socially dominant and socially marginalized social identity groups.

Social structures of domination and subordination are maintained and reproduced through the institutions of society, and education, whether public or private, K-12 or post-secondary, are not exempt from these processes. Education through schools plays the dual role of reflecting as well as reproducing these patterns of domination and subordination, through stratification in access to better schools, and through non-inclusive curriculum and pedagogy. But schools, and classrooms operating within this perspective of social justice education, can also offer the unique opportunity to help identify these inequitable patters, interrupt them in the classroom, and model more equitable relationships. Operating within this perspective, then, educators can select from a range of choices, selecting either to perpetuate the inequality, or to interrupt and transform them (M. Adams & Love, 2005, esp. 587).

Adams and Love offer their teaching and learning model as a way of analyzing the complex and dynamic interaction of teaching and learning in the classroom. The authors propose that teaching and learning in the classroom can be analyzed as taking place within the four interactive quadrants of (1) the student demographics; (2) the self-awareness of the instructor; (3) an inclusive curriculum; and (4) a flexible and inclusive pedagogical process. They have employed this model during numerous seminars they

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have facilitated with primarily university faculty, interested in creating more inclusive classrooms and to interact across social and cultural differences more effectively" (M. Adams & Love, 2005, 586). Questions I will explore in my PLC will include, What kinds of knowledge about a student would a teacher seek to gain, and for what purposes?

A teacher's knowledge about his or her self would include knowing one's identities, socializations, assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs. Indeed, knowledge about self as a social justice educator has become an important component in the process of that type of facilitation (see "Knowing ourselves as social justice educators", by Bell, Love, Washington, and Weinstein, in M. Adams et al., 2007, 381-393). Questions I will explore in my PLC will include, How does a teacher's knowledge about his socialization, background and experiences influence his teaching? Because of its practical field value [12], I will use the Adams and Love model, with its interactive appendices, as the organizing structure of my PLC.

Freire's Contributions to My Facilitation

Although my research is not grounded in Freire, I used his liberatory educational practices within my PLC. Writing within an overtly oppressive governmental and societal system, Freire (1970) theorized that educational practices reinforced the oppressor's paradigm. Education reproduced the social inequities, not just by what was taught, but how it was taught. He called the teacher-centered, whole class lecturing format of the oppressor's power representative (the teacher), as the "banking method," in which teachers, the only experts, and font of knowledge, pour their information into the empty vessels that are their students. He saw that apparently benevolent practice as the seeds of

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[12] I have also had numerous professional interactions with the authors as instructors and mentors at the University of Massachusetts, and can attest to their expertise.

violence, because here, both teachers and students' humanity is reduced in that they are objectified actors. This interaction, then, is contrary and obstructionary to the human's ontological libratory struggle.

Freire believed that the vocation of each person is to become fully humanized. Social injustice, exploitation, oppression and the violence of the oppressors thwarts people in their struggle to recover their lost humanity (43-44). Social justice, then, is the condition that best provides opportunity for each individual to realize his or her fullest expression of humanization. He also believed that "the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (76). An aspect of Freire's philosophy often overlooked by commentators is his belief that the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed is to "liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (44).

Freire's philosophical and systemic analysis of oppression and its reproduction is applicable to my intervention. According to this view, if PLCs merely reproduce the existent inequities and power imbalances within the school system, they may just become a slicker way to indoctrinate and reproduce dominative paradigms. In that case, the use of PLCs will not include the human liberation of the teacher-participants. I subscribe to that libratory endeavor for myself as a teacher, and as a teacher-facilitator, seek to assist others in their own quests for empowerment and liberation. For that reason, then, I avoided the "banking method" of supplying answers, but rather, encouraged inquiry through dialogue. Of course, I am not alone in that approach.

Higher education teachers such as Shor (e.g., 1992; 1996) and junior and high school teachers such as Gutstein (2007; 2003), Gregson (2007), and Cammarota (2007), are proponents of Critical Pedagogy, based on Freire's philosophy and enacted in the classroom teacher and learner exchange. Gutstein's practice (2007; 2003) provides an example of its application in a junior high school classroom. In his social justice education practice as a seventh and eighth grade math teacher in an urban setting, Gutstein began with the Freirean-based tenet which posits "that education and politics were inseparable, no education could ever be neutral, and education should always be linked to broader social movements to serve the struggles for humanity and liberation from oppression" (E. Gutstein, 2007, 421). He also sought to replicate Freire's emancipator literacy, achieved through the combination of awareness, critical thought, and reflective action he termed "reading the word---acquiring text literacy---and reading the world---developing a sociopolitical historical understanding of one's own life conditions and broader society…[and for changing the world], which he called writing the world" (421-422). His aims were consistent with Bell's definition of social justice education as being both a process and a goal. His process was in helping his students develop positive social and cultural identities by validating their language, culture, and history (E. Gutstein, 2003, 40).While teaching mathematics, he matched the subject objectives with three goals for teaching for social justice: developing sociopolitical consciousness, a sense of agency, and positive social/cultural identities. His goals matched with identity or recognition theorists, and his curricular lessons helped the students read the world through solving mathematical problems designed in part to show

inequitable distribution of wealth and resources. Ensuing discussions would sometimes raise issues of power.

In a recent study, he recounted specific critical practices in his math class. One he termed "normalizing politically taboo topics" in which students were encouraged to generate critical discussions on topics generally off limits in that grade level. After having instructed mathematics principles, he gave real world examples that helped students to understand the numerics behind local gentrification. After reading both the word and the (local) world, many students took action (wrote their world) by writing letters of protest. His studies have shown that through his content instruction in the micro-social system (framing the discussion in something he refers to as "normalizing politically taboo topics") many of his students had developed agency in the macro-social system after they left his class (E. Gutstein, 2007, 426).

Those teacher-practitioners provide compelling evidence of the empowering effects of student-centered pedagogical practices. I have endeavored to utilize them in my own classroom, and decided also to model them as part of my facilitation style for my PLC.

We turn next to the design of the research study.

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND PLC INTERVENTION

<u>Introduction</u>

In this and the next chapter, I present the research methodology. In this chapter, I discuss all that led up to the design of my PLC intervention, which includes my professional experiences as a teacher and as a PLC leader; my relevant personal assumptions and beliefs; my graduate studies in social justice education; and my comprehensive pre-dissertation research. I conclude with an overview and description of my designed PLC intervention.

In the next chapter, I fully explain the mixed method research design and the ways I analyzed my various data sets.

Prior Experiences as Teacher and PLC Facilitator

In the spirit of the social justice educator's ongoing practice, I begin by critically examining myself with regards to my prior and current roles as teacher-practitioner, professional development provider, and researcher in this school site.

During my 30 years of working as a teacher, I have served in numerous professional roles outside of the classroom, both in the high school and throughout the school district. District-wide, I have chaired a committee on school's climate that included the superintendent and several principals from other schools. Within my high school, I have worked with both small groups of teachers and administrators, within in the following capacities: I am a state-trained and certified teacher-mentor; have co-chaired a committee for multi-cultural inclusion in the high school; served as the sole faculty representative for the 145 faculty members in a recent conflict between administration and faculty; co-

founded, coordinated, and operated a student peer mediation program; served in various academic committees; rewritten and written numerous course curricula; and most recently, was responsible for using the PLC professional development model in this school to organize, write, and administer professional development curriculum for 45 teachers, guidance staff, and an assistant principal. However, I did not have autonomy in writing that professional development plan. Rather, like nearly all PLC formats discussed in the literature in Chapter 2, our PLC also featured an administrative-directed focus, and I was to oversee the learning of those 45 professionals. In addition, I also facilitated my own PLC comprised of nine teachers, guidance staff, and an assistant principal (from the total of 45), where I created curricula and activities to match the required content. The PLC I facilitated met approximately twice per week for the entire academic year. The format and philosophical design was based on the models written by the DuFour's (R. DuFour et al., 2008) and Gibbs (Gibbs & Ushijima, 2008).

While I included in that PLC model active learning strategies for participants, it was not teacher-centered, and ultimately, unsatisfactory for teachers as a comprehensive professional development program. I (and teachers' evaluations) found the model lacking in its capacity to account for and address teachers' day to day professional challenges and concerns; it did not more fully empower teachers; nor did it help teachers themselves to identify the areas of knowledge and skills they needed to effectively meet their challenges. Those mandated PLCs also did not adequately recognize either the range of the increasing diversity among the student body, or provide the requisite training and or sharing of effective teacher past practice in addressing issues in diversity.

After my experiences and reflections with this PLC format, I came to posit the following perspectives on PLCs for in-service teachers:

➢ In order for a PLC to be effective and empowering for teachers, practicing teachers need to be partners in the learning process. There, they can validate their own and others' experiences and expertise and, if possible, continually question themselves as socially and personally situated learners who also play various social and cultural roles.

➢ The dynamics of adult learning communities are highly variable, especially if teachers are mandated to attend PLCs. Teachers who do not want to be in a PLC, but are mandated to attend, can be quite destructive to the community, and undermine the required levels of relational trust. Whenever possible, teacher choice in PLC is highly preferable. This is especially true for the intervention I designed. I assumed that teachers who would volunteer for this PLC would be more innately motivated and more highly invested than those required to attend a PLC.

➢ I have also been consistently surprised at how little influence and power teachers have over their own working conditions, and how readily they acquiesce to directives they disagree with.

➢ I needed to design an intervention in the form of a PLC that addressed the above, and incorporated research-based aspects of what has been effective in PLCs.

To summarize, my experiences as a PLC leader and my academic research discussed in the last chapter provided me with powerful empirical and research-based information sources that have, over time, convinced me that the existing PLC professional

development model has been inadequate to meet the actual professional needs of teachers. Before I present my PLC intervention, I will present my personal assumptions and educational background, and discuss how those intersect with the professional experiences I have just disclosed.

Disclosing Crucial Personal Assumptions

As a long-term working teacher in this research location, my participation in the system has provided me with the awareness of the lived experiences of the participants in the study. As a qualitative researcher, this participant/observer role is an essential element of the study that requires critical examination (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, esp. 78-79).

We graduate students in the University of Massachusetts' social justice education program learn that an essential practice for both facilitator and participants is one's frequent personal reflection throughout the learning process. If all practice that, in theory the learning environment (a classroom, field site, etc.) itself then can become an ongoing source of analysis of one's personal contributions to reproductions within the learning space of societal power inequities, or of patterns of domination and subordination. Those choosing to may then act as agents of change in the quest to promote greater social equity and justice. As a high school teacher, I have striven to create socially just classrooms, and when appropriately part of the curriculum or the discussion, have also taught social justice content. My hopes are that when students see and feel equality and fairness modeled and practiced in the classroom, they can then add to their educational experiences a felt sense of a community based on equity and fairness. They would then have a new, lived standard from which they could then compare and contrast other social systems. Even if they were not able to immediately classify an inequity in a social setting,

they would know by contrast with the socially just classroom that something "did not feel right."And when they add to that experiential sense academic information about the social inequities and unearned privileges of some with certain social identities, students would be doubly prepared to potentially choose to act in ways that promote justice and peace within their particular spheres of influence.

My ongoing self reflection has led me to identify those hopes I have for my students. They also form the basis for my facilitation style, which I will discuss when I describe my PLC intervention below. I am also cognizant of other personal beliefs and values that qualitative researchers need to account for and to disclose. I rely on the following researchers for framing these beliefs.

Marshall & Rossman (1999) draw upon Brantlinger's (1997) work as having provided a useful summary of these seven categories of crucial assumptions which, when directly addressed, strengthens the logic and integrity of the dissertation proposal (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, 106-108). I will apply and address each of them here. The first concerns the social justice lens of this dissertation study.

1. First, *how does the researcher view the nature of the research?* The nature of this research is one of the value and efficacy of a voluntarily-attended, teacher-responsive PLC that is centered upon the content and process consistent with a particular social justice perspective. I recognize that even the concept of "social justice," and social justice education, promotes energetic criticism from a range of philosophical writers[13]. I followed conventional research practices, and although I

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[13] While that argument is beyond the scope of this study, elsewhere I have reviewed the history of social justice in education (2010), and Adams (2012) most recently provides a good overview of salient themes.

did not proselytize during the seminar, my treatment was not politically neutral. I also acknowledge again that I am of a disposition or belief system that endorses the education for, and the enactment of, social justice, which I will define more fully below. My treatment, and the assigned readings, challenged participating teachers to explore their social roles based on their multiple social identities and any attending privileges or disadvantages, as well as examining ways they may have been perpetuating inequities in the institutions and society within their own classrooms. The action component of social justice education encouraged individuals to perform transformative steps within classrooms to create greater equity and justice. And as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, I discovered from teachers' interviews that they *had* begun to transform themselves and their professional interactions with students and staff.

I highlight my presumption that recognizing and acting within one's power— that is, being an agent—is part of the nature of this research. Participants in this study were offered an organizational tool to help them re-categorize and re-assess the range of their teaching duties. Engaging in that itself was an active step which involved personal and collective agency. Also, the social justice component helped them first to identify the range of student diversities. It then helped them to determine that certain differences put some students at a learning disadvantage, and that teachers had power to alter their pedagogy and parts of the curriculum to better meet the needs of all learners. The nature of this study, then, included an invitation to act in accordance with the knowledge and skills presented and explored. Admittedly, such agency requires a *disposition,* or the "habit of thinking

and action regarding teaching and children" and a world view (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, 396) that is critical of a status quo that is not equitable for all.

2. Second, the *how does the researcher view his position relative to the participants*? I acted both as a facilitator and as a fellow participant. I was "intimately involved" in the lives of my fellow practitioners (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, 396) as they are my co-workers, and I acted as a peer-facilitator.

3. Thirdly, the *direction[s] of my gaze* as a researcher were twofold. One was external in that I closely studied Participants' nonverbal communication, as well as their verbal and written expressions. The other was concurrently internal, as indicated above, and I frequently prompted teachers to explore their inner realities. There, we sought to determine how our own identities and assumptions were manifested in our own professional practice. As facilitator, I frequently reflected and shared insights with Participants, including new personal awarenesses and past "blindspots." By doing that, within this context of a PLC based on social justice education, as Griffin and Ouellett (2007) posited, I "taught who I am…[and showed that] learning about social justice issues is a lifelong process"(M. Adams et al., 2007, 90-91). Other aphorisms come to mind that speak to the importance of keeping the focus one's self, such as, "We do not see the world as it is, but as we are" (variously attributed). And the Hindu proverb alludes to the far-reaching effects of an individual's change: "Reform yourself and you will have reformed thousands."

4. Fourth, what is the *purpose of the research?* My purpose was both private, in that it will contribute to the completion of my doctoral studies, and public, in that I deeply desire to provide necessary and relevant research findings to colleagues in the site, and by extension, to the readers of this study.

5. Next, the *intended audience* of this study is primarily all of the Participants, the teaching community here, the local and district administrators, my dissertation committee, and the scholarly community.

6. Sixth, with regard to the *political positioning* of this study, its frame presents a social justice perspective, and is therefore not politically neutral. However, I never required any Participant to view social justice as I do, or as anyone else does. I did encourage each Participant's critical examination of the individual categories of self, students, teacher practice, and curricular choices, and the dynamic interplay among each. I also encouraged and presented views in opposition to that of a social justice perspective.

7. And finally, how do I view the *exercise of agency?* Clearly my seminar placed me primarily among the other teachers as a facilitator in a study of our local praxis. However, I also functioned at times during group discussion and discovery within the alternate role of the neutral, passive observer. At other times, I engaged in Socratic dialogue with Participants. I also encouraged Participants to assess (and re-assess) their own agency in all of their professional interactions. Doing so is a necessary aspect of empowerment, which in turn is a vital component of liberation from the oppressive, dominative forces. Note: The PLC agreed that any action coming from the collective, such as intervening in the school system,

dialoguing with administration, sharing information beyond the group, etc. would

first require unanimous approval by the group. Individual members, of course,

could act as they see fit within their own sphere of influence, and as we will see in

the results chapters, the fact that several did when interrupting perceived social

injustices, was one of the exciting discoveries of this study, discussed in Chapter

7.

In addition to those seven items above, I teach my classes—and facilitate adult

learning—from a value system that is close to what theorists and practitioners such as

Adams and Love (2005) term, "teaching from a social justice perspective." In this

context, a social justice perspective is based on analyses of the iterative patterns of

domination and subordination within social structures. Ongoing critical analysis provides

educators with a critically important role in both raising awareness of how those

structures are reflected in classrooms, and how they might be reproduced within the

relationships of people within the learning space. Social justice education, the authors

write, offers a "unique opportunity of *"interrupting* these unequal relationships both by

helping people understand social inequality, and by *modeling* more reciprocal and

equitable relationships in the classroom" (M. Adams & Love, 2005, 587. Authors'

italics).

To summarize, I strongly believe that self-knowledge is especially critical for teachers

who decide to research *and* to teach from a social justice perspective, and this has been

made even more urgent by today's increasingly diverse student demographics.

Pre-Dissertation Research

To briefly review, the formation of this dissertation study actually began with the realization that my past efforts as a PLC facilitator yielded only partial success with teachers. Also, my own frustrations grew as a currently practicing high school teacher subject to the ever-increasing demands from outside stakeholders whose actions continually discounted and disempowered teachers. I critically examined my role as PLC facilitator to determine what I was or was not doing to promote optimal adult learning and teacher empowerment. As I discussed in Chapter 2, I supplemented these explorations with research relevant to matters of teacher learning within particular PLCs. During my research, I also acknowledged my debt to Freire, who influenced my thinking about the dangers of passively ingesting "knowledge" distributed by representatives of dominative power structures, and to Cochran-Smith and Lytle, who provided a valuable frame through which I will view teacher learning within the PLC intervention.

But even taking those aspects into consideration did not provide all that I needed to design the most effective PLC. I needed to discover from administrators what their external expectations were, what were their research and philosophical bases, and what they expected from the teachers. And although it seems entirely logical to ask teachers what their experiences were and what they needed from professional development, that obvious practice was absent from my review of the literature. So I also asked the teachers for their sense of their past and current professional experiences and demands, and what they thought they needed to more effectively face and deal with them. I then held numerous informal dialogues with them, later noting what they said in my researcher notes and adding it to my data sets. Given that our school had adopted the PLC model for

professional development, and armed with the information I had gathered from my informal conversations, I then proceeded to hold two formal focus group meetings with an existing PLC, of which I was only a member. I will now detail the results of the meetings with administrators and with teachers.

Interviews with Administration

I conducted seven interviews between March and May, 2010, with the administrators. Interview times ranged from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. I met with the district superintendent in charge of professional development, four curriculum coordinators, and the high school principal. The purpose for these interviews was to discover what state guidelines and mandates these administrators followed in their recommendations for curriculum and classroom pedagogy, their implementation within their departments, and what flexibility they allowed the teachers in following those mandates. From the administrative interviews, I learned that

➢ All disciplines within the high school are mandated to teach using "differentiated instruction." Differentiated instruction requires teachers to continually monitor the content acquisition and skill mastery of each student through a variety of data sources such as student self-report, quizzes, tests, and the like. Then teachers are to provide additional instruction, or re-teaching, to those students who did not acquire the content or skill. The teacher must then provide a variety of alternate pedagogical methods to better assure that each student's learning styles will be activated.

- The teacher is required to construct and adhere to yearly SMART[14] goals.

- The administration unilaterally decided that PLCs were the professional development format that the district would adopt. The teacher is also required to attend PLCs whose agendas are set by the administration.

- Within the PLC, teachers there are to construct "Common Formative Assessments," which are pre- and ongoing-tests of students' baseline aptitude in particular content and skills. Those scores are to be logged for the administration to view. Upon sharing the scores with the PLC (at times, teachers may consult on scoring of some assessments) teachers are required to discuss the results of those assessments, and to agree upon new pedagogical approaches in cases when a certain percentage of the students did not master the skills. Scores and scoring graphs; teacher plans; final assessments; percentages of students mastering the skills; along with brief narrative accounts of each meeting, must be kept in a binder, located within the department chair's office.

- Our district will soon be requiring all its teachers to teach in a "culturally responsive manner," though the date of implementation and other particulars have not been formally identified.

- The district administrative team is committed to the PLC model for teacher professional development, and that the administration team itself has organized its own PLC, based on the model presented by DuFour (R. Dufour et al., 2005).

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[14] "SMART" is an acronym for goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely.

Interviews with Teachers

With the teachers, I conducted two one-hour focus group sessions within an administrative-assigned PLC of eight high school teachers, of which I was also a member (not the facilitator). During the first session, I asked my fellow teachers in the community what they thought were their most pressing needs and concerns about their current teaching duties. I also asked them what they thought would be a helpful design for them in a future PLC that might address these pressing needs and concerns. I then provided them with the Adams and Love (2005) article, and encouraged them to read the article prior to our second session, so we could discuss the potential usefulness to the high school teachers' realities of the authors' inclusive teaching and learning model.

During the second session we discussed that article and the model. The authors suggest that inclusive teaching and learning can be analyzed by looking separately at the four interrelated quadrants of student, instructor, curricular materials, and pedagogy. I drew the four quadrants on a whiteboard, and suggested ways in which we might organize the existing mandates and challenges using those quadrants as our analytic framework. I asked whether the authors' model might be useful in helping to organize our teaching duties both inside and outside the classroom. Each responded in the affirmative, though three stated that they were not entirely clear about the model, that it seemed inclusive, and that they would definitely be interested in exploring its usefulness to them.

From the focus group discussions with teachers, I also learned that the teachers felt confusion, frustration, and anger concerning the quantity of pressing external mandates. They reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of external mandates, and confused

about if or how they were connected with each other. Two teachers reported that as relatively new practitioners, they were unsure about what level of accountability they would be held to by supervisors. They reported that the external mandates were disjointed, and "got in the way" of some of their teaching efforts in the classroom.

Several reported genuine concern about how they were going to change their instruction style to meet the needs of students in a classroom that was soon-to-be de-leveled academically. And because all disciplines must re-write existing curricula into the "Understanding by Design" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) format, and demonstrate "differentiated instruction," teachers reported uncertainty about which mandate(s) to focus on.

One teacher, a middle-aged adult who began teaching as a second career three years ago, and was completing a masters degree in Education, reported that she had not really taken into account how students' diversity and her own life experiences interacting could have an effect on learning. After she completed the first appendix exercise in the article, that activity "really opened [her] eyes," and she expressed genuine interest in continuing that exploration. Her reply, combined with others' interest in exploring how the factors of a teacher's life and social identities interacted with students' lives during the learning enterprise, added additional encouragement for me to design a PLC centered on this model.

I also held several informal conversations with many other teachers in order to get their sense of what they needed in professional development, which also produced a large amount of anecdotal information. When combining the formal focus groups and informal

conversations, I spoke with approximately 30 teachers as part of my pre-dissertation study.

The teachers in the formal focus group agreed that the Adams and Love (2005) article presented a potentially useful analytic framework within which they could organize their current challenges and mandates. The teachers' response during the informal discussion of the article directly influenced the formulation of both of my research questions. Since the teachers thought that placements of the current classroom challenges and outside mandates within the model's quadrants of teaching and learning were indeed plausible, it led me to seek to research to what extent a PLC using that holistic learning model would help them to manage their challenges and mandates. When I asked if they would be interested in working in a future PLC that I would facilitate that would use this model as a way of organizing our current challenges and mandates, all the teachers immediately responded in the positive.

How Pre-Dissertation Research Informed My PLC Design

This information influenced my study in a couple of ways. First, I decided that my focus for the PLC's effectiveness for teachers would be in the outcome domains of the quadrants of knowledge and skills associated with teaching, knowledge of students, and knowledge of pedagogy. Since this school does not require a proscribed curriculum or pedagogy in the form of scripts, I knew that teachers in the PLC could experiment with different ways that learning could be achieved in the classroom. Next, learning that the district was requiring some future addressing of student diversity in the classroom reinforced my decision to use a teaching and learning model based on social justice

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education. Given that, it led me to propose the holistic model as the basis for the PLC "treatment" in my study.

It is important here to note that I focused upon the *teachers'* needs and questions when designing this PLC seminar for my dissertation study. Teachers want and need something that is useful and practical. That is why at its core, although soundly research-based, this is a study seeking to discover the *pragmatic* benefits of a PLC that provides through its process and reading content, a holistic, social justice approach to teaching and learning. Teachers in this school were enthusiastic about a heuristic tool that would help them to determine the knowledge and skills they need in identifying, coordinating, understanding, and performing all of their duties within the school building—not only in the classroom. Because of this need at the "ground level," I have asked research questions and designed a research method that I now believe has provided the data necessary to more efficiently, more competently, and more inclusively facilitate teaching and learning for all in the classroom and in all professional functions.

This, then, is the pre-dissertation research that led me to organize my study as a way of answering my two research questions, and to create a voluntary PLC for participants based on a holistic model of classroom inclusivity at my suburban public high school. My PLC intervention, then, was designed to answer these two research questions: 1) How can a voluntarily-attended PLC help public high school teachers face the challenges of the school year? In particular, how can a volunteer, teachers-only PLC help teachers regarding the following outcome dimensions of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy?

2) How do teachers report, find or believe that a voluntarily-attended PLC, facilitated in a holistic, socially just manner, and using a holistic model also based on social justice principles, helps them to respond to the range of challenges they face? In particular, I asked whether teachers report, find, or believe that such a PLC helps them recognize and deal with (a) challenges of student diversity within the classroom; (b) mandates from external stakeholders that address student diversity; and (c) the entire range of competing demands teachers experience from the multiple sources.

Description and Outline of the PLC Intervention

The experimental PLC I designed and facilitated consisted of a 10 week series of one hour seminars held after school, and centering discussion and exploration around the four quadrants of teaching and learning proposed by Adams and Love (2005).[15] To review, Adams and Love proposed an inclusive learning model whose four dynamically interacting quadrants consisted of knowing one's self as a person and a teacher and the identities one brings to the classroom; knowing the demographics and backgrounds of one's students; creating a more inclusive curriculum; and developing a flexible, more inclusive repertoire of pedagogical skills. The 10 sessions were bookended by an introductory and concluding session, and the remaining eight sessions took Participants

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[15] There was a significant change in the schedule that required me to ask for volunteers to participate in the PLC study *after* the school day. The school year during which I conducted my pre-dissertation research maintained a building schedule that incorporated regular PLC meeting times during the school day. During the summer before my scheduled study to be held in the fall semester, the local Board of Education changed the building schedule. In addition to significantly increasing instruction time, the schedule also eliminated teacher PLC meeting time during the regular school day. Instead, teachers were to meet for about 60 minutes in certain mornings before students arrived, approximately 20 times during the school year. The new structure mandated administrative-designed content for the PLCs. Therefore, the only way for me to run mine would be to hold it after school, and to ask for teachers to volunteer their time.

through each of the four quadrants of teaching and learning, twice. The first cycle during weeks 2-5 introduced them to each of the four quadrants, and they applied them to their current classroom practice. The second cycle during weeks 6-9 were designed originally to take the Participants again through each quadrant, but this time to encourage them to consider how the external mandates might be better organized and coordinated.

The readings that we used were from several sources. My primary written source was the Adams and Love article, including especially their worksheets listed in their appendices. I also used an edited text from which I selected excerpts for participants called *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook,* (Second Edition), edited by M. Adams, and colleagues (M. Adams et al., 2007). With contributions from several educators-researchers, this text provides a range of discreet entities and theoretical foundations to social justice education, as well as suggested curricula and pedagogical approaches.

Broadly, the elements of the PLC included reading outside of class, an initial community activity generally connected to the proposed theme for the meeting, break out group work and report-back to the entire community. Because my facilitation choices drove the learning process—which, in social justice education, is of equal importance with the content—I must explain in detail my facilitation style and rationale.

Facilitation Process

To briefly review, my facilitation choices for my designed PLC were informed by my prior experiences as a PLC leader, my own experiences as a teacher, my interview data from administrators and teachers, my research of relevant literature, and my social justice perspective informed by my graduate studies and personal assumptions and beliefs. I

theorized that merging the best of both the PLC model of communal work and support

with the scope and humanistic viewpoint of social justice education would create an

optimal, ongoing inquiry-based learning experience for teachers that would counter the

current mechanistic trends in teacher reform and empower teachers to finally recognize

and claim their voice in the education discussions.

Applying that information to the current study, then, I hypothesized that the most

effective seminar for veteran/in-service teachers would be teachers-only, voluntarily

attended PLC whose facilitation protocol was based on a social justice perspective. As

facilitator, I sought to accomplish these three equally important tasks throughout the

seminar:

1) To facilitate in a way that helped create a learning community where

Participants felt safe enough to trust each other so that their personal and

collective examinations and analyses could be more authentic, and thereby likely

to be more beneficial to them. That positive learning environment has been an

essential element in my previous experience, and has been supported in research.

Griffin and Ouellett (2007) assert that the facilitator's attention to "climate during

the class meetings is the most crucial factor in sustaining an environment that

invites and supports critical examination of [Participants'] own experiences…(M.

Adams et al., 2007, 94-95). In addition, research on effective PLCs asserts that

trust within the community is an essential feature, for with it, community

members will "reach out, not fearing they will look inadequate or that they will be

ridiculed" (S. M. Hord & Sommers, 2008, 152). And in the absence of being

required to merely ingest the information from an expert, thereby reproducing the

"banking method," and giving the illusion that expertise has been attained and learning and challenging assumptions and conclusions can end, participants were more likely to create the ongoing "inquiry-*as*-stance" approach (M. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

2) To provide a "set of interactive, experiential pedagogical principles" (Bell, in M. Adams et al., 2007, 2) so as to create experiential learning in which Participants could experience, create personal meaning, and apply meaningfully to their practice. During those experiential activities, participants could also engage meaningfully with the following materials:

3) To provide a series of selected, essential texts (and more complete bibliography, for individual additional reading) that provided conceptual frameworks of social justice in education. During discussions, it was important to encourage participants to include their prior and current experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, thereby not invalidating their professional experience, but using it as a scaffold on which they built additional knowledge, skill, and confidence.

In short, I intentionally highlighted the four interacting quadrants in the Adams and Love model, and invited the Participants to examine and reflect on their own and the group's process throughout the seminar.

Typical facilitation procedure throughout the seminar consisted of the following: began each session with a community activity and personal sharing. Continued with pair-shares, discussing the week's reading and or discussing results of activities. Individuals were encouraged to work with someone new in dyads or triads, followed by report-outs

to entire group and group discussion. For each meeting, I posted large sheets of paper containing:

➢ The Community Agreements for Group Safety (from the second session to the end)

➢ Parking Lot –issues or questions that occurred to the person but did not seem to belong to the flow of the discussion at the time. These would be addressed as soon as possible.

➢ Insights—awarenesses, questions, "ah-ha's" that the person would like to post

➢ Request for and Sharing of Additional Resources

➢ List of Mandates, Challenges, and Clerical Duties (the latter refers to teacher obligations outside of the classroom instruction)

As previously stated, the process of learning was as important as the content. Therefore, rather than lecturing and following the traditional educational approach, I wanted to assure that the Participants could be fully included and interactive during the learning process. I wanted all voices to be heard, and all concerns stated and addressed. Accordingly, I designed the format to invite teachers' pressing needs or suggested changes to the proposed structure. As we will see, this approach led to a surprising and important finding which grew out of the community's collective decision to change the proposed agenda so as to capitalize on new knowledge and realizations they were making. I will present and interpret those findings in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Finally, the community agreed that we would all keep each other informed or updated as needed between meetings, via email. See Appendix A for complete details of my PLC treatment.

Benefits of Experimental PLC Intervention

I designed a PLC that built upon research-based successful PLC practice, and my own experience as a PLC leader. My study examined the effects of my enhanced PLC design on the participating teachers' knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy in dealing effectively with the entire range of professional challenges. But because the study was also one that instructed on and functioned within the principles of social justice education, and adopted the inquiry as stance paradigm to the existing challenges to teaching and the outside mandates, teachers stood to gain more in my PLC than from standard PLCs. Traditional PLCs focus on teacher acquisition of intellectual material and skills, so as to improve student learning. I predicted that my PLC would have greater potential benefits to the participant because of the following premises: My holistic, social justice-based designed PLC intentionally addressed teachers' intellect, emotions, and spirit—all of which are part of a whole person. If those were addressed in meaningful ways, teachers stood to gain greater meaning from the outcome of this type of PLC. My pre-dissertation research also directed me to construct an intervention that addressed the emotions teachers shared with me.

Teachers had shared with me many emotions, such as confusion, frustration, despair, and anger, and those were often coupled with senses of individual isolation. My PLC intervention invited teachers to account for, to share, and to explore their feelings and their sense of isolation in a supportive group of other teachers who have chosen to take part in the same study. Consistent with a PLC facilitated in from a social justice perspective, I invited Participants' to share their personal feelings, in small and larger groups, and then engage in activities designed to validate, support, and discover ways of

effectively dealing with those emotions, as they relate to professional functions. Also, self-efficacy, an outcome dimension, asks for the extent to which the teachers feel capable of successfully meeting a range of professional obligations.

In addition to addressing teachers' emotions, I also provided content material that helped them better organize and understand their competing demands. As an ongoing part of my facilitation, I continually accounted for and addressed the participant's emotional and intellectual components. As participants became more comfortable in sharing those personal aspects in the group, I facilitated in a way that fostered and noted increased senses of affiliation and community. I intentionally did that to both accelerate interpersonal trust and to address their reported sense of isolation. I believe that this component also addressed part of the participant's spirituality, which can be defined here as one's realized sense of connectedness to that which is beyond him or herself.

Finally, when considering the teacher's current disempowerment, I was interested in determining if this holistic approach within my designed PLC would empower participants in ways that enabled, activated, or even increased, their praxis. That is, will they take actions in accordance with their chosen theories or beliefs? In my PLC, I encouraged teachers to also examine themselves as agents within a local and larger societal system. One's agency, and acting justly in accordance with it, is an empowering outcome of the type of social justice education I espouse. Therefore, in accordance with my curiosity as to whether participants would report a different sense of personal agency, I was also interested in determining if my seminar would affect how teachers initially assesses, then reassessed what I have termed above as their Personal Teacher Self-efficacy and General Self-efficacy.

In the next chapter, we will fully examine how the different instruments were constructed, who the participants were, and how I analyzed and interpreted the data I collected from my uniquely-designed PLC intervention.

CHAPTER 4

MIXED METHOD RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the last chapter, I discussed all that led up to, and then included detailed discussion of my PLC intervention. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which I will determine if and to what extent my intervention answered my research questions and yielded findings beyond those questions. I begin this chapter with a focus on the methodology of my intervention, discuss my participant selection and grouping, then proceed with the different instruments I used to measure and interpret the quantitative and qualitative data I collected. I conclude the chapter with this study's limitations.

Rationale for Mixed Method Research

Because I sought the pragmatic benefits to practicing teachers, I selected a mixed methods design. Creswell (2003) states that the practice of research requires that philosophical ideas must be combined with broad approaches to the strategies of research and implemented with specific procedures (4). My decision to use a mixed methods design is based on the nature of what I sought to learn in this study. My research questions addressed problems that teachers face, and sought to determine if the holistic, voluntary PLC based on and facilitated from a social justice perspective, would have practical applications, or solutions, to those problems. Therefore, those focuses are ones that can be labeled as a "pragmatic knowledge claim." That is, I am stating the assumption that I and the participants in the PLC will discover what is useful from the "actions, situations, and consequences" of the communal and individual work, and seek to discover "what works," rather than antecedent conditions (Creswell, 2003, 11). Although in practice, as we will see in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, as part of the social justice

analysis, Participants' discussions naturally tended towards antecedent conditions and causal elements.

A pragmatic knowledge base, therefore, encourages researchers to draw liberally from both qualitative and quantitative assumptions and research methods, and to select research procedures that best meet the needs and purposes of the research (Creswell, 2003, 12). Marshall and Rossman (1999) would categorize my attempt to discover the benefits to teachers' knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy in this designed PLC as an exploratory inquiry, in that it sought to identify and determine the influence of the PLC on "important variables" for teachers and for teaching (41).

Overview of Mixed Methods

My research questions called for both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative design consisted of two separate questionnaires, delivered both to participants in my sample and to a control group, in a pre/post format. One questionnaire I used was an established metric, The Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES); and I wrote the other questionnaire. The questionnaire I wrote included closed as well as open field questions.

The qualitative components consisted of the open-field questionnaire's written responses of both Participants and Controls, the tape recorded final PLC session, and an end-of-PLC interview with each Participant from the sample group only.

The data collected from the PLC participants were augmented by my own field notes and transcription from the recorded tenth session.

Pre and Post Design

I conducted a pre/post comparison within the Participant group, within the Control group, and a comparison between both Participant and Control groups. This was a quasi-experimental design because I did not randomly assign groups, but did employ a control, or comparison group.

The basis for comparison between the two groups was the pre- and post-questionnaires only. I did not have the kind of ongoing interaction with the Control group that I did with the Participant group. Therefore, for both the Participant and Controls, I compared the pre- and post- tests for each, as well as between the two groups. There were no follow-up interviews with the Control group, and there were no observation on my part, or journaling. It is worth noting that I made minor adjustments in the language of the post- survey open field questions to make them appropriate for both the sample, who received the treatment, and for the comparison, who did not (see Appendix H). The distinction between my treatment and observations of the two sets of teachers can be schematically depicted as follows:

Participant Group: O/OX-OX-OX-OX-OX-OX-OX-OX-OX-OOX/OOOOOOOOOO

Control Group   O/——————————————————————/O

The notation above illustrates that design. X represents the exposure of the sample group to the treatment (the PLC), the effects of which were measured. O represents observations recorded on an instrument. I recorded observations for each PLC meeting in my log notes, and audio taped the last session, accounting for the double O at session 10. I made only two observations in the form of online questionnaires with the comparison

set of teachers. The slash marks indicate the beginning and end of the 10 week one hour sessions. The 10 O's to the right of the second slash mark indicate the 10 interviews. The left to right dimension indicates the temporal order of procedures in this study. The separation of rows by the dashed horizontal line indicates that the comparison set of teachers are not equated by random assignment (Creswell, 2003, 167-168).

The major difference between the Participants and the Controls sets of teachers is that the Control group did not participate in my PLC, although they were concurrently assigned by administration to their own PLCs, and not all 11 were in the same PLC. Participants in my PLC were also assigned by administration to other PLCs, though not all were in the same one. I ascertained their learning there through question five of my post-PLC interview protocol (see Appendix I). Controls also did share with the Participants both the classroom and external challenges. The Controls did find limited ways of addressing classroom and external challenges, as I will discuss in Chapters 6 and 7. My study focused on the role of the PLC in helping the Participants understand and address the full range of their classroom and external challenges. At the end of the 10 hours during which the PLC met, I re-administered the questionnaires both to the Participants and to the Control teachers.

PLC Participants and Control Population

The potential subject pool for my research included all the approximately 145 teachers in a public suburban high school of approximately 1600 students in the Northeast United States. Teachers volunteered based on an open invitation to all teachers in the high school at the beginning of the 2010-2011 academic year. It is important to note that all teachers in this site must take part in an administrated-assigned PLC. In this

context, my experimental PLC intervention constituted a "volunteer" PLC effort for the participants—in other words, they were volunteering to take this experimental PLC in addition to their mandated PLC. Therefore, since my PLC would be an additional professional activity for them, and conducted after school hours (see footnote 3,Chapter 3), I sought and gained permission to begin the study immediately after school once per week, and offered continuing education units for successful completion of the 10 weeks.[16]

All of these teachers who volunteered for and participated in this experimental PLC, with the exception of new hires, had been active members in some kind of administration-assigned PLC with peers during the past two years. Those PLCs were based on the model presented by DuFour and DuFour (R. DuFour, 2007; R. DuFour et al., 2008; R. Dufour et al., 2005; R. DuFour et al., 1998), discussed in Chapter 2. This is noteworthy because their experiences with the previous PLCs may have predisposed them toward the value of professional learning communities and thus to the PLC in this study. It is also noteworthy in that all Participants had experience in the traditional PLC format, and therefore theoretically better able to distinguish similarities and differences between those and my designed PLC, thus potentially influencing their attitudes towards PLCs.

I invited all teachers in the school to take part in my study. I addressed them in an early full faculty meeting, using the written invitation as my basis, and answered

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[16] I gained administrative approval to begin the PLC during the last 25 minutes of contracted teacher time in school. This Northeast state requires teachers to accrue a certain amount of continuing education credits to maintain licensure.

questions. I also followed up my oral invitation with the written one to all high school teachers, reproduced in Appendix B.

Selection of Participant and Control Sets

From my faculty invitations, I received both personal responses, with several teachers approaching me immediately following the meeting. Others sent emailed responses. I pooled the entire list of willing teachers, then I stratified them and came up with two equivalent sets, a participant and control. The first set of 11 comprised my participant group, the next set of 11 teachers I designated as the control set. The control set did not participate in the experimental PLC.

Selection Criteria for Participants

For the Participants, my original intention was to stratify 10 or 11 interested teachers based on criteria designed to achieve a cross-departmental sample, with balanced demographics of gender, age, length of teaching experience, and longevity within the school. I was unable to construct my envisioned balanced demographic, because the volunteers did not represent the range of differences I wanted. Instead, I compiled a list of the 11 who were able to meet after school. After getting each teacher's confirmation through email, I then personally delivered the confidentiality agreement to each teacher (see Appendix C), and answered any questions. I explain my confidentiality procedure below. After they signed the agreement, I asked them to complete the demographic self report (see Appendix E) prior to the first PLC meeting[17].

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[17] Information from this demographics sheet provided me with both a sense of the diversity of social and personal identities, and their written thoughts about prior PLC experiences, so that I could further respond to their stated needs and experiences.

Selection Criteria for Controls

I asked the interested others via email (see Appendix D), who for a variety of reasons could not meet the constraints of the meeting time, to serve as Controls for this study. I asked the Controls to take the two questionnaires twice: once before the PLC began, in October, and again when it ended in December. A couple of the Controls asked again what my PLC was, and I explained that it was my attempt to understand what teachers will or won't find practically useful in a PLC.

<u>Confidentiality</u>

To best ensure sample participant and control group confidentiality, I did the following:

➢ After selection of volunteers, and prior to any participation, I met with each of the 22 teachers participating in the study, watched as they read the consent form, answered any questions, and kept a photocopied signed form for my records

➢ All those participating in this study self-selected a pseudonym to be used throughout the study, including online participation

➢ I stored participant data in secure locations within my home and on my computer

➢ I enabled a safety lock on my computer that required a password to access participant data

➢ I used the participant-selected pseudonyms for each participant in the writing of my dissertation

> ➢ In the field notes and all transcribed data, I eliminated all specific references
> that might identify the location of this study site

Although I cannot guarantee participants' complete confidentiality in situations of

potential computer theft, hacking, voice recorder theft or related incidents, I did all that I

could to maintain participant confidentiality.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires are useful in applying findings to larger populations, and as a method

of social exchange (Dillman, 2007). Marshall and Rossman report that the definite

advantages of surveys come into play when the "goals of research require obtaining

quantitative data on a certain problem or population" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, 97).

These clearly apply to my current study. Other strengths applicable to my study include

the instrument's "accuracy, generalizability, and convenience" (p.97). They are an

effective data collection technique when seeking to explain beliefs, attitudes, and

assessments that interact to produce an effect--all of which directly address the complex

layers of interactions of teaching and learning referred to in my research questions

(Marshall & Rossman, 1999, esp. 40-41).

Through the closed and open field questionnaires, I collected data from all participants

that provided information about their belief in their own efficacy as teachers, and about

their attitudes about their knowledge and skills base. Because I need a "standardized

measurement that is consistent across all participants," both in the participant and control

sets, my questionnaires provided me with "comparable information [obtained from]

everyone who was described. Without such assessment, meaningful statistics cannot be

produced" (Fowler, 2002, 4). Giving the same questionnaires to participants before and

after the seminar allowed me to statistically analyze changes. Comparing results of participants to those not participating allowed me to analyze any variance between the sets of teachers. Descriptive statistics also allow me, in theory, to better generalize my findings outside this particular location.

Scales, such as the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES), provide a teacher self-reported account of factors critically important to the educational process (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) reviewed several measurement problems of researchers attempting to construct a reliable, inclusive teacher self-efficacy scale. Basing their scale on Bandura's teacher self-efficacy scale, but updating some of his questions, they constructed a scale that they tested and revised three times, yielding an instrument valid and reliable. I used it as a pre- and post- test of teacher self-efficacy for my participants. See Appendix F for this instrument and the authors' report on their construct validity.

Although the OSTES provided data relevant to teacher self-efficacy in student engagement, pedagogical practice, and classroom management, it did not address all components of my research questions. I therefore designed additional questions to assess components of my research question not addressed by OSTES, and especially my questions as to the utility of PLCs. For these newly designed questions, I followed the format of OSTES, and reviewed instructions as to proper statement formation and selection choices from Dillman (2007) and Fowler (2002). On this basis, I constructed my own scale (Appendix G). My additional questions more directly address the teacher's sense of knowledge and skills relevant to their teaching and professional duties. I also

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designed questions to determine what the Participants' sense of teacher self-efficacy was, and their attitudes towards PLCs.

To assist in serving that end, I also wrote five new open-ended questions concerning knowledge, skills, and other challenges teachers anticipated facing in that upcoming academic year. Combining close with open-ended questions enhanced the mixed methods approach in that it allowed me to collect both the quantifiable data and the subjective data that I required for this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

I pilot tested my new questions--both those modeled on OSTES and those that are open-ended--in three ways. First, I administered the current form to three teacher colleagues not part of either participant or control sets, with the questions: "Are there any questions you thought did not apply? Any questions that made it difficult for you to respond? Any areas you thought should be covered but were not?" Second, I revised the questions based on their feedback. I then asked two doctoral student colleagues to take the actual survey online, to determine ease of online administration and as a final check for omissions or redundancies. Finally, I took the test online, but did not factor them into the statistical analysis of the two groups.

The questionnaires spoke to research question 1; the interviews spoke to both questions. The following items on the questionnaires addressed the specific aspects of my research questions, which for review, are:

1) How can a voluntarily-attended teachers' Professional Learning Community help public high school teachers face the challenges of the school year? (My questionnaire items # 14-19; and all post treatment interview questions).

1a) In particular, how can PLCs help teachers regarding the following outcome dimensions of:

    A) Knowledge (Answered through my questionnaire Items: 1,2,4,5,6,7,7B, 9,10,11,12; and Interview questions 1, 2, 7, 8; and with all subquestions).

    B) Skills (Answered through my questionnaire items #3, 8, 9, 11, 13; and Interview questions # 1, 3, 7, 9).

    C) Self-efficacy (Answered through OSTES, my questionnaire items #12, 18, and Interview questions 3, 8, 11).

2) How do teachers report, find or believe that a voluntarily-attended PLC, facilitated in a holistic, socially just manner, and using a holistic model also based on social justice principles, helps them to respond to the range of challenges they face? (Answered by post-treatment interview questions 1-8).

2a) In particular, do teachers report, find, or believe that a holistic, inclusive PLC model based on social justice principles helps them recognize and deal with:

A) Challenges of student diversity within the classroom (Answered in my questionnaire item #17; Post-treatment interview questions 1, 6, 7).

B) Mandates from external stakeholders that address student diversity (Post-treatment interview questions 4, 7B, 8).

C) Whole range of competing demands teachers experience from the multiple sources (Answered in Post-treatment interview questions 8, 11).

Pre-PLC Questionnaires

To better determine effects of this enhanced PLC experience, I determined a baseline level of all seven Dependent Variable (DV) beliefs (i.e., self assessment of knowledge,

skills, classroom management, etc.) for both Participants and Controls before the PLC, and measured it against any changes in both after the PLC. It was therefore imperative that I collected those responses from all 22 prior to the start of the PLC.

I purchased a subscription to an online survey company. I transferred my two written questionnaires onto their website, which is password protected. I then sent personal invitations via email to all 22 subjects in my study. Using only their pseudonyms, each then completed both questionnaires prior to the start of my PLC. I was able to then use the Participants' open-field responses to further modify my PLC to meet their stated needs.

Prior to the start of the seminar, I distributed to the Participants the agenda outlining the design and the readings for the 10 weeks. One reason I distributed the agenda for the entire seminar was because such practice had not been followed in any of the previous PLCs, and my pre-dissertation data from teachers indicated that such as omission contributed to their sense of confusion (and I believe, their sense of powerlessness). I decided that an important initial step towards teacher empowerment must account for their prior experiences with PLCs and professional development, and clearly highlight how this PLC would differ from previous ones, as I discussed in Chapter 1.

Post PLC Questionnaires

In order to administer the second set of questionnaires, I entered them into a separate file on the same online survey site. On the day of the last PLC meeting, I sent another email invitation to all subjects in both sets, asking them to complete the two surveys as soon as possible. At the end of the last PLC meeting, I asked the participants present to complete the surveys, and to set up a time for our interview as soon as possible.

The content of the closed field questions on both questionnaires was identical to the ones taken prior to the PLC. I constructed the open-field questions differently for both sets of teachers. I asked the Participants to account for changes in their knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, and approaches toward student diversity, as a result of this PLC. For the Controls, I asked the same questions about those four categories during the past two months (concurrent with the time my PLC ran), but worded the questions so as to eliminate reference to my PLC, since they did not participate in it, nor had I met with any of them during that time. See Appendix H for the differentiated post PLC open-field questions.

My intention for these data was to discover changes within each set, and between sets, pre and post PLC.

Semi-Structured Interviews

At the conclusion of the 10 sessions, I conducted face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with the Participants. Interviewing participants is a data collection method relied on "quite extensively by qualitative researchers" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, 80), and is indicated by the exploratory nature of segments of my study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; see also Rossman & Rallis, 1998, 180-183). These interviews provided me with a fuller understanding of the Participants' perspectives regarding the PLC and their own learning, skills assessment, and self-efficacy, thus assisting me in answering my research questions. See Appendix I for my interview protocol.

I conducted interviews beginning one day after the PLC concluded (December 23) until January 7. I audio recorded them, hired a graduate student to transcribe 1/3 of them, which I checked for accuracy with the recordings. I transcribed the other 2/3 of the

interviews. I reiterated confidentiality and anonymity to all Participants. The transcriber used only the pseudonym given by the Participant, and I did not disclose my school site to her.

Supplementary Materials

Since "observation is fundamental to all qualitative inquiry," (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, 194), I closely observed people, actions, and events, and as unobtrusively as possible, briefly jotted down my observations during the sessions. I wrote briefly during the sessions so that the Participants would not feel as I was watching them, but more of a facilitator/participant. This data collection technique began the "written record of [my] perceptions in the field." Within four hours after each PLC session, I amplified any written notes during the session, and I followed this advice of Rossman & Rallis (1998): to elaborate, reflect, question, comment, and speculate. I also noted how the PLC was functioning as a whole. I then returned to my initial impressions during the session, and wrote my "impressions, insights, and emerging hypotheses" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, 195). I wrote from 1,000 to 2,000 words in my log after each session.

I must emphasize again, however, that during each PLC session, my focus was always on the group, and on assuring the fidelity of my role as facilitator. The PLC, and by extension, the quality of my data for this dissertation, depended largely on the effectiveness and quality of my facilitation, and on their perceived sense that a major reason I was doing this PLC was to help them (speaking again to the "public" purpose of this study, described in Chapter 3, under "Explications of Crucial Personal Assumptions, # 4).

Focusing on the teachers during the seminar was also ethically indicated, I believe. Since this study investigated the extent to which a PLC of this type was useful and helpful to the teachers, I needed to be fully present during meetings, and not distracted by taking copious notes, or otherwise focused on the private purpose of my study.

To better assure openness and trust, I decided not to audiotape the sessions, except for the last session, after getting unanimous group consent to do so.

Summary of Instrumentation

To summarize, these were the instruments I collected for this mixed method research study:

- ➢ Four sets of quantitative data in the form of pre-post study questionnaires – two for the sample and two for the comparison group, consisting of both closed and open-ended items. Open-ended items are qualitative data. I coded them.
- ➢ Tape recorded, transcribed, and coded last PLC meeting. Also qualitative data.
- ➢ Post-treatment interviews with only the Participants. Qualitative data; tape recorded, transcribed, coded.
- ➢ My field notes, personal data organizing sheets and organization charts, used as part of the triangulation process with quantitative and qualitative data, when I analyzed and interpreted the research findings.

Data Analysis for Quantitative Data

Quantitative data were completed online through the closed-ended pre and post tests. I analyzed variance of average scores of both questionnaires between both groups, using a two-tailed t-test. I also used the one sample t- test to determine changes within the

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groups, after the PLC. I am aware of the limitations of those statistical tests, which I will

present at the end of this chapter.

Data Analysis for Qualitative Data

To review, there were five sets of qualitative data: open-ended questions on both sets

of pre and post groups, and the post seminar interviews. The last PLC session and all

Participant interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Guided by the principles of Grounded Theory, and therefore in an effort to determine

what emerges from the mass of qualitative data, I followed standard data analysis

techniques for qualitative data, outlined by Cresswell (2003):

    1. Organized and prepared data

    2. Read through all data and obtained a general sense of information and reflected

    on its overall meaning

    3. Conducted a detailed analysis, determining what thematic elements emerged

    from the data, and used those themes as coded categories

    4. Used the coded categories, including "critical incidents" (Flanagan, July,

    19541954) to see how they addressed my research questions

    5. Selected a method of representation of descriptions and themes, such as a

    representative narrative passage from a Participant, to use as clearest examples of

    theme

    6. Interpreted what was learned or the meaning constructed from the data (2003,

    190-195).

I used coding suggestions and thematic constructions suggested by Rossman and

Rallis (1998, 284-290). While coding, I used the categories of my operationalized

definition of terms (discussed in Chapter 2) and my research questions as my categories. I also accounted for that which fell outside of the scope of my research questions. Anything within that category was what emerged from the data. Some of the most intriguing findings emerged from the structure of my research questions, but were surprises that were not contained by the questions. I will discuss those in Chapter 7, and suggest future research based in part on those findings, in Chapter 8.

Steps Taken to Assure Validity of Qualitative Data Analysis

Because my multiple roles within this research site carry with them the danger of biased interpretation, I will begin by listing my five roles in this site at the time of this study. First, I was a 22 year teacher at this public suburban high school in the Northeastern United States. Second, I was a colleague for both participant and control sets of teachers, experiencing the same classroom challenges and multiple mandates. Third, I was an experienced, PLC facilitator and participant in this school, and it was in that role that I had discussions with my colleagues, which contributed to my conducting this study in this site. Fourth, I was the designer of the PLC used as an intervention in this study, and I was the facilitator for the 10 week PLC sessions. Fifth and finally, I was the researcher. I must emphasize here, and did several times during the study to the Participants, that I had *no administrative role,* nor authority over participating teachers in either the participant or control sets, and was not involved in their personnel matters in any way (except that I was a continuing education provider). I did not evaluate them, nor did or will I provide any identifying information about what they did or did not say to the administration. I was (and continue to be, as of this writing) their colleague, and a

teacher/facilitator/researcher. I continue to exercise caution in making any findings

available to the school administration.

The following are the steps I took to validate the accuracy of my findings (Creswell, 2003, 195-197). "Validity…is seen as a strength of qualitative research, but is used to suggest determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account"(Creswell, 2003, 195-196).

First, I entered into this study fully aware that I must guard *against* biased, pre-determined interpretation that I may bring. That means that I continually practiced a form of what Piantanida and Garman (1999) call "reflection as introspection." That involved my frequent looking within, to examine my own mental and emotional responses to my experiences during this study (Piantanida & Garman, 1999, 142-143), and my responses to experiences reported by the Participants. Part of this entailed my log notes, described above. Another document I kept was a personal journal, in which I wrote on average of three times per week throughout the entirety of the study. In the journal, I kept a personal, honest, inventory and account of what I believed and felt about the research questions, the culture of the school, the issues and challenges that teachers face, and my feelings and thoughts about what transpired during the seminar. After any electronic or personal conversation with a Participant between meetings, I would write in my researcher field notes both the content and my reaction as soon as possible after the meeting. Whenever I heard something a Participant said that matched with those feelings, I noted the congruence, but upon interpretation, I did seek alternative explanations or understandings of the phenomena (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Additional strategies I used to better assure validity were:

➢ Triangulation of research methods, by the multiple methods design described
earlier

➢ Rich, thick description to convey the findings

➢ Frequently consulted with two PhD psychologists and dissertation chair, to
challenge and to enhance the accuracy of my interpretation (Creswell, 2003, 196).

Limitations of Study

➢ All teachers had the same opportunity to volunteer for participation in the study.
But because participants volunteered, and were selected in large part because of
their availability to meet after school, I can not make the same kinds of
generalizations applicable to the population that I would if they were randomly
assigned.

➢ T-tests assume independence, and there was no independence of variables or
subjects. Therefore, all statistical findings will be reported with caveats, and I
cannot make strong conclusions based only on any statistical findings. Also, I
analyzed each of the seven DV as if they were independent of each other, and
they are actually closely related conceptually, and the nature of the PLC was that
Participants interacted with each other, also affecting independence. I decided
against lowering the alpha level below 0.05, because I have limited power, and
lowering the alpha level would weaken my statistical findings further. Also, I
decided not to use MANOVA because I wanted to keep the analysis simple, and
the statistics are only one piece of evidence I plan to report, and I will use those

findings as only part of the conclusions I plan to make from my entire data sources.

My intentions for using quantitative data were: to determine if quantitative findings could add a fuller chapter to the story of the data. Also, I viewed this intervention as a kind of pilot study, from which future researchers could conduct similar research designs.

➢ The total size of the population is small, affecting the power of the statistical findings. Also, I created the second set of DV, and although I pilot-tested it, I do not have reliability or validity. That is, if I were to "wipe subjects' memory clear," subjects should give the same responses each time after the intervention. This, of course, increases the likelihood of a Type 1 Error. I am also not certain that my closed-field questions measure what they intent to measure. A way to address that limitation is to view this study as a pilot, and a future study could gather larger samples or more controls to increase power. For example, several schools consisting of 20 small PLCs per school, with each group being treated as one set of data, could provide the larger N, greater independence and randomization required. That (costly) research project could employ hierarchical linear modeling.

➢ There is a question of transferability of findings to other settings, since this school is suburban, public, located in the Northeast, and familiar with the use of PLCs as a mode of professional development.

➢ Teachers who volunteered for this seminar with a social justice perspective may not represent the "norm" of teaching population (see M. Adams et al., 2007, esp. 69, for distinctions bewtween hostages and volunteers in social justice courses).

> ➤ There were no teacher observations, only self reports. While self assessment is an essential component of professional practice, observation helps give objectivity to the interactions self-reported. However, in clinical practice, therapists engage in "supervision" with peers, and this PLC could function as a teaching practitioner's peer supervision.

In the next chapter, I begin my presentation of my research findings.

CHAPTER 5

REPORTED FINDINGS FROM PARTICIPANTS AND CONTROLS BEFORE

AND AFTER PLC

The following two chapters present my data. These data, as described in Chapter 4, include the following:

1. Pre and post questionnaires, taken by the PLC Participants.

2. Pre and post questionnaires, taken by the Control population who were not PLC Participants. The questionnaires for both Participants and Controls involved both closed and open responses, as described in Chapter 4.

3. The individual interviews and supporting documentation, which will be reserved for Chapter 6.

In this chapter, I examine only the closed and open responses to the pre and post questionnaires for the Participants and Controls. The closed-field questions were Likert-scaled, attitudinal measurements of the following DV: teacher's sense of self-efficacy in classroom management; student engagement; instructional strategies; general sense of self-efficacy; knowledge; skill; and attitudes about PLCs.

The open fields asked questions such as, What have been your major challenges as a teacher; do you believe you have sufficient knowledge, skills, and self confidence to deal with the challenges associated with teaching? (See Appendix J for the complete questionnaires.)

First, I present demographic data on the PLC Participants, self-reported from their intake forms.

Demographics of Participant Group

Originally there were 11 group members participating in the PLC treatment. One, a 44 year old female special education teacher, left the PLC and the school, due to a job change. Here is a bulleted summary of the demographics for the 10 remaining PLC participants:

- ➢ Not counting myself, the group consisted of eight females and two males.

- ➢ The range of age was from 29 to 65, and 5 of the 10 were within their 40's.

- ➢ Nine identified solely as Caucasian, or White. The other identified as Asian-White.

- ➢ Six reported being a denomination of "Christian," with a seventh identifying as a non-practicing Christian. Though a practicing Christian, one added that his father is Jewish. The only non-Christian religious affiliation identified as Druid. Two did not provide an answer for "religious affiliation."

- ➢ Two chose to share additional identifying information: a Participant self-described as "liberal"; another as a second generation English teacher and formerly, an eight year paraprofessional.

- ➢ Not all curricular departments in the school were represented. Absent were Music and Art, Business and Applied Technology, Social Studies, Math. Of the ones present, English had the most representation (four), followed by World Languages (three), PE/Health Science (one), Science (one), and Special Education (one).

- ➢ Six had taught in the public schools for 16 or more years.

➢ For two, this public high school had been their sole public school teaching assignment.

➢ Seven teachers had participated in some kind of diversity workshop in a previous PLC in this school, including one who had participated in an LGBT workshop; one in a National Association of Multicultural Education conference; and one had received training in diversity in the workplace, and facilitated workshops in a previous employment. Of the three who had never participated in that kind of workshop, one had been teaching for five and one half years, one for 16 years, and one for 42 years.

➢ All 10 had participated in previous PLCs, since participation is required of all teachers in this setting. Seven stated the focus was on curriculum writing and revision; six had taken the Tribes Learning Community 24 hour training; four mentioned technology workshops; two cited external workshops; and two commented negatively about their experiences within those administrative-assigned PLCs.

Regarding meeting attendance, six of the 10 Participants were regular participants at all of the 10 PLC sessions. The remaining four were there for at least seven of the meetings.

Similarities and Differences among Participants

There were a number of points of similarity. Most of the Participants were female, half were in their 40's, nine self-identified as Caucasian, and six identified as current Christians with a seventh raised Christian but currently not practicing.

Another area of general comparison within this group was in the years of public school teaching. Defining a "veteran" teacher as one who has taught for five or more years in the public schools, 100% were veterans, ranging from five and one half years to 20 or more years. The longest service was 42 years.

Eight participants had taught in at least one other school prior to this current assignment. Seven reported having had participated in some kind of training centered on diversity, multi-cultural education, or social justice. Finally, all had previously participated in at least one PLC in this school that was administratively structured and directed.

Another important area of homogeneity within this group, of course, was the fact that each had voluntarily agreed to be a part of this PLC, and each was aware that it was designed to be responsive to their self-identified professional needs. Indeed, discovering what those needs were was one of the reasons I asked the pre-treatment open field questions. It also served as the beginning of the important practice of metacognition and self-reflection, discussed in Chapter 2. It bears repeating here that all Participants cited the fact that all were voluntary as a distinctly positive element of this PLC. I will discuss that more completely in Chapter 7, where I will emphasize that the fact that this was a volunteer, teacher-responsive PLC made it critically different from the PLC program recently instituted in this school location, and indeed, different from the PLC designs described in the literature in Chapter 2.

Areas of contrast within this group, demographically, were fewer than the areas of similarity. While the majority were in their 40's or older, two were at least 10 years younger, one who was 29 and the other was 33.

Another area of difference was that two participants had worked in another non-education field prior to coming to education as a new career.

A third area of difference that participants themselves mentioned was that they did not know each other well, and worked in five different departments within the school. See Table 5.1 below.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Ethnicity (self-identified)	Religious Affiliation (self-identified)	Department currently teaching	Total years public school teaching	Total years teaching in this school
Hunter	F	29	Asian-White	Non-practicing Christian	English	5.5	5
Goulet	M	44	Caucasian	NA	English	8	6
John Lewis	M	33	Caucasian	Roman Catholic	English	10	8
Chantal Fourcy	F	48	Caucasian	Roman Catholic	World Languages	10	10
Faye	F	44	Caucasian	Druid	Science	16	16
IrishFan	F	47	Caucasian	Episcopal	Special Ed.	16	1
Theresa	F	43	Caucasian	Congregational	Health/PE	20	8
Lisa Ballantine	F	60	White	NA	World Language	31	28
Leigh	F	58	Polish/French	Catholic	English	36	31
Jackie LaValley	F	65	Polish	Catholic	World Language	42	12

Table 5.1 Demographics of Participants

Control Group Demographics

Originally, there were 11 members of this group, matching the original number of the Participant group, but as in the Participant group, one Control group member later dropped out of the study for unknown reasons. A bulleted demographic list follows:

➢ Six were male, four female.

➢ The range of age was from 22 to 62, and six of the 10 were 42 or younger.

➢ Nine identified as Caucasian, or White. The tenth identified as Native American.

➢ Seven reported being a denomination of "Christian," including a Control identifying as a non-practicing Catholic. Three did not provide an answer for "religious affiliation."

➢ None accepted the invitation to provide additional personal or social identity information.

➢ Not all curricular departments in the school were represented. Absent were Music and Art, PE/Health Science, Math. Of the ones participating, English had the highest percentage (three), followed by Social Studies (two), Science (also two), World Languages (one), Business and Applied Technology (one), and Special Education (one).

➢ Six had taught in public schools for 10 years or less, and eight had taught in this school for 10 years or less.

➢ For four of the Controls, this school had been their sole public school teaching assignment.

- Only one had never participated in a previous course in diversity, multi-cultural, or social justice issues in education. He has been teaching in the public schools for 14 years.

- Of the nine who reported having participated in a previous course in diversity, four had taken a pre-service course, two had studied diversity issues in their prior careers in medicine or business, and three had taken various workshops as in-service teachers.

- Concerning previous PLC experiences, four directly mentioned professional development areas of curricular writing and revision; one mentioned the Tribes 24 hour training (though I am aware that at least two others also participated in that training, but did not mention it); five made general comments about the focus or PLCs, ranging from "lack of focus," to benefits of grassroots PLCs."

Similarities and Differences among Controls

The following areas presented the closest similarities within this group. Six of the 10 were 42 years old or younger. Nine self-identified as either Caucasian or White. Six self-identified as being a denomination of "Christian," with a seventh (male) who identified as a non-practicing Catholic. None supplied additional personal or social identifications.

Eight had taught in this school for 10 years or less, and six had taught in public schools 10 years or less. Of the nine who reported as have had participated in a previous seminar or course in diversity, multi-cultural education, or one that specifically dealt with social justice issues, four reported having taken a course as a pre-service teacher, two reported having specifically studied diversity issues within a prior career in the medical

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field and the other in the business field, and three had taken various workshops as in-service teachers, commenting that they were stand-alone seminars that had little or no follow-through.

Not all curricular departments in the school were represented. Absent were Music and Art, PE/Health Science, Math. Of the ones participating, English had the highest percentage (three), followed by Social Studies (two), Science (two), World Languages (one), Business and Applied Technology (one), and Special Education (one).

Regarding the question about the content focus of previous PLC experiences, four directly mentioned curricular writing and revision; one mentioned having taken the Tribes 24 hour training program (though I am aware that at least two others were previously on the PLC track, but did not mention it); five made general comments about the focus or PLCs, ranging from "lack of focus," to benefits of "grassroots PLCs," and one did not answer. See Table 5.2 below.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Ethnicity (self-identified)	Religious Affiliation (self-identified)	Department currently teaching	Total years public school teaching	Total years teaching in this school
Swim One	F	22	White	Catholic	English	0	0
Marie Godfrey	F	32	White	Protestant	Business, Applied Technology	2.2	2.2
Lisa Smith	F	42	Caucasian	Catholic	World Language	6	6
Stephen	M	33	Caucasian	Christian	Special Education	7	4
Elizabeth	F	46	Native American	Episcopal	Science	10	9
Anonymous1	M	35	White	Catholic	Social Studies	10	10
Aloysius	M	40	Human/American/White	None	English	14	6
Lincoln	M	39	Caucasian	None	Social Studies	18	3
Coach Duke	M	52	Caucasian	Roman Catholic—non-practicing	English	21	21
Frodo	M	62	White	NA	Science	33	33

Table 5.2 Demographics of Controls

Areas of Demographic Comparison and Contrast between both Groups

<u>Similarities between Groups</u>

➢ Both groups consisted of nine identified whites.

➢ Two of the Participants, and three of the Controls did not provide an answer for religious affiliation question.

➢ In both, seven reported some level of affiliation with the Christian religion.

- In both, all but one had prior experience in an administratively designed PLC for the previous two academic years. The only one who did not was a new teacher, a member of the control group.

- In both groups, there were teachers who had studied diversity issues within their business or medical field, as part of their prior career professional development (one Participant and two Controls). One Participant actually facilitated workshops on diversity in a previous role within the business field.

- Participants' and Controls' age range was equivalent: 29-65 and to 22-62. All original 22 teachers agreed to be part of this study in a defined capacity.

Differences between Groups

- The Participants included eight females, while the Controls had four.

- Though the age ranges were similar, more of the Controls were younger, on average: 50% of the Participants were in their 40's, 60% of the Controls were 42 years old or younger.

- Three of the Participants added additional social identity information, while none of the Controls did.

- The Controls had teachers from two departments not represented within the Participant group: two teachers within the Social Studies department and one from the Business and Applied Technology Department.

- In years of teaching in public schools, six of the Participants had taught for 16 years or more, while six Controls had taught for 10 years or less.

- Four Participants had taught in the school site for 12 or more years, and for two, this school was the sole public teaching assignment. For the Controls,

eight had taught in this school site for 10 or less years, and for four, this site

was their sole teaching assignment

➢ Concerning previous experience with professional training in diversity,

multicultural education, and or social justice education, seven Participants had

reported such experience in one or more of those, but only one reported taking

a course as a pre-service teacher. Five had taken various workshops while

working as in-service teachers. Nine Controls reported having participated in

such training, and four had studied the above as part of their pre-service

education.

Closed-Field Questionnaire Comparisons between Groups

What follows is a presentation of the data of the two different closed-field

questionnaires. As noted in Chapter 4, the first are questions from the Tschannen-Moran

and Hoy's OSTES scale, and the second are my own questions exploring teacher attitudes

about their self-efficacy, knowledge, skills, and work in PLCs.

Participants Report Higher Positive Changes in Student Engagement, Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management

My baseline of the teachers' attitudes across the various subfields directly impacting

them and their job performance was provided by the Controls' responses, and the

Participants' responses taken before the study. I found several salient differences between

the Controls and Participants after the study was completed. I will report the differences

between the groups in the first questionnaire, the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's Teachers

Sense of Self-efficacy Scale.

I performed a two sample, one tailed t-test for all the comparative tests between the Controls and Participants. In all three subscales of Student Engagement, Classroom Management, and Instructional Strategies, the PLC group averaged a higher positive change than did the Controls.

➢ For Student Engagement, the Participants averaged an increase of 1.1, contrasted with the Controls' decrease of -1.1.

➢ For Instructional Strategies, the Participants increased significantly from zero, at 2.6, compared to the Control's slight increase of 0.6.

➢ For Classroom Management, the Participants' average increase was a slight 0.6, but when compared to the Controls' sharp negative decline of -4, we see a compelling difference. This difference was also significant (p = .02). I will explore the implications of this more fully in Chapter 7, but this appears to be a very compelling finding that the PLC had a sustaining effect on the Participants' self-report of classroom management; while the Controls, representing the general faculty's concurrent opinions at the end of December, had strongly negative views of their effectiveness in classroom management during the same time period.

See Table 5.3 for a summary of the findings.

Subfields	PLC mean(post-pre)	PLC Std. Dv.	Control mean (post-pre)	Control Std. Dv.	Mean Difference (PLC-Control)	t score	df	p value	CI (between groups)
Classroom Management	0.6	5.03	-4	4.71	4.6	2.10	17.92	0.02	(.01, 9.18)
Student Engagement	1.0	4.76	-1.1	4.79	2.1	.98	17.99	.16	(2.38,6.59)
Instructional Strategies	2.6	7.58	.6	4.81	2.0	.70	15.22	.24	(-4.04, 8.04)
Knowledge	1.8	2.78	.3	2.94	1.5	1.17	17.94	.25	(-1.19, 4.19)
Self-Efficacy	1.4	1.71	0.6	1.07	0.8	1.25	15.13	.22	(-.56, 2.16)
Skill	-.1	1.66	.4	1.77	-.5	-.64	17.92	.52	(-2.11, 1.11)
PLC	4.7	6.70	1	3.39	3.7	1.89	13.33	.08	(-.618, 9.61)

Table 5.3 Descriptive Statistics

Participants Report Higher Positive Changes in Knowledge, Self-Efficacy, Attitudes about PLCs

When I compared the differences between the post and pre survey scores between the two groups, I discovered that in the following three subscales the Participants scored positively, and higher than, the Controls: in knowledge, self-efficacy, and in attitudes about PLC. The latter subscale was the only one of the four that had a statistically significant difference (p = .04). Interestingly, in the subscale of skill, the Participants scored slightly negatively (-0.1) and the Controls scored slightly positively (0.4). Again, I will discuss this further in Chapter 7, but I here I suggest that the difference is due in large part to the increased awareness the Participants developed concerning the range and depth of both knowledge (including enhanced awarenesses) and skills necessary for teachers to continually address matters of fairness and equity when addressing diversity issues in the classroom. And at the same time, Controls were being trained in skills exclusively addressing external mandates, which omitted any issues of student social identities outside of learning styles.

The following seven box plot graphs show the variance from the median of the post-PLC minus pre-PLC questionairre scores of both groups, for each dependent variable. It displays the distribution of the two groups, the Participants (PLC) and Controls.
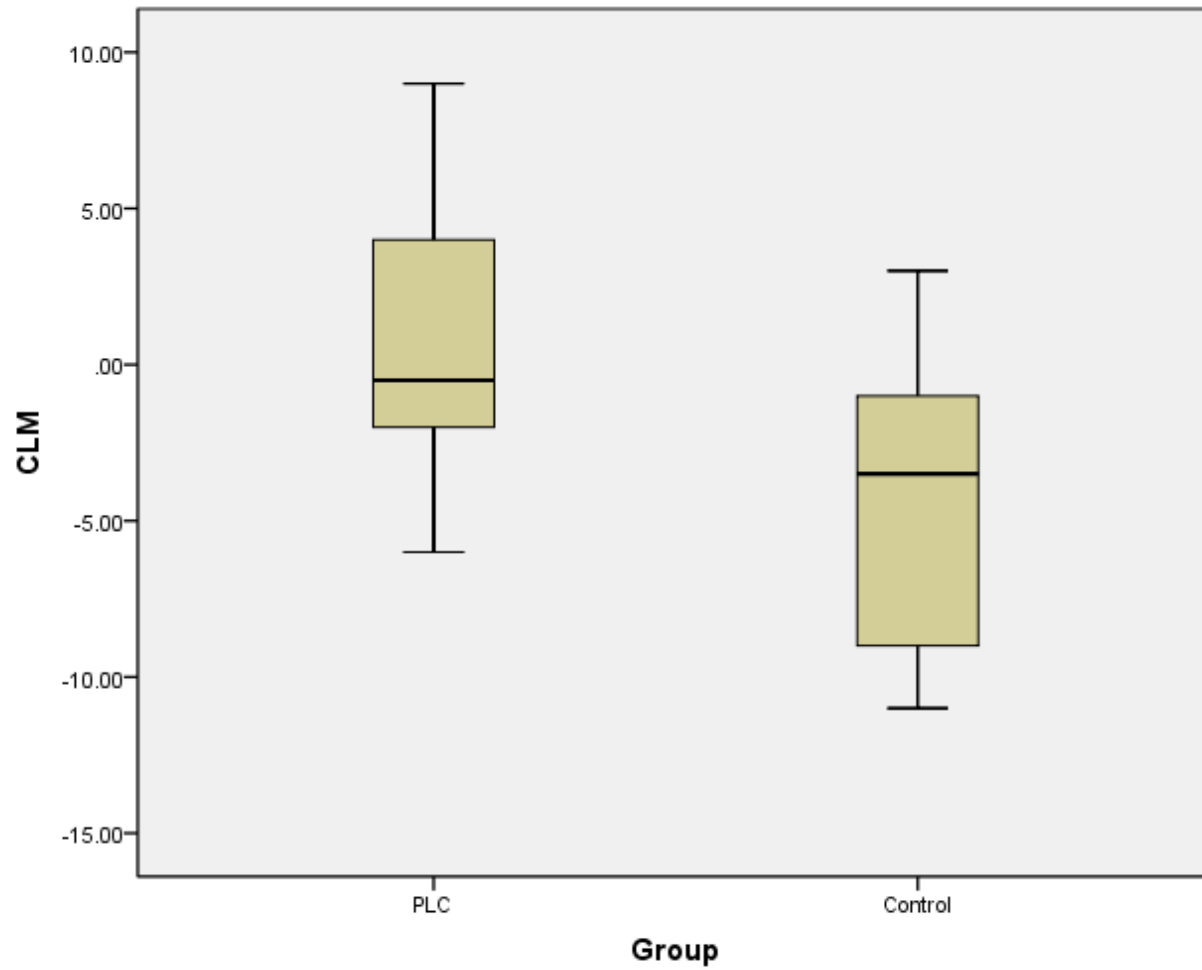
Figure 5.1 Classroom Management
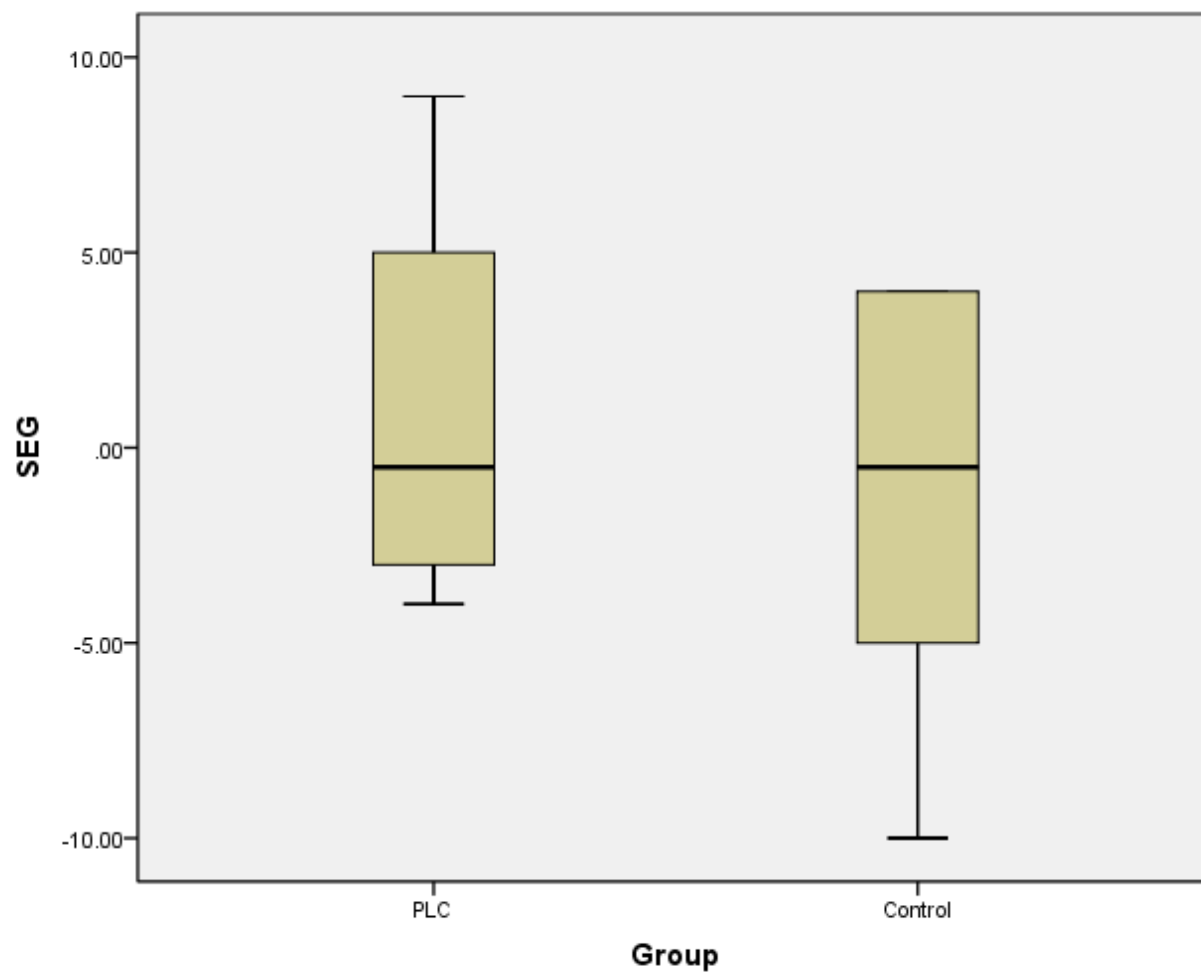
Figure 5.2 Student Engagement
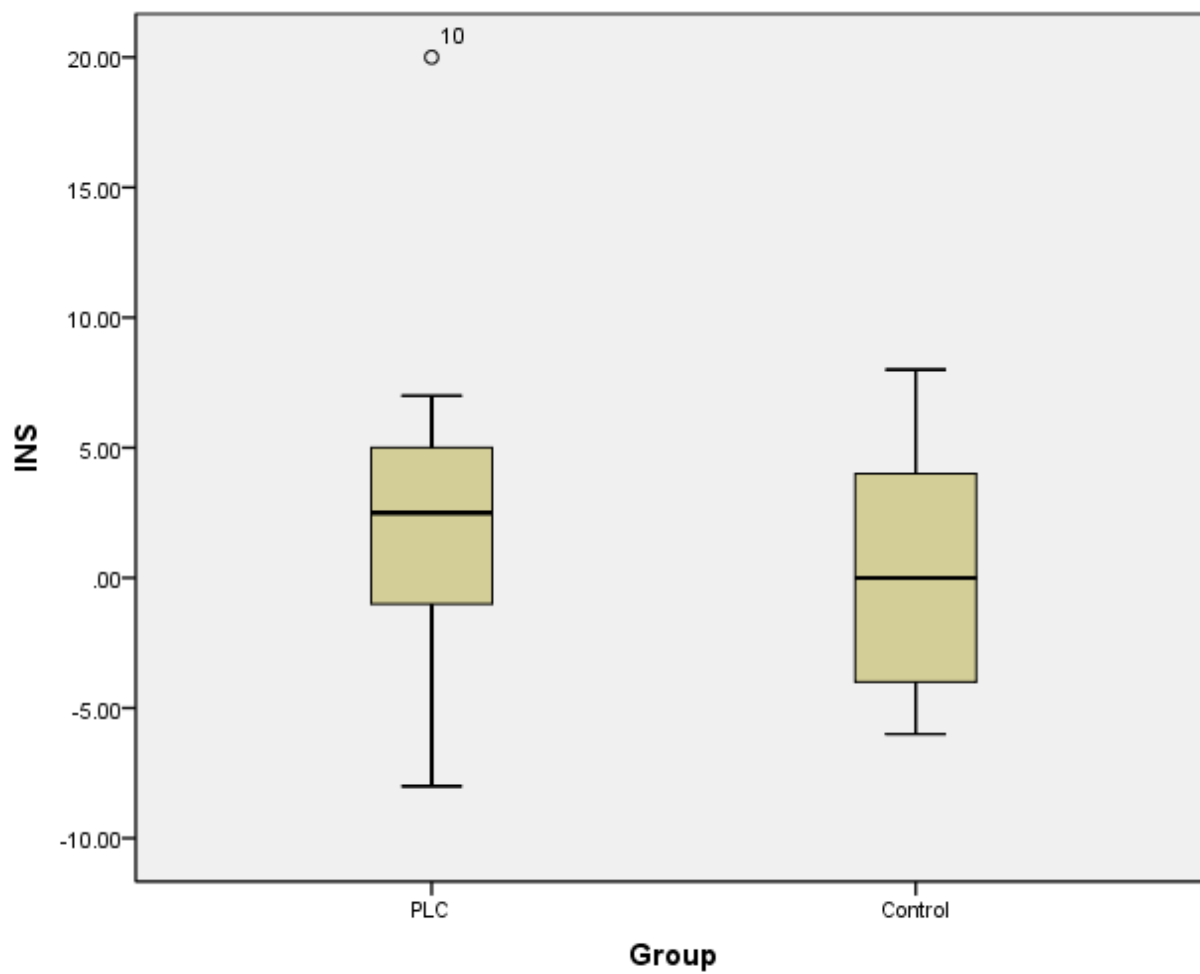
Figure 5.3 Instructional Strategies
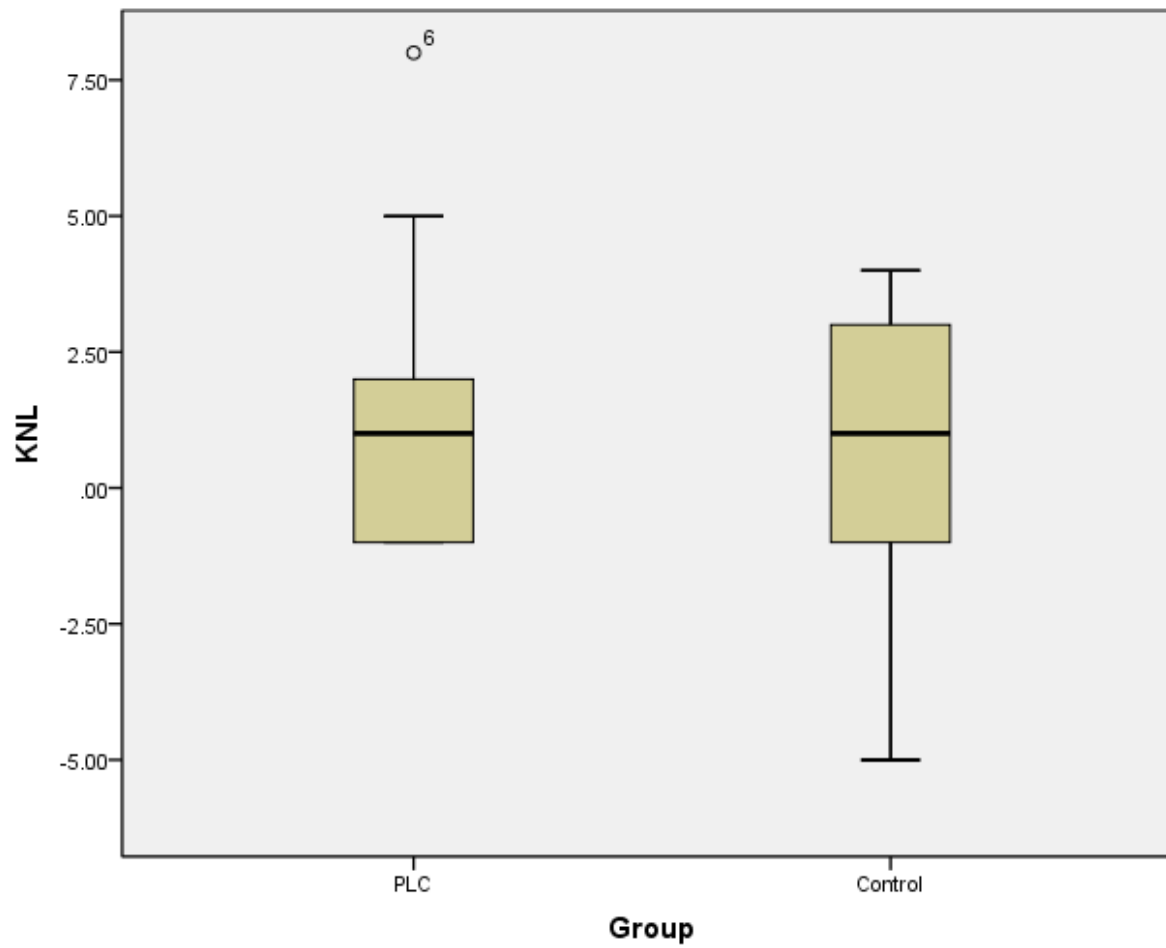
Figure 5.4 Knowledge
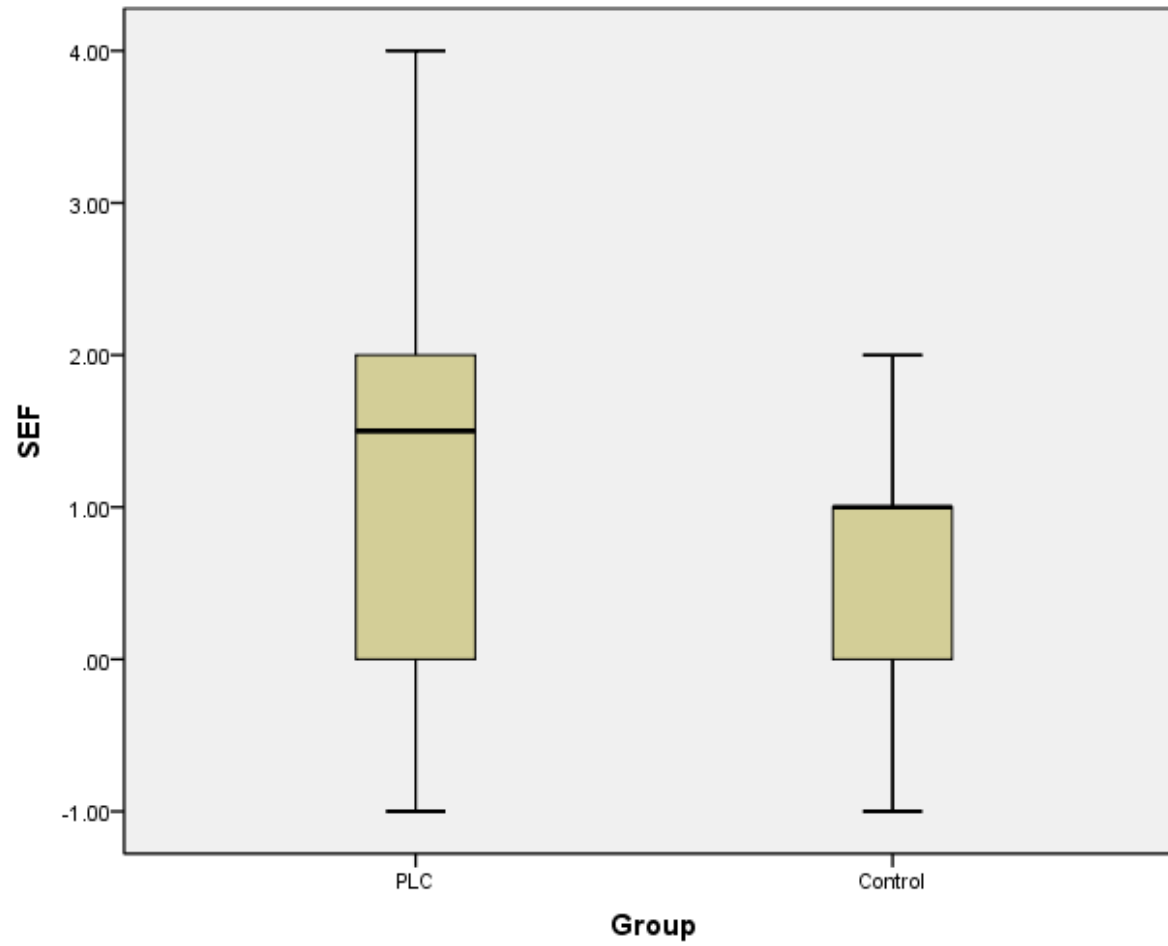
Figure 5.5 Self-efficacy
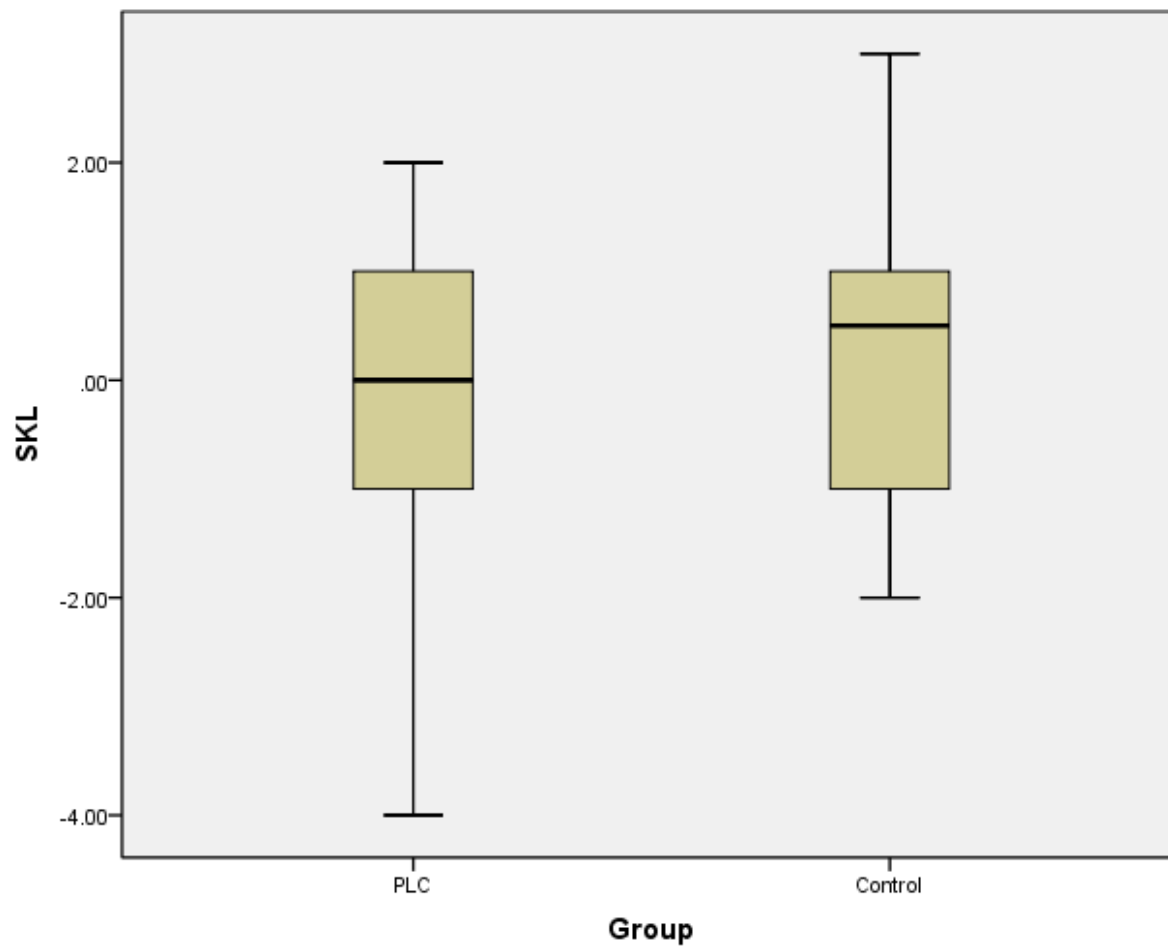
Figure 5.6 Skill
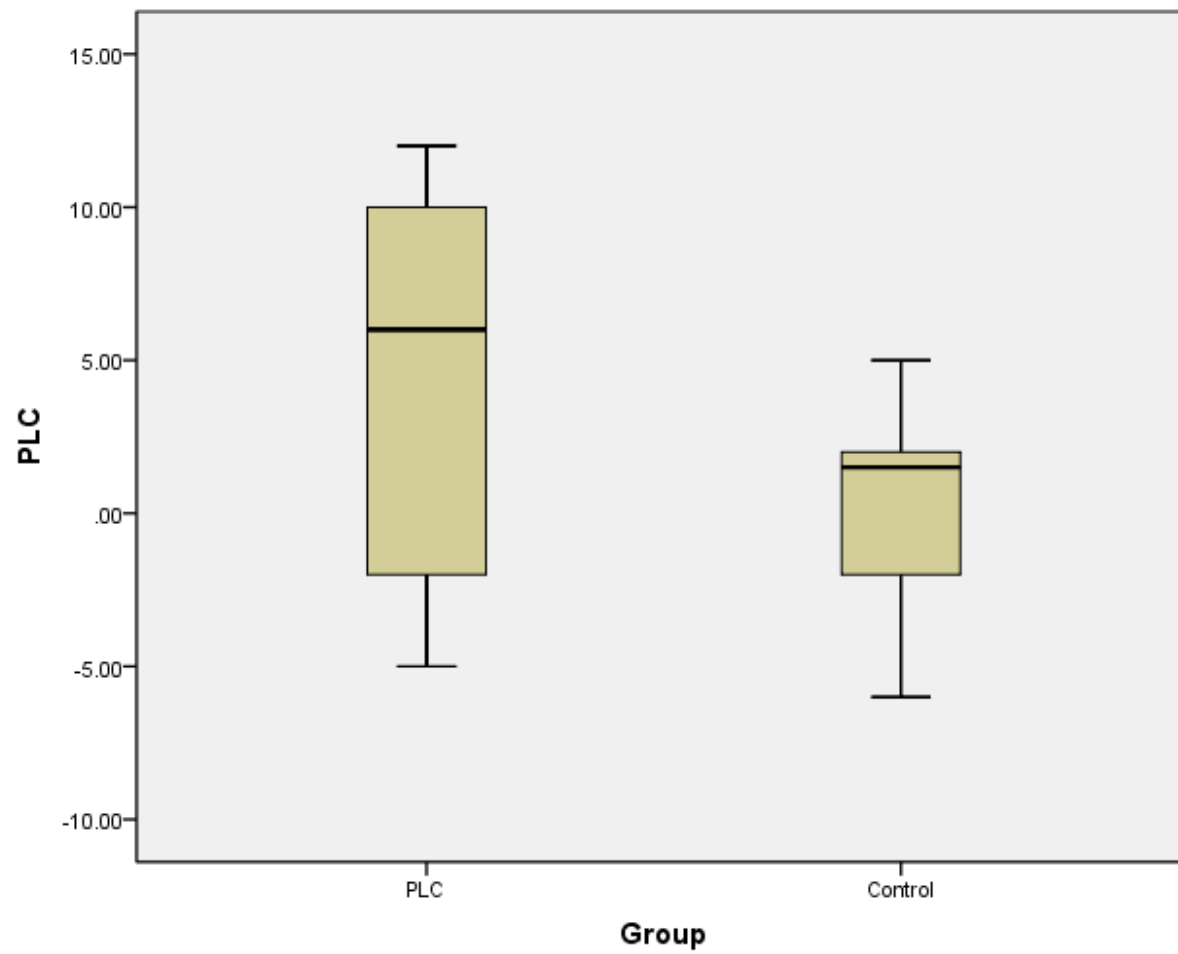
Figure 5.7 PLC

Pre-Treatment Open Field Responses for Participants

In the pre-PLC portion of the questionnaire, I asked both groups the same eight questions. Overall, I wanted to discover their self-assessment of their professional abilities, and what they thought they would need more of, to meet the variety of inherent professional challenges and imposed mandates they faced. See Appendix J for open field protocol questions.

I found that teachers did not distinguish between "knowledge" and "skills," often using the terms interchangeably. For example, when asked about new skills they sought to teach more effectively, six teachers reported actually wanting *knowledge* of more strategies to use to motivate students, or to *learn* and incorporate technology, thereby classifying technology as a skill. Because of their conflating the terms and the intersecting relationship among those subfields, in my attempt to accurately reflect their data, I will report on *their* understanding of the terms.

I grouped the findings of these open-field, pre-treatment responses under two main categories, each with subfields:

(1) Their concerns about performing professional duties inside the classroom, including of course their interactions and relationships with the students. I further divided category 1 into three subfields:

(a) Functions for which the teacher is responsible for, and has <u>primary</u> power to execute. This may include the teacher's assessment that he needs to gain additional professional development, training, experience, etc., and that he is responsible for getting that. More often, this category includes grading papers in a timely fashion, reporting grades, and the like.

(b) Areas in which, in the teacher's judgment, the primary responsibility lies within the student. This includes students completing assignments.

(c) Those aspects of interactions within the classroom that require collaborative effort from both teacher and student to most successfully complete. This includes activities such as effective class discussion.

The second category addresses teacher duties and obligations that fall primarily outside of the classroom, though in reality, those outside issues often impact classroom interactions.

(2) Participants' concerns about their growing professional obligations outside of the classroom, including required changes and additions mandated by external stakeholders.

I will begin by presenting what the Participants viewed as past and anticipated challenges, and what they thought they needed additionally in order to teach more effectively, and to meet the other demands of the teacher.

All Participants Desire Increased Knowledge, Skills, Self-Confidence in order to Meet Professional Demands

The 10 Participants listed a total of <u>43 distinct concerns and issues</u> concerning the professional requirements and rapid changes and additions to their job. Several issues were repeated, such as concerns about time and classroom management, and the desire to learn how to include more technology. I will present these findings in bulleted form, with brief comments. Analysis is reserved for Chapter 7.

➢ Category (1a): All 10 Participants expressed a desire to increase their levels of the three subfields of knowledge, skills, and or self-confidence in ways that would help them to address the existing requirements for teaching well in the classroom.

In itself an important finding indicating high motivation to meet professional challenges, I believe that a major motivator for that unanimous desire is revealed in comments nearly all the teachers made at some point in the questionnaire about the demands they face as teachers: teachers recognize that it is practically impossible to do those (and more) 43 items equally well, and in the timeframes provided. Eight specifically mentioned the at-times "overwhelming" (their word) demands of teaching, such as the concurrent expectations of getting graded work back to students in a timely manner[18], juggling the clerical duties attached with the teaching duties, while simultaneously "keeping [academic] rigor," as Jackie stated. Even though some of the total number comes from external stakeholders, teachers understand that they are held responsible to enact them. That is why I categorized them under the subfield of 1a: functions for which teachers have the primary power to effect.

➢ Also in (1a), concerning issues of diversity or intolerance of difference among students within the classroom, nine of the teachers shared actions they had done or planned to do. Teaching for social justice involves analysis of systemic power structures, and how those structures operate to produce and maintain inequities. Particular attention is paid to effects on the dis-empowered and other groups targeted by the dominant or privileged groups. While I cannot guarantee that this is the understanding of teaching for social justice that Participants had when they answered this question, my application of it helps frame the results of this aspect of the theme of teacher-reported challenges from within the classroom.

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[18] This school location imposes deadlines for teachers to return work to students and deadlines to post the scores on the school's internet grade book

➢ Five teachers' concerns fell within my aforementioned understanding of teaching for social justice. Jackie stated a past challenge in which she determined that there was an "unfair distribution of [instructional] materials [among the departments]," and that "those in power have a hidden agenda that supersedes [their publicly stated goals and objectives]." Leigh came into this PLC wanting to know not only how to define social justice, but "how do we infuse social justice into the classroom without seeming like we are 'forcing' beliefs? And what role does social justice play in effective collaboration both in school and beyond?" Three of those five teachers wished to find ways to better address student diversity needs. Both Jackie and Leigh identified problems they had seen with students in accepting other students who were homosexual. Jackie stated that "there is little acceptance of homosexual students in this school." Leigh desired greater confidence in "dealing with homophobia," and also wanted to learn "how better to infuse diverse perspectives in the classroom." More generically, Hunter wished for greater skill in "fostering feelings of community" within her classroom.

➢ (1a), In answering the question about how teachers deal with student diversity in their classroom, eight teachers reported taking some kind of direct action. The most common answer was that teachers modeled for the students the behaviors they expected from them. Six wrote that they purposely sought to model tolerance and respect of difference among everyone within the classroom. Faye said that she will "emphasize and model keeping an open mind." Hunter anticipates potential difficulties with areas of diversity when preparing lessons with certain

texts and subject matter. She stated, "I model desired behavior when I can predict certain readings or activities will set [my students] off."

➢ Eight also reported that they directly spoke to the class about their expectations about tolerating and respecting difference. Five wrote that that they directly encouraged students to share aspects of their culture or backgrounds that were diverse. Irish stated that she teaches "tolerance, acceptance, and appreciation of different cultures, beliefs, and practices, and allow…students to share their values, beliefs, and cultural experiences."

➢ Categories (1b, 1c) To meet their anticipated concerns, Participants desired increased knowledge, skill, or self-confidence in dealing with the challenges associated with the school's recent decision to academically group students more heterogeneously. Teachers anticipated that the new grouping would present various new challenges in both curricular revision and in pedagogy. Students would also present different levels of motivation, different learning styles, and collectively would probably present different classroom management issues. Also within those categories, six teachers mentioned the dual concern of addressing student motivation (1b) and student learning styles (1c), encapsulated by Faye's response in which she expressed the desire to learn "methods for teaching material to a lower grade that I take for granted they should know (when in fact, they shouldn't…)." John's sentiments echoed those of Lisa, Faye, Leigh, and others, when he wrote of his concern about motivating this new classroom of heterogeneously grouped students: "I have difficulties in teaching heterogeneous groups, especially of lowest students." Others sought practical methods to connect

to the variety of learning styles, to manage classroom behaviors, and to better

manage their own time and demands. Hunter wanted to manage her time better

and to find new ways to "challenge the top learners, [and] ways to engage

reluctant learners."

➢ (1c) Five Participants stated a desire to increase or to improve student academic

achievement, something that needs the collaboration of both teacher and student.

Interestingly, three of those five worded their answers in ways that reflected the

newly-imposed system changes and external mandates: namely, the school's

movement toward collapsing academic levels, and mandates for teachers to

employ and to report on their research-based instruction. For example, in

anticipating the coming year, Irish desired an increase of knowledge of "proven

instruction that is research-based in its results locating various level[ed] materials

to reach/teach [variety of learners] and a variety of instructional levels."

➢ Also in (1c), six teachers wished to increase or to improve their student's social

and emotional development, using phrases such as "increasing student

accountability," or helping students develop a "sense they are being disrespectful

to others by some of their actions and words." Faye, assigned to teach sophomore

for the first time that year, stated that she wished to become more confident in

"handling the social/emotional issues of sophomores…a very different animal

from seniors."

➢ Of note were three less common responses. They fall under Categories 1a and c.

The first, Category 1a, is that two teachers specifically stated that they directly

challenged or interrupted student remarks that showed intolerance or disrespect.

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Hunter said that "talking to instigators one-on-one helps." John will try to "create a safe place in class where students are protected [by him] from discrimination [from others in class]."

➢ Category (1c) One teacher, Chantal, who had previous experience in a prior career as a facilitator of diversity seminars in the business environment, reported that she purposely structured her pedagogical approaches using a variety of the multiple intelligences to address the different ways in which students learn. She wrote that following that pedagogical approach was a way of "demonstrating and appreciating how different people learn…[and to] create lessons and assessment options."

➢ Category (1a) Finally, one teacher, Goulet, stated that he usually did not perceive issues involving student diversity within his classroom, writing, "I have had very few diversity issues in my classes." From his perspective, I am certain that he is speaking accurately. But one must be mindful that students of targeted social identities within his classroom most likely have a different perception about whether or not there are "diversity issues" within his classroom. I will return to this important issue of social justice in education in Chapter 7.

Participants Unanimously Concerned about Managing Outside Mandates and Duties Additional to Teaching

The second main category represents teachers' concerns about their professional development and the growing professional obligations and mandates from outside the classroom. I found that the Participants listed <u>30 separate perceived challenges that came from outside the classroom.</u> I present a bulleted summary, with brief explanation.

➢ At different points in the questionnaire, all 10 Participants expressed a strong

concern about managing the continually growing number of external mandates

and required additional professional duties, all in conjunction with increasing

challenges within the classroom. Eight Participants directly mentioned the new

mandates for teachers to incorporate data and publicly report it with frequency.

John summarized these demands well, when he wrote, "I need to differentiate

instruction; [am required] to make data-driven decisions; [there are] external

demands for data that make me feel a loss of teacher autonomy and control;

demands for S.M.A.R.T goals; bimonthly assessment of [student] skills; Common

Formative Assessments[19]; publish research studies to justify what I teach…I often

feel incredibly overwhelmed."

➢ Four teachers, at various points in their answers, mentioned the clerical duties

they had to perform outside the classroom--such as student supervisory duties;

requirements for teachers to return all phone calls and emails within one business

day; complete and file each student's unexcused absence--as particularly

burdensome. Leigh stated that with the additional "clerical demands on my time, I

[am now more concerned about] simultaneously meet[ing] the teaching demands

and testing requirements." A more comprehensive list of those duties will be

presented in Chapter 6.

➢ Five Participants wrote that they wished to receive additional training or learn

new skills in order to meet the external mandates. Most of the training and skills

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[19] These are the formal and informal methods that groups of teachers construct to measure the skill acquisition and proficiency of students. They are "common" because each teacher within their assigned "PLC" needs to use the same ones, then return to the group to share scoring concerns, re-teaching strategies, combine and tabulate data. etc.

building centered on learning how to employ the new mandates for data usage in the classroom, re-teaching, and publication based on those data analyses. John summarized those concerns by writing of his desire to increase his knowledge concerning "additional training in how to read and interpret data, how to collect data in ways that produce reliable and useful information, how to analyze data, how to use data to inform instruction." As stated in Chapter 1, an external mandate from the school's administration is for all teachers to employ what the district terms "differentiated instruction" in the classroom (see Chapter 1, footnote 2). In addressing that new mandate, Jackie, a World Language teacher, wanted to find new ways to "combine differentiated instruction with culturally differentiated groups of students."

I also asked the Participants if they had received any training specifically on matters of diversity and or social justice, and what their experiences of previous professional communities had been. Seven had participated in seminars or workshops that directly addressed issues of diversity, bullying, racial injustice, LBGT conferences, and the like. Each reported having had positive experiences with the training, though Goulet noted that there "was not much follow through."

Within this category of mandates and demands external to the challenges inside the classroom, I will include another noteworthy finding. Four Participants reported having concerns that focused more on personal issues, specifically how they personally managed time, or problems in relationships with co-workers. Two reported feeling continuous pressure to do more than they had time in the day to do. The other two admitted to having had general personal discomfort in dealing with co-workers. While it is obvious that each

teacher brings herself to the practice of teaching within the classroom, I decided to include this set of four in the external issues because what they wrote, for the most part, referred to relationships and issues outside the class.

It is important to note here that the external mandates require the teacher to act in the classroom in ways that are different from past practice, or in addition to current practice.

Pre-Treatment Open Field Responses for Controls

The information I analyzed from the Controls' open field responses allowed me to group their concerns under the same two main categories as the Participants; that is: (1) Their concerns about performing professional duties inside the classroom, including of course their interactions and relationships with the students. I further divided category 1 into three subfields:

(a) Functions for which the teacher is responsible for, and has primary power to execute. This may include the teacher's assessment that he needs to gain additional professional development, training, experience, etc., and that he is responsible for getting that.

(b) Areas in which, in the teacher's judgment, the primary responsibility lies within the student;

(c) Those aspects of interactions within the classroom that require collaborative effort from both teacher and student to most successfully complete.

(2) Controls' concerns about their growing professional obligations outside of the classroom, including required changes and additions mandated by external stakeholders.

I will begin by presenting what the Controls viewed as past and anticipated challenges, and what they thought they needed additionally in order to teach more effectively.

All Controls Desire Increased Knowledge, Skills, Self-Confidence in order to Meet Professional Demands

The 10 Controls expressed a total of <u>43 distinct concerns,</u> with some repeated, such as concerns about classroom management by four (category 1a)[20], and meeting different learning styles, mentioned by three (1b).

➢ As with the Participants, all 10 of Controls expressed a desire to increase their levels of the three subfields of knowledge, skills, and or self-confidence in ways that would help them to address the existing requirements for teaching well in the classroom. Three directly stated that they wished to increase their knowledge, skills, and or confidence in helping students to succeed academically (1c). Lincoln wished to learn better ways to "help students who don't understand." And Swim One desired for greater self confidence in understanding "what students need day to day skills-wise, knowledge-wise, etc. [and also to construct a classroom environment to be] a place where students feel safe" (1c).

➢ (1a, 1b) Nine of the teachers expressed past and anticipated concerns about students, especially when the teachers factored in the varied student motivation levels, some of which had in past led to behavior issues in the classroom. Lisa, a World Language teacher, said a past challenge has been her "trying to keep repeating students motivated, to minimize disruptions, [and to] motivat[e] students to value learning a second language without parental valuation"(1a).

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[20] Interestingly, both sets of teachers indicated that it was their primarily *their* responsibility to manage the class. A democratically-run classroom, or a teaching environment that is more social justice oriented would certainly seek to create a learning environment where personal responsibility for behavior, as well as community-created social norms, is emphasized.

Marie anticipated the upcoming challenge of "teaching an elective in which groups of students take the same classes, and those students present behavior and discipline challenges" (1a). Lincoln stated the anticipated concern that the collapsed academic leveling would provide a variety of in-class challenges to student motivation and learner-appropriate pedagogy (1a).

➢ (1a) In contrast with the Participant group, the Controls mentioned with less frequency issues concerning the students' social and emotional growth. Five teachers stated that they wished to acquire additional knowledge, skills, and or self confidence in meeting student diversity issues. Each one said specifically that he or she wanted to learn more about student diversity, about "their [the student's] world" and about "their understanding" of the world. One teacher, Lisa, suggested forming a student focus group to discover student needs.

➢ (1a) Aloysius stated a previous challenge with working within his "own biases." Swim One stated the importance of "look[ing] at the whole student," and she wished to increase her knowledge so as to construct a classroom where "students feel safe" (1a, 1c).

➢ (1a) In contrast with two Participants who had mentioned their concern about students who were gay or lesbian, only one of the Controls, Frodo, mentioned a social identity or diversity issue of a student. He stated that a past challenge of his was in teaching visually impaired students, or what he termed "teaching blind students."

➢ (1a) An interesting additional note that represents an aspect of social justice is that two teachers mentioned the inequity of power between administration and

teachers as being the source of a locally inequitable and unfair situation. Lincoln stated his difficulty with what he saw as administration's misuse of their power, citing the "frequent administrative observations [of his teaching were] to see if I am complying with directives."

➢ (1a, 1c) In answering the specific question about how teachers deal with student diversity in their classroom, nine of the teachers reported acting in some direct manner.[21] The highest frequency of teachers, seven, wrote that they taught students directly about "tolerance," "respect of differences," and or encouraged "student discussions" on the diversity topic. Frodo wrote that he "present[s] to students a variety of historical references to the multitude of cultures contributing to knowledge of my discipline [Science]." Lincoln wrote that he provided "opportunities for social justice to bloom through activities and discussions… [since] American history offers quite a few teachable moments when it comes to diversity."

The next highest frequency—one half of the Controls – wrote that they modeled the behaviors they expected from their students. Elizabeth wrote that she "treat[s] all students equally, regardless of capabilities and backgrounds." Aloysius wrote that he "embraced" diversity, and used it "as a tool for examining the dominant paradigm."

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[21] Answers are categorized in three main headings. The first is teacher actions through these four methods: modeling the behaviors they expect from their students; directly interrupting student intolerance or disrespect of diversity; directly teaching about tolerance/diversity or encouraging student discussions on the topic; intentionally seeking to discover about students' diverse identities. The second heading is some teachers' opinion that there is no problem in their classroom with diversity. The third heading is minimal to no direct work on diversity issues.

(1a) Three teachers stated that they directly interrupted student intolerance or disrespect of diversity. Stephen stated succinctly, "I don't tolerate inappropriate comments."

In summary, a majority of the actions above are grouped under category 1a, indicating that teachers believe they hold the primary responsibility in the classroom, including addressing issues of diversity.

I discovered three additional, less frequent findings that fit within this category. One teacher intentionally sought to discover her students' diverse identities. Marie wrote that she sought to "better understand (so to serve better) my student population in terms of their background—cultural, socio-economic, familial origin, learning style…and that [her] facilitation allows students to accept each other regardless of our differences."

Another teacher seemed to confess in his answer to the question about actions concerning student diversity. He indicated that he did minimal to no direct work on diversity issues, writing that he did "very little with race, ethnicity, gender, national origins…[and] almost nothing with sexual orientation, physical disabilities, [and] psychological disabilities."

The reader will recall one teacher in the Participant group had stated that he had little to no issues with student diversity. I discovered two of the Controls who expressed a similar assessment. Anonymous wrote, "I have had no major problems with [diversity] (and very few minor ones) in my classes since I have been teaching." Coincidentally, both share some of the same apparent external social identities as Goulet—white males.

Controls Unanimously Concerned about Managing Outside Mandates and Duties Additional to Teaching

The second main category represents the Control teachers' concerns about their professional development and the growing professional obligations and mandates from outside the classroom. They identified 35 external mandates.

Just like the Participants, at different points in the questionnaire, all 10 Controls expressed concern about managing the continually growing number of external mandates, the required additional professional duties, all in conjunction with increasing educational challenges within the classroom. Swim One considered it a challenge to "[prepare] lessons while adhering to requirements of curriculum, mandates, and other restrictions." Marie listed these new mandates: "teacher curriculum writing; competing external demands of district, state, federal; teacher meeting needs of individual learner [school-mandated "differentiated instruction"]; demands of professional duties additional to teaching…" Coach Duke reported that a past challenge had been "excessive and confusing external demands without direction, [where] administration says one thing but enforces another." He anticipated challenges in dealing with the "hypocrisy of the state ['s required standardized test…where administrators] pretend it is organic to what we teachers do, but in reality we must get students to simply pass it or we are liable." Stephen wrote a concern that was shared by four other teachers within this category when he stated that he anticipated challenges in "collect[ing] data, maintain[ing] documentation, all while meeting student needs during class."

Six wrote that they would like to receive additional knowledge and new skills so as to develop greater self confidence in meeting and managing the new mandates. They listed

topics for professional development such as: help in meeting the new requirement for teachers to re-write curricula in the prescribed formats; incorporation of technology in the classroom; and implementation of the requirements of data in informing instruction. Anonymous wanted knowledge in order to answer his question, "How can [all that is expected of teachers] be done efficiently? With external requirements of Common Formative Assessments and data collection, I would like to know an efficient manner to issue, assess, pass back the results, provide feedback and still continue with progress regarding the curriculum and/or skills emphasis."

Stephen wanted to learn "How to avoid getting overwhelmed by all the mandates, meetings, challenges, and responsibilities of the job, so I can be focused on educating students."

Regarding any prior training they may have received in matters of diversity or social justice, six had received formal training in diversity, with four of those having studied one or more courses in pre-service graduate work. One had been trained while in her previous position within the business community. Of those that commented on the nature of their experience, three found it "interesting" and or thought provoking. Stephen wrote that he "retained little" from his pre-service training course of 10 years past, though he had found the subject matter "interesting."

One of the six, Coach Duke, recalled a professional development workshop on race offered in the past at this school's location. Concerning his experience, he wrote, "…after two hours we went back to our classes, and it was business as usual."

As with the Participants, I discovered data from this group that could be classified as disclosed concerns about one's self. One half of the Controls shared this information,

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though part of the content differed from the Participants. One difference was that two

stated their personal challenge in staying "positive" in the face of the stresses of changes.

Lincoln said that a past challenge had been "remaining positive amidst adversity,

[especially in] following administrative directives when I disagree."

A similarity was the use of the descriptor, "overwhelmed," when describing what they

felt when they considered the new mandates.

Table 5.4 displays the total number teacher-identified obligations from both sets of

participants, prior to the PLC.

Both Sets of Teacher-Identified Mandates and Professional Obligations	Total Number
Pre-PLC Participant-Identified Teaching Challenges	43
Pre-PLC Participant-Identified Outside Mandates	30
Pre-PLC Control-Identified Teaching Challenges	43
Pre-PLC Control-Identified Outside Mandates	35

Table 5.4 Total Number of Teacher-Identified Professional Obligations

We now turn to what the Participants wrote after the 10 session seminar.

Post-PLC Open Field Participant Responses

Participants Unanimously Report Positive Personal and Professional Growth

The first two questions asked separately if the PLC provided any new knowledge, or

skill, that helped them with their classroom teaching. Again, teachers did not distinguish

between those two subfields, so for purpose of analysis and in consistency with my

earlier analysis, I will combine their answers to those two questions. My other two

questions asked if the PLC provided gains in self-confidence in their classroom teaching,

and if it helped them in dealing with classroom diversity. I have organized their responses to those four questions under two main categories:

(1) Influence of the PLC primarily on one's self, including personal gains in new knowledge (including more insight, and content knowledge of social justice education); skills, including increased management skills concerning teaching duties; and or self-confidence.

(2) Influence on the teacher's professional relationships, including increased understanding and or different interactions with students, and differences in relationships with colleagues.

Eight Participants stated that they perceived gains in knowledge, skills, and or self-confidence as a result of the PLC. The first and highest frequency is personal insight, with six reporting that gain. Chantal wrote that she was now "more aware of issues of diversity and how to better facilitate those types of discussions should they arise [and that] the discussions we had about triggers were helpful and validating and there were specific strategies suggested." Hunter wrote that what she learned in the PLC significantly affected her, writing:

> Honestly, it's hard to know where to start. The assigned readings really opened my eyes to the incredible influences, pressures, and developmental changes in my students and in myself as a teacher. I didn't even really know what social justice was before this PLC, but now I can identify new ways that I can address these topics when they arise in class…other teachers shared stories that gave me new tools to use with students. ..[and a new] powerful skill I have is to proactively process triggers and to identify the feelings behind those intense reactions.

As a result of her interactions within the PLC, Jackie wrote that she "has been made more aware of how my past and present life experiences can add (and probably have added) greatly to that which I offer to my students." She continued that she felt more

confident in meeting the teaching demands: "I have been made aware of how refocusing can make the seemingly impossible tasks ahead of us as manageable." Leigh stated that she learned "a new way to look at the meaning of social justice in the classroom—that is, a state of mind when teaching rather than a proscribed course."

John's increased knowledge has led him to a moral imperative as a teacher. He wrote, "Reading about and discussing social justice in the classroom has helped me to understand the moral and ethical imperative that I have as an educator to create equity and safety for all of my students."

Five Participants wrote that the PLC helped them to understand and better manage their teaching duties. Hunter wrote, "As a group, we all appreciated the grouping activities that made our professional responsibilities a little easier to grapple with." Jackie stated, "I have been made aware of how refocusing can make the seemingly impossible tasks ahead of us as manageable." And Irish wrote that the PLC "…helped to lighten the load of many mandates, initiatives, etc. by categorizing them into the four quadrants and realize that we can address many of those mandates through our pedagogy and curriculum." John wrote that "I feel a lot more confident about my ability to meet the demands put upon me by outside stake holders since we developed a scheme of organization and found a place to put them."

Five also directly stated that they felt more confident in their classroom teaching demands, both from inside and outside the classroom. Hunter stated that she now

> Felt more confident in handling potentially sensitive topics…[and] I really appreciated the quote in one of the readings where it stressed that there's not ONE type of experience, everyone's is different and authentic, and I know that helps me communicate with kids who feel that the only ones who can understand them are ones who are like them.

John wrote, "I feel a lot more confident about my ability to meet the demands put upon me by outside stakeholders since we developed a scheme of organization and found a place to put them."

Participants Report Improved Professional Relationships

The second theme groups teachers' reported professional relationships with others; specifically, in their relationships with students, especially in the fuller light of considering their diverse identities, and in their relationships with colleagues.

Seven wrote that they had increased awareness of students' diversities, now incorporating a broader awareness or sensitivity to the scope of diversity and injustices, and a new ability for the participants to think from a new perspective, or what three teachers termed "a different lens." Lisa, who in a previous answer wrote that she had always considered herself to be an open and accepting teacher, wrote of a new realization after this PLC—wondering how her students may *actually* be seeing her. She came to that question by "examining more closely different types of diversity and how different students might be perceiving [me and what I thought was] a very un-biased approach … [this PLC] made me more aware that I am not always as aware as I think I am, of diversity issues (especially some of the broader issues)." When writing about how she now viewed student diversity after the PLC, Hunter recalled that hearing other teachers share their experiences with their own and with student diversity was especially helpful to her.

> The teacher stories really helped me understand the huge diversity of student identities. Some of their stories were about topics I'd never even thought of, so when things come up in class (even in a joking way) I think back to the impact it had on a grown person and I feel more comfortable in starting a dialogue about it now.

Faye wrote that the PLC "increased my awareness of my need to pay more attention to external motivators and internal motivators for student learning." Leigh shared a similar insight about students' lives, along with a different understanding of what social justice education is. She indicated that the PLC increased her "… awareness of the impact of student behavior from outside the classroom." Irish wrote that the PLC "helped me look at [people who are unlike me] with a closer lens and appreciate those differences that make us individuals." And she applied the experiences within the PLC directly to her class, reporting that the activities for discussion and interaction among learners were "fantastic [in the PLC]…and I have used a few in my classroom…to help foster a positive learning community as well as getting to know my students on different levels."

Four Participants stated their increased awareness of the value of working with the others in the PLC. Lisa wrote that she learned "The feeling that I am not alone—that my colleagues are experiencing similar frustrations. I also gained respect for the colleagues I didn't know that well before." Chantal shared a very similar reflection: "I especially appreciated that my frustration was shared about the many competing priorities we have." She went on to specify the value of hearing others' stories, writing she was touched by "… the fabulous anecdotes we would sometimes share about situations in our classes with students, and how various PLC members dealt with those issues. I love that and learn very well experientially, albeit vicariously." Others also mentioned the impact of learning from each other. Hunter wrote that "other teachers shared stories that gave me new tools to use with students…"

Post-PLC Open Field Control Responses

Controls Report Increases in Knowledge and Skills Relevant to Some Mandates

The Controls, obviously, did not receive the treatment of the PLC. But I wanted account for what they reported having learned during the time frame of the PLC, since they too were involved in an administrative-directed PLC. So I asked if they noted any increase in knowledge, skills, or self-confidence during the past two months that helped in their professional duties, and if so, what caused the gain. Since my PLC was centered on the experience and practice of social justice education and diversity, I also asked the Controls to account for the ways in which they dealt with student diversity in the classroom during that same time frame. See Appendix K for both sets of post-PLC open field questions.

The Controls' responses differed from the Participants first in the quantity of their writing, then in their specificity, and finally in what all but one omitted. Like the Participants, I have organized the Controls' responses under two main categories: (1) Control's personal gains in new knowledge (including more insight, content and individual knowledge); skills, including increased management skills of external mandates; and or self-confidence. (2) Control's reported dealings with student diversity.

What is notably absent from the Controls is any mention of relationships with colleagues, positive or negative. Only one mentioned a positive experience within her own administrative-assigned PLC, and that comment was parenthetical. When answering the question about new skills, she wrote, "…not all activities are successful for all learners and that by talking to colleagues, I can utilize a different approach to reach more

learners." I will more fully discuss the comparative learning communities in this school

setting in Chapter 7.

Eight teachers reported some gains in knowledge, most of which would typically fall

under the category of "professional development." Examples include new knowledge

within own subject or content area; training in implementing some of the external

mandates; and other, miscellaneous knowledge or skill acquisition.

Five reported new knowledge or some skills acquired for implementing some external

mandates; notably, "differentiated instruction," mentioned by three of the five. Others

learned online tools to help meet the external mandates. Marie wrote, "I have obtained

access to Quia,[22] which is an assessment tool that will allow me to create formative

assessments and obtain instant results to adjust my teaching in real time based on the

knowledge base of the class." Three cited training in different technology functions, such

as "Smart Board." [23]

Four reported individualized gains. Aloysius read "several bits of research related to

the effectiveness of student study habits and what teachers can do to help students retain

more of what they learn."

Two wrote of new insights. Stephen wrote that he "gained more of an awareness of

my beliefs and abilities as a teacher," but did not write any more specifics explaining

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[22] This is a web-based survey tool the district subscribes to, to facilitate teacher and
student data reporting and publishing.

[23] The Smart Board is an interactive projection display that enables teachers and business
leaders to combine a variety of learning tools, such as websites, images and videos, into a
compelling lesson. From http://www.ehow.com/facts_5842649_interactive-smartboard-
definition.html, retrieved 12.13.11

further. Lisa wrote that the surveys she completed for my study actually "helped me to reflect on my own strengths and deficiencies as a teacher and has reminded me how much I can impact student interest and learning…[yet]…I still do not believe that some of my students value learning a second language." Swim One wrote that working with a mentor teacher "has drastically helped me with classroom management."

Notably, five Controls explicitly stated that they had not gained any new skills.

Three Controls reported a consistent gain in self-confidence. I thought it noteworthy that each one attributed the gain to the new knowledge or skills they learned, pertaining either to their subject area or professional development for mandates. Two indicated that their confidence fluctuates. Stephen noted that this has been a pattern throughout his career, and that "this has not changed in the past two months."

Four wrote specifically that their confidence level had not increased at all. One of those four, Marie, wrote that any confidence she may have is overshadowed by the pressing professional demands, writing, "I do not feel I've gained self confidence as a teacher since taking this survey [two months ago] as I feel increasing demands are continually placed on educators."

Some Acted in Ways to Improve Acceptance of Diversity

The second category groups the Controls' responses to how they reported dealing with issues of student diversity in the classroom.

Three teachers wrote that they have had discussions with students on issues of diversity. Aloysius wrote that "we had a class discussion on issues of sexual orientation, with an emphasis on why it can be difficult to have an open and honest discussion on such topics."

Three teachers wrote that they had personally acted in ways to promote improvements

regarding student diversity in the classroom. Marie wrote that she "…attempted to add

diversity themes throughout each unit in all three classes I teach. I believe this has been

helpful as I have not experienced conflicts related to diversity thus far." Swim One held a

discussion with her class because

> Students were getting frustrated with each other. At that point, as a class, we
> started over and created a classroom policy list in which all students were to
> follow. They now know the standards and consequences for not following the
> standards.

Four teachers wrote that they had done "minimal" to "nothing new" during the past

two months in this matter.

In the next chapter I will report what the Participants revealed to me in one to one

interviews, and triangulate their personal disclosures with my supporting documentation

of the audio-transcribed last PLC session, and my researcher notes.

CHAPTER 6

PARTICIPANTS' REACTIONS TO THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

In the preceding chapter, I presented both quantitative and qualitative data based on the responses by the Participants and Controls to the closed and open-field questionnaires. In this chapter, the data is entirely qualitative, a product of one to one interviews I conducted with the 10 seminar Participants only. I did not hold such interviews with the Controls.

I conducted the first of the 10 interviews the day after the PLC ended, on December 23, 2010, and the last on January 8, 2011. The interviews ranged from 17 minutes to 51 minutes, depending largely on the time available and the interest of the interviewee.

In this chapter, I will augment the qualitative data from these interviews with two additional sources of information. The first is the group's discussion in the final PLC session, which I audio taped after getting their unanimous consent. On that final day of the seminar, eight of the ten participants were present.

The second source is my detailed field notes, which I logged very soon after the end of each PLC session, and between meetings, following any incidental meetings or electronic communications about the PLC from Participants. In Chapter 4 I provide a more detailed account of my procedural steps. Material from these notes and the audio taped session provide useful amplifications to the findings of my interviews. I present them in this chapter to augment or clarify themes that emerge from the interview data, and to present notable findings not present in the interviews.

The PLC Changed How the Participants Thought, Felt, and Acted

My first interview question asked if the Participant found the PLC to be helpful. Given that all 10 Participants stated emphatically that the PLC *was* helpful to them, all responses to my subsequent questions are explanations of that positive finding. Their answers revealed specifically how, when, and why the PLC was helpful.

Overall, my research questions sought to determine if this uniquely-designed, voluntary PLC could help teachers in performing their jobs better, and if they would report an increase in knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy (what they understood as "self-confidence") they thought necessary to do so. When I probed for their sense of changes in their knowledge, skill, and self-confidence in performing their professional duties, their responses showed a complex interaction among those three, and they often used the words "knowledge" and "skill" interchangeably. Therefore, I will report their understandings of the terms.

In addition to those subfields addressed in my research question, I discovered that each of them spoke very positively about a greater sense of affiliation with each other. As detailed in Chapter 4, I structured each of the 10 sessions to include time for small group sharing. Several reported those small group activities specifically as building their sense of connectedness. Also, as Participants listened to each other's struggles and successes, each of the 10 applied in some ways what they learned and experienced in the PLC to their classrooms—and for some, even with administrators-- and then returned and shared their experiences with each other in the PLC. Each told me in the interview that he or she gained knowledge, practical skills and encouragement to try similar activities, or to act in ways that encouraged more inclusion.

This interplay of factors has led me to group the findings under two main categories. Essentially, I have discovered that participants reported that the PLC was useful to them because,

 (1) They learned about areas and interactions they found both personally and professionally helpful in performing their job. Those areas of learning include:

> (1a) Insights, content knowledge of social justice, and social justice in education;
>
> (1b) The PLC created a new organizing tool, based on the central Adams and Love Model, as a new way of understanding and organizing their classroom challenges, additional external mandates to teaching, and assigned clerical duties;
>
> (2) Their experience in the PLC has beneficially changed the ways they now act and plan to act.

Participants Gained Content Knowledge of Social Justice, Social Justice in Education, and Insights

Although the seminar was a relatively short 10 hours and the field of social justice education is extensive, seven interviewed Participants reported acquiring an increased understanding of the scope of what constitutes human diversity and or possessing a fuller understanding of social justice education. Lisa reported that the PLC gave her "an expanded view of diversity. I learned there were more social identities [than I originally realized], and that will impact how I see my students' lives in the future."

Faye also reported a broadened understanding of diversity. She said that in this PLC, she learned that diversity was "so much broader than the visually obvious racial diversity of students." She learned to recognize various other levels of diversity, and to ask herself, "What do I really know about these kids? What should I know? And how is that going to

affect how I handle situations? [This PLC] made me think a lot more about what I need to know, what's really important to know."

Others, such as John, Lisa, and Theresa also stated that their understanding of student diversity was expanded beyond race and gender and learning style.

Chantal told me, "You made me think about all the areas of diversity in the classroom, how we teach, and all the pedagogies in the way we interact with kids." But at the same time, she lamented the lack of reflection time in the crowded schedule. She continued, "One of the most important skills of a teacher that we have less and less time to do is to be reflective…and [her experience with this PLC reminded her that when she] feels I am operating on a very superficial level—some of my thought processes—is not a very good feeling."

 I asked Participants what else they had learned, outside of our PLC and during the same time. That included their other PLC. Seven stated that they did not learn anything of real significance. John's response to the question highlights the values of this learning within this kind of community. He replied,

> No, I don't even know if there was anything else going on outside the PLC honestly. That was the reason why it was so powerful because I didn't feel like I was growing much professionally this year because we have been so task oriented, you need to get this done, you need to write these things and fill in these boxes and that's kind of deadening. We would be reminded once a month of all the things we were failing at and being light years behind. So honestly this was the one area where I felt like I was growing professionally. The rest of the time I'm just trying to keep my head above water and [keep from] being overwhelmed.

Participants also stated they had an increased or renewed personal insight. Five reported greater self confidence or verification in their beliefs about justice that they held coming into this seminar. Faye said, "I think [this PLC has been] a reinforcement of the

self confidence I used to have when I see something that's an injustice I [was] quick to speak up for the kids…"

Leigh, a 35 year teaching veteran, said that the PLC's content and format had "much to do with the awareness, the sensitivity, and the consciousness of the teacher. I had not thought of that before." She then continued, sharing her insight of recognizing her sense of humility regarding the field of social justice. She said, "In a sense, I feel more skill-less in the sense that there is so much more I need to know." She then postulated that

> Social justice is more of a lifestyle or frame of mind. I am now more in tuned to others talking about something related to social justice…In that sense the knowledge is awareness. I do not have a lot of knowledge, but [this PLC experience] made me look at it and be more sensitive in a different way.

Five other teachers reported increased personal awareness of their own triggers and new or enhanced skills in dealing with them more effectively in class. During the third session, I shared some of my own triggers with the group, then invited them to explore their own, considering the theoretical value of effectively managing their own and the students' triggers during class. Near the end of that meeting, Faye shared with the group that she had not realized how many trigger points she had, and she noticed that as she aged they increased, even though she saw herself as an "open person." She said to the group that "I'm not as skilled as I thought I was…things I thought I knew…as far as looking at kids…from a social standpoint." Hers was not the only uncomfortable insight shared.

Participants Realize Limitations of their Prior Knowledge of Diversity

Other Participants reported coming to uncomfortable insights. As I reported in the last chapter, on average in the closed field questionnaire, Participants reported a very slight

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decrease in their assessment of their skills after the PLC. That finding was supported in five of the Participants' disclosures, at different times during the seminar and between meetings.

Faye's realization about what she did not know about the depth of student diversity and social identity affiliations humbled her, as it did Leigh and three others. They realized that they did not have a more comprehensive awareness of diversity, or skill to deal effectively with matters of diversity or social justice in the classroom. In her subsequent interview, Faye admitted that she was regretful that she had not been acting more as an agent of social justice. She said, "overall I'm disappointed with what I've done so whatever I take away from the PLC I think should be things that take me back to where I was 10 years ago with how I view the students and what I know about them and things like that."

Faye echoed the words of Irish, who sought me out between meetings three and four to tell me that she felt like she "didn't know shit" now about social justice and diversity, after reading and discussing the seminar materials to date. She thought she knew, but now realized there was much more to know.

I wrote in my field notes about that particular conversation between the two of us, in which Irish also disclosed that she now felt uncomfortable for having completed the Pre-PLC survey with high scores which indicated her self-assessed expertise in her understanding of diversity issues. She told me that if she were to fill it out the day we were then talking, she would assess herself lower. She wondered aloud if that realization was what I had intended to happen, then ended the five minute informal conversation by saying that our PLC meetings have been "a really important learning experience. I am

learning a lot, and am really glad I took this course. Phil, I think that everyone in the

school should take this."

Irish decided to share parts of that conversation with the group seven weeks later,

during the last meeting. On that last day, she told us that she had come almost "full

circle" concerning her confidence level about understanding diversity and social justice

issues. She thought she knew more than she did, realized she did not, and now has

learned much more. She disclosed that she had approached me between the earlier

meetings, and said that when she came to the first PLC meeting, she felt

> Pretty confident, especially in the area of diversity. I was aware of diverse
> learners, and diversity as a whole. After the first couple of weeks, I [realized] I
> don't know squat…and became aware that we really are clueless. Now that I've
> come almost full circle, it's made me aware of *so* much more.

Also during that meeting, Jackie said that while it was helpful to "clarify all that we

[teachers] have to do, the most important thing we have learned, or at least I have

learned, is to keep that sensitivity to the individualness [sic] of each student."

In our interview, Faye shared a new connection she made between global issues of

social justice and social justice and diversity issues in the classroom. She told me that as

a result of this PLC,

> I learned how to apply the definition of social justice to a classroom. I guess I
> never equated diversity issues in the classroom as being social justice issues in the
> classroom. I didn't take it down to here is what's right in front of us. So from a
> knowledge standpoint I almost want to say I didn't know social justice could be
> applied that way and now I do. Now I equate diversity issues in classroom with
> social justice issues. An example of social justice is in [my field of]
> environmental science: U.S. pays a poor country money to dump our toxic waste
> there, and we dump on our poor here, too…

Hunter also disclosed a more enhanced view of social justice after the PLC. She told

me,

> Before the PLC, a strength of mine was thinking I can interact well with students; I can see where they're coming from. This PLC and the social justice perspective here showed my view was more limited in certain ways because I was drawing it more from myself. I definitely am more aware of different areas that could be approached or brought up in certain ways...A teacher's responsibility is to lead the class to respectfully solving issues that arise in class. I'm not sure if I did it to such depth before the PLC.

Three specified the seminar's readings as good sources of content knowledge. Hunter also stated that she "*loved* the readings [because] they were full of great information and [were] so interesting…"

Participants' Powerful Affiliation with Each Other

The previous subfield addressed what Participants learned intellectually. Here, I report on what some said they learned experientially, within a community they stressed positively as being "voluntary" and intentional. Indeed, at several times throughout the seminar, and during interviews, all Participants noted that each was there volitionally, and most theorized that that fact was a significant contributor to the group's good climate and overall success.

As the reader will recall, I discussed in Chapter 3 my intention to facilitate this PLC in a manner consistent with a democratic, socially just classroom. In that way, in addition to teaching about social justice as an academic discipline, I sought to provide Participants with the experience of learning—and facilitating/teaching--in a socially just way. I will conclude this chapter with Participants' comments about my facilitation.

At some point during their answers, every Participant mentioned a positive aspect of being with the other members within the PLC. During the very first question, independent of each other, six used the term "community" when referring to the others in the group as a main reason they found the PLC helpful. They generally reported that the

PLC greatly reduced their feeling of isolation. Chantal, a 10 year veteran for whom

teaching was a second career, stated that the PLC "reduced my stress level" and "I

enjoyed it so much I don't want it to stop." When asked to explain what she found helpful

and confidence-building from the community, Chantal explained,

> I think in having some of those discussions about how we would respond to
> students who present certain issues, or how we would respond to comments being
> made and what we'd do with that; I found in chatting with the group, I thought
> that was very validating for me, Phil. I felt that in those smaller groups I could
> chat more about my day-to-day and what I do to bring students out to try to make
> them feel like they are included to try to create always a soft spot for them to land.
> [And] though I still feel many times overwhelmed by the job, I think that one of
> the last sessions we had helped me self-confidence wise. If I could just implement
> what we talked about which is really trying to leverage our ideas around two or
> three central ideas, then have many far reaching tentacles. I think that too will
> connect to my feelings of confidence.

Goulet was a Participant who had disclosed in his open-field, pre PLC questionnaire

that he had a number of uncomfortable professional relationships within this building,

which led him to concerns about being in this PLC. He told me that he found the PLC

"definitely helpful [in that it] helped me get some perspective about me not being alone

in my anxiety." He then shared a new awareness that was "big for [him]: there is a

network of people that [he] could talk to…vent…ask advice [from, which was] a larger

network that [he] had before, than [he] thought [was possible]." He wanted to sustain the

"connections" he felt he made with the other members of the PLC, stating that he

appreciated being a part of this PLC, and that it differed sharply from an administrative-

directed PLC he was assigned to facilitate the previous year. There, the teachers who

were compelled to be there were "nasty." He attributed our PLC's sense of community in

part to the fact that participants volunteered to be there. He also stated that even though

he frequently arrived exhausted from the day's demands, even coming in a "bad mood" at

times, he would "…always leave in a good mood, because of the nurturing atmosphere and the way we approached all the topics…"

Faye, a 16 year teaching veteran, stated that "the opportunity to meet with this group of very diverse teachers…and the dynamic of the group…and some of the ideas that came out of it were absolutely worth the 10 weeks. This is what a PLC is supposed to be for."

Theresa stated that "the part of the PLC that's really useful is having those conversations about best practice in the class and what really helps people connect better and learn from one another." She also remarked that it was "great and enjoyable to hear what people are doing and more about who they are and how they approach their classes, their students, and their jobs…"

Towards the end of our interview, Hunter asked me a question. She often wondered if the PLC was just an accidental and "magical group," or if I had hand selected and somehow "micromanaged the group to become what it was." I assured her that the Participants were those who had accepted the invitation, and that there were other teachers who were interested but could not participate because of schedule conflicts. However, I do interpret her comment to reflect both on the sense of affiliation she felt with the group and my facilitation, which I will present at the end of this chapter.

Hunter also reported feeling more confident about performing her professional duties as a result of the PLC. When prompted, she explained that she had developed a sense of community and trust within this community:

> It's a place where you can really hash it out with your fellow teammates...Your secret thoughts are being voiced already. The cares and concerns people whose values you trust more than yourself, people are saying the same things. So it's not just me being a lazy, terrible worker, it's actually more widespread, so now you

have confidence in bringing up the issue…there's [sic] so many styles and types and personalities in that group, and if you can see how they bring up these issues you can absorb the best of everybody and how they are bringing up these…one's person's way of bringing up a topic is totally skillful and it's great to see. And then when you're finally there, yes I did it, when you're finally talking to somebody in a position in a power different from you, that power or inequality, you have in the back of your mind to the voices of all of those people, so how can you let them down? You've already talked about it, you know it's real; you have an opportunity to let it be known…

Faye believed that PLC Participants discovered, or rediscovered, their own empowerment. She told me that

We [the PLC] worked on something that wasn't a mandate. I think maybe that's the difference that the administrative PLCs that are out there are basically here's a PLC to work on a mandate and we chose the problem then tried to find solutions to the problem as opposed to being given a problem that we may or may or may not have wanted to work with and them be told to find a solution to the problem.

The sense of camaraderie continued after the meetings. I noted in my field notes that although I ended the meetings after one hour, after each one, several stayed and talked. After the second meeting, Jackie and Hunter stayed after the meeting for about 15 minutes, conversing easily. Jackie stated to me and Hunter that she was "really looking forward to the next meeting," and left. As Hunter and I were walking together toward our respective classrooms, she said that she "really liked the meeting."

During the last meeting, several participants repeatedly stated that they felt validated, supported, and sustained by the community. Faye said that she found it vital for continuing in teaching, saying that "…every time I think I can't do this [teach under these circumstances] for 14 more years [her projected retirement], I can look at somebody like Jackie [a 42 year teaching veteran] and look beyond that. Every time you guys start to think, 'I can't do this anymore,' remember that you are not alone and because at least in this room there are people that will help you and support you."

Hunter spoke next, and said that while she found it "really pleasant to interact [during meetings]…when I'm teaching or …reflecting, a lot of the themes from these meetings really start percolating, and I don't think I have had that with any other professional learning community."

Participants Adapt Adams/Love Model to Their Professional Challenges

The second subheading under which Participants reported that the PLC was useful to their job performance was that the Adams/Love model provided a useful framework from which they analyzed the learning process, and provided a basis they used to modify and create a new organizer, which included more of the high school realities of teaching.

But to apply the Adams/Love model in a comprehensive way, I believed that an essential initial and ongoing task was to inventory each teacher's professional duties. That comprehensive list of duties provided a tangible product (which grew throughout the 10 weeks) that we could evaluate and finally, reorganize.

At the start of each session, I posted the combined list of duties and professional obligations, and encouraged Participants to add to or modify the list. Please refer to Chapter 3 and Appendix A for more detailed facilitation procedures. The relevance here is that the PLC members directly applied the items on the list to the Adams/Love Model to determine under which quadrant the duties belonged. Here is a list that the Participants compiled that was current as of the sixth session.

Group-constructed List of Challenges We Teachers Currently Face:
1. 9th Grade: inter-discipline feedback mechanism regarding one's performance
2. Frequent, unannounced administrative walk-throughs (note: as of 11/23, we were informed of new observations by administration teams)
3. Special Education: Law compliance
4. Demonstrate competency and skill in each of the state-required Teacher

	competencies*
5.	Address each student's social and emotional learning
6.	Demonstration of culturally responsive teaching (CRT)
7.	Addressing the "Common Core of Learning and Teaching" (Hargreaves, 2001), which essentially is the interaction among curricula, teacher, and student.
8.	School is in process of collapsing the lowest academic tracked level into existing college-bound level and creation of new "levels" within some existing courses (e.g., creating a college bound British Literature course, which has only been offered in the Honors level.)
9.	Following student performance standards. Each graduate is required to demonstrate student performance standards that are not operationalized*
10.	The high school community and classrooms are expected to adhere to a school-wide social behavior norm—but its specific behavior components have never been stated*
11.	Rapidly changing mandates, which include both changes to practice and additional requirements
12.	Compliance with Federally mandated Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI)
13.	Must collect classroom data frequently, publish it internally, and prove that we used it to inform subsequent teaching
14.	Must rewrite all curriculum in Understanding by Design©(UBD) format
15.	Must identify different learning styles of students and use Differentiated Instruction in classroom
16.	High numbers of students in classroom
17.	Low student motivation, maturity, and cliques
18.	Parental input/support
19.	Must employ Tribes Learning Community © (TLC)procedures
20.	Smart Goals must be written, with numerous deadlines
21.	Juggling different demands from all sides
22.	Must comply with Learning Disability guidelines for teaching
23.	Some teachers also teach college courses
24.	Unspoken value of what makes good teaching. Are some older methods, once thought effective, no longer valued? No connections offered by outside stakeholders between past practice and current "reforms"
25.	Expected to be current with new techniques, such as use of technology
26.	We are offered Isolated Professional Development experiences, with no continuity to past initiatives, mandates, etc.
27.	Required bi-weekly Common Formative Assessments (CFAs), with return to students within 2-3 class days
28.	Check emails and phone messages frequently throughout the day, and return all messages within one business day
29.	Post grades online; major assignments must be posted within two weeks
30.	Create and use rubric for all assignments
31.	Contact parents for all unverified absences of their child from your class (as of

week of November 8)
32. Put daily objectives on board
33. Follow Bloom's taxonomy jargon
34. Many teachers have days in which they teach for 6 continuous hours, with only 5 minutes between classes and 23 minutes for lunch

Table 6.1 Participant-Created List of Teacher Professional Duties (as of 12/3/2011)
(*school-identifying information here has been deleted)

But Participants realized that there were other duties teachers needed to perform—

"clerical" requirements--that did not fit into any of the quadrants. They decided that in

order to more effectively modify the Adams/Love model, they would need to take

another inventory of *all* the duties, and prepare that for the next meeting. To help do that,

between meetings seven and eight, John sent electronically to each Participant his own

constructed graphic organizer. See Appendix J for a reproduction of that tool. Using that

organizer as a supplement, along with the posted list of teacher responsibilities, during

meeting eight the PLC then amended the above list to include the following additional

"clerical duties," reproduced below in Table 6.2. These duties can be described as teacher

requirements outside of the classroom.

1.	Attend Parent Planning Team meetings
2.	Complete frequent reports to special education teachers
3.	Follow 504 plans and Individual Education Plans
4.	Perform administrator-assigned duties, such as study hall monitoring, lunch room monitoring, which includes expectation to clean up after students (note: some of those duties prohibit attending to other requirements. That is, monitoring lunches prohibits grading, calling parents, etc.). In some study halls, one teacher is responsible for as many as 60 students, which includes referrals to office for absences.
5.	Provide official grade reports each 4.5 weeks.
6.	Teachers monitor the State-required high stakes test
7.	Hall monitoring during the five minute break between classes, which includes explicitly stated expectations of: disciplining students (write referral forms for office) for potential cigarette and drug use, cell phone use, crude language, moving students along to class, etc.
8.	Provide class attendance reports in paper, but enter on computer too

9.	Complete discipline referrals; issue detentions for students and monitor own detentions
10.	Create, maintain, update teacher's own web-page
11.	Attend monthly faculty and department meetings
12.	Write curriculum before school for 22 separate days throughout the school year
13.	Monitor administrative-issued detentions to students for 90 minutes after school (once per school year)
14.	Write student recommendations for college, military, and complete standardized recommendation forms
15.	Attend monthly faculty and monthly department meetings, each lasting a minimum of one hour after school
16.	Write two complete exemplary lessons and file electronically for school-wide publication

Table 6.2 Participant-Created List of Additional Duties Outside of Classroom (as of 12/17/11)

After having reviewed the teacher duties and the four-quadrant model, in session nine I invited break-out groups of Participants to create a new graphic which would capture as many of the requirements on both lists as possible. After each group drew their models, I then invited the collective to create a universal graphic organizer which, in a manner like the Adams/Love model, labeled the areas, and placed the duties in the proper places.

Once that was completed, I asked which seminal action would address the most duties. These prompts follow the Pareto Principle, discussed in Chapter 2. The Participants created a model, reproduced in Figure 6.3, below.

```
                                              ┌──────────────┐
                                              │  Smart Goals │
                                              └──────────────┘
                       ┌──────────────┐
                       │   Common     │
                       │  Formative   │       ┌──────────────┐
                       │ Assessments  │       │ Federal SRBI │
                       └──────────────┘       │   Mandate    │
                                              └──────────────┘
                       ┌──────────────┐
                       │ School Data  │
                       └──────────────┘
                       ┌──────────────┐
                       │Collapsed levels│
                       │/differentiation│
                       └──────────────┘
      ┌──────┐         ┌──────────────┐
      │ UBD  │────────▶│     TLC      │
      └──────┘         └──────────────┘
                       ┌──────────────┐
                       │ Environment  │
                       └──────────────┘
                       ┌──────────────┐
                       │   Rubrics    │
                       └──────────────┘
                       ┌──────────────┐
                       │  Technology  │
                       └──────────────┘
```
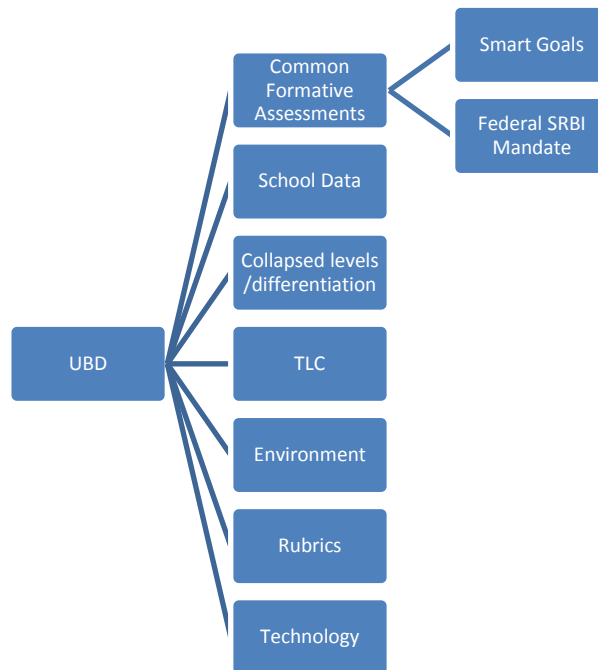
Figure 6.3 Participant-Created Professional Duties Organizer

They determined that the seminal action that would affect the greatest number of required areas was to focus on the directive of rewriting curricula in the Understanding by Design (UBD) format. If comprehensive, the UBD construction should include the several other requirements shown on the graphic organizer.

The PLC immediately realized that they needed professional development to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to meet those demands, since few had been sufficiently trained in UBD course writing to construct the necessary comprehensive revision. I should note here that UBD is a design for units of study, and not entire course construction. Therefore, if enacted, the PLC plan would need to modify the intent of UBD itself.

Interestingly, as I noted in my field notes, each Participant agreed that the future professional development would best be acquired in a group that functioned as this PLC did. The PLC constructed another chart, stating their professional development needs in order to meet the additional demands and professional duties. See Figure 6.4, below.
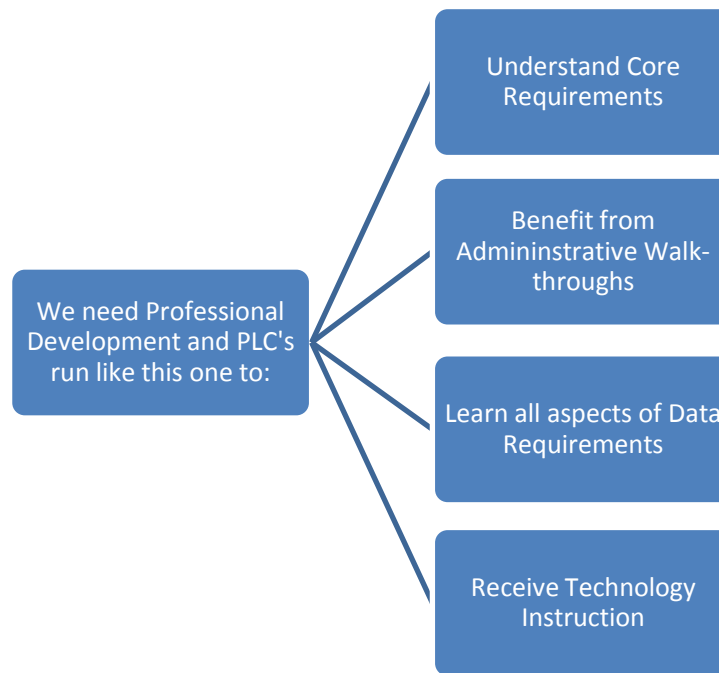
Figure 6.4 Participant-Created Professional Development Needs Organizer

In the next chapter, I will discuss how these last two figures provide a unique contribution to the field of PLCs as a means of professional development. Here I will note that teachers empowered to do so in this kind of PLC were able to create two organizers: the first organizing a majority of their duties, and the second indicating their professional needs, requesting they be collaboratively learned within this PLC facilitation model and structure.

During the last session and throughout the interviews, each Participant mentioned the value of the group-constructed graphic organizers (reproduced above) during meeting nine. John's comment at meeting 10 summarized sentiments of most, when he stated "I can deal with [the duties] when it looks like this (pointing to the newly organized). I can't deal with it when it looks like (pointing to the previously unorganized list)."

Chantal then spoke of her own further reduction of the teaching interdynamics from the Adams/Love four quadrants, to two main categories: "curriculum and relationships with students." In her desire to more efficiently feed those categories, she wondered first what could be eliminated from the myriad demands teachers face. Then she spoke of something that is a new category in these findings: the value of research-based data to support teacher decisions. Our PLC and its content led her to see the value of the combination of research and experiential learning in this PLC to teachers. She said that what she realized at that moment was that I had been "walking [the PLC] through is all very connected to real research and real theory, and there is a design to it…[are the external mandates] anchored in something that resembles the truth [of our experiences]?" This kind of realization and questioning is empowering to teachers, and the findings in this study have begun to contribute the necessary addition of the teacher-practitioner's own voice and experience to the academic research. It also demonstrates what Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) refer to as "inquiry as stance."

Six found that just listing the duties was helpful, though daunting to see in its entirety. Goulet, a 10 year veteran, for whom teaching is a second career, referred to "that big list [of all the teacher duties]" when he reported his reaction of relief when in session nine, the grouped constructed its own organizer, thereby placing those duties "into more

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manageable categories and I was like, ahh, thank you. I wish somebody had done it before." And John offered that "just knowing what is out there [concerning all the teacher duties and mandates] and more about [them]" was new and useful knowledge.

Six different Participants told me during the interviews that the Adams/Love Model could be more useful to them if it took into account both lists of professional and clerical obligations. Hunter reported that employing the adapted model the PLC created at the end of the study helps her to focus on specific aspects which in turn "[help] me do my job better."

Two indicated to me that the Adams/Love Model was not helpful for the internal classroom challenges. Lisa said that "four quadrants were too many for me because I was having a hard time as we were doing that seeing the differences between the teacher and the pedagogy and splitting those things off…"

Two reported that the model was helpful as it was in dealing with internal classroom struggles. Irish said that the model has encouraged her to "take a closer look at why kids aren't successful at school and try to empathize with them and reach them in as many ways as [she] can."

However, when asked if the Adams/Love model was helpful in dealing with the outside mandates, eight reported that it was useful. Faye stated that it was "far more valuable to me there [because]…I realized three of those quadrants can be folded into one thing and we're doing that all the time and that made it seem much less daunting and that's where I get that little piece of self confidence…I can say that definitely beyond this school year I will hold that model in my head."

During the interviews, four Participants identified a new skill of theirs as being one of organization of the teaching demands. Goulet reported that he acquired "some organizational skills, in [reorganizing duties so] that it doesn't feel overwhelming." Both he and Hunter reported feeling differently after the PLC. Goulet stated that the PLC "really helped me put things in perspective," and Hunter stated that she has the skill now to "mentally manage the burdens of our profession in ways that are healthier than what I was doing before and more productive that what I was doing before."

The PLC Changed the Ways Participants Now Act and Plan to Act

We have just considered the different ways in which Participants reported that the PLC increased what they knew. Here we will examine how the PLC had changed the way they acted, and planned to act. In each case, Participants reported those changes in actions as being "right" or of value, even though at times uncomfortable.

Four Participants told me of changes they had made in their interactions with students. Three others reported now speaking their truths to administration. And another told me that she felt more confident in meeting the outside demands of teaching. Participants have interacted with students in ways reflective of social justice and greater diversity awareness.

Irish, an 18 year teaching veteran, told me that one of the most important skills she learned in the PLC was to show more of her own struggles with her students; "to be more open with my students in terms of me showing my weaknesses." In fact, five other Participants shared similar new confidence and comfort levels in disclosing to their students aspects of their social identities in order to validate diversity and to build community.

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Coinciding with the end of the PLC in late December, Theresa told me that with holidays approaching, she tried a new activity.

> I asked students in their groups what holiday in December they celebrated, if any. I saw this [as an activity that brought out diversity. A student] asked me before break, "Theresa, do you celebrate Christmas or do you celebrate something else?" And it was really neat because it was that opening of not everybody celebrates Christmas and there are other holidays we celebrate in this school. That was a question I had never asked and I think it came out of what we had done in here.

Three other teachers made discreet changes in their approaches to learning more about student backgrounds and perspectives. For example, Lisa told me that a "response to our PLC" was for her to take the opportunity with her students around the Christmas break to go beyond the privileging of the Christian Christmas. She asked them about their various cultural and religious traditions which led to a "very rich cultural discussion"—something she would not have done "without this PLC." The students, she reported, found it "fun…[and] they were very positive."

Some were reminded through this PLC of what they had valued earlier, but had not stopped acting on. Faye's realization was that she became tired by the overwhelming demands of teaching and its clerical duties. She taught a class that she did not like because the students were frequently disruptive and not interested in the subject matter. After learning about the efficacy of getting to know the student's various social identities, she decided to try to get to know them better. She told me,

> I tried a couple of little things. I met with certain students privately…maybe if I get to know them a little more and maybe that will make me like them a little better…[students responded] enthusiastically. ..I saw a dynamic between the kids I hadn't seen before. It's easy for them to make off with it but for a good 20 minutes, I managed to get all the way around the room, I think there were 15 of them there that day, and actually talk with some of these kids I've really been struggling with in a way I haven't had a conversation with them… I'm 16 years in and I'm on the borderline, I've been walking a very fine burnout line right now. I can't leave the job, I can't afford to leave the job, and I like the job but I've started

to let things go because I'm tired. Part of it is the extra stuff we have to do too. It's an excuse, it's not a good excuse, it's not a legitimate excuse and it bothers me that I make that kind of realization because I don't want to be that kind of teacher who just comes in, teaches and goes home.

Faye had told the PLC this same story, but not in as much detail. They were highly supportive of her intervention. Other teachers applied the content and experiential knowledge from the PLC to interactions with students, interrupting and redirecting offensive words and actions. John relayed his new understanding and resultant actions this way:

> I think if addressing a situation, I guess it's part knowledge and part skill. I think a teachable moment is a skill [in that the teacher senses a negative in the classroom, and like in social justice,] defend the identity of something that has been attacked. It is a skill [for me to try] to help the person understand what's going on…I have more ideas on how to do it I think by seeing other people and hearing their stories [in this PLC]; I feel like my skill with that is stronger now.

John's insight led him to decide to deal more directly with religious-intolerant remarks about Jews he would hear from students. He told me that he "feels a much stronger sense of responsibility for issues that come up. I will no longer ignore the 'little comments' that are said. You can pretend you didn't hear it or you can get up and deal with it. I feel more like it's important to deal with it."

Importantly, such action provides a powerful model for students. Four other Participants reported acting similarly with students, and seven told me that they felt more *confident* in the righteousness in addressing intolerant remarks and in their skillfulness in doing so. Hunter simply stated that she was "more sensitive to picking up certain issues [from students] that come up just in passing," and will address the situation promptly. This echoes what Irish told me: "I now know how to approach kids when [I] hear an

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inappropriate comment in class [by] taking a step back and really looking at the situation and addressing it right then and there."

These Participant revelations lead me to complete this section with a fascinating discovery that has developed for at least five Participants. Each indicated to me that as a result of his or her experiences within the PLC, he or she had felt moved to act as an agent of social justice, and that urge was coupled with the felt sense of support from the PLC when they did act. These Participants felt obligated to speak on behalf of targeted social identities, present or not. John relayed a critical incident in which he confronted a student who had used a pejorative epithet for one with mental disabilities.

> I remember it was after one of the days we had done a reading on social justice and a student said something like 'that's completely retarded,' used that word and I felt…I think before…that word, we hear it so often, like the word 'gay' it's impossible to address it every time because it's used so much. When it was in a classroom conversation I would always deal with it but this was like on the side [outside of my classroom]. I was nearby; I heard it going on and I went over and said something. Before if it were in my class I would have dealt with it, but if it were on the side I probably would have just let it go most times, I wouldn't have picked that battle. But I picked it that time because we had been talking about it and the importance of it so I went over and said that's offensive and I explained about how that's a person of disability and you wouldn't challenge a kid who couldn't walk to a race, so why would you pick on somebody or put down somebody who has a disability they have no control over? The kid ended up apologizing, he backed down from it.

I asked John if he were able to identify anything about the PLC that may have affected his decision to act in that way. He responded that the PLC certainly influenced and motivated him to act:

> Oh yeah, definitely. I think a lot of times when you're enforcing something you worry you don't want to be the only one who is doing it. You don't want to be 'that' teacher. We talk about that with cell phones, I don't want to be the one mean teacher who takes away the cell phones if no one else is doing it. I think finding out other people are doing it and finding out I'm part of a movement within the faculty to enforce principles of social justice whether or not people

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know that's what they're doing I think that camaraderie and that shared responsibility is a huge motivator from the PLC.

When further prompted what about the PLC may have given him further confidence to interrupt and re-direct/correct the student, John cited some of the readings I issued, recalling that it was his responsibility to speak for the disabled person absent. He also spoke of the powerful witnessing to something like that from Chantal, and used that as a support, if subconsciously, throughout the interaction.

That sense of personal responsibility to act, bolstered by a sense of belonging to others who share those values and could support the actions, is a critical discovery.

Both Chantal and Hunter related critical incidents in which they felt compelled to speak on behalf of the silenced, or of ones not represented when they heard comments that were destructive towards others. Chantal interrupted student gossiping she heard during a study hall supervisory assignment. She told me that what the students were saying really triggered her. She did not know the students talking, nor did she know the student being gossiped about, but she told me she simply could not be silent, that someone needed to interrupt this, and she did; even using it as a teaching moment for the students. I asked her whether the PLC influenced her to act, and she replied, "I would have liked to believe I would have had the confidence before the PLC to intervene because it was the right thing to do. But I know I have the confidence as a result of it, I know this helped me."

And in addition to more socially just interactions with students, three Participants reported having verbally resisted administrators who added more to teacher duties, explaining that any more would place further unfair demands.

Participants Verbally Challenged Administrator's New Requirements

Those three Participants shared separate instances in which for the first time, they respectfully challenged administration's directives. Goulet stated that he felt since the PLC that he "had the tools to speak up," and did so, in telling the administrator that he respectfully challenged that administrator's duty add-on to the teaching team of which he was the leader. In explaining his reasoning to me, Goulet stated that he believed that as a teacher, "We have a right to participate in the design of how [and when we perform our duties], not just responding [automatically] to the directives and orders and mandates." Prior to that, Goulet did not feel empowered to challenge administrative directives.

Hunter also relates the first time as a teacher here that she challenged an administrative directive. At a different meeting with administration, in which she was a team leader of teachers who were not all present, Hunter explained that as a result of the PLC, she chose not to remain silent this time:

> Before I joined your PLC, I was silent at a lot of those meetings…now I'm very aware [that] I have to take care of the interest of those teachers [not present] because I can see more of the outside mandates and internal pressures so I feel more confident [in saying] 'no, we are not going to do that because [we already are responsible for these duties]'…I feel like I've got more of a charge to represent voices that may not be present at the time.

Chantal also spoke her truth for the first time to administration. As she had been in the past, she felt uncomfortable with a newly-added expectation for teachers. She noticed that no one else spoke in response to the new requirement. This time, she could not maintain her own silence:

> But I think that perhaps what the PLC has sensitized me to even more is the discomfort of the people who aren't speaking. And so there I was and I was hearing this kind of chat and I said to myself, I mean it makes my skin crawl, who else's skin is crawling in here? I do think that the conversations we've had and the literature you've had us read Phil have made me think more about the people who

aren't speaking up. So that's the voice that I feel that I have to be listening out for extra special…*and I know the PLC had something to do with this*…[Chantal continued to recount in detail that she told the administrator that the teachers had numerous existing demands] (emphasis added).

These changes in behavior reflect Freire's desire to see agents of social justice write the world in greater justice. They are also consistent with writers such as Bell, whose definition of social justice education includes the goal of acting as social justice agents. I will discuss this more fully in the next chapter.

Participant-Created Organizer Helps Manage Teaching Requirements and Provides a Communication Tool

Each of the Participants told me that the Adams/Love teaching and learning model was useful, most especially in these two ways: helped them to better organize especially the outside mandates and to see how those could be addressed as part of the social justice perspective to teaching and learning; and as a scaffolding mechanism from which they constructed their own organizing model that more comprehensively accounted for their lived working experiences.

The organizer had other benefits mentioned by several others: stress reduction, empowerment, greater self-confidence, and it could serve as a communication tool teachers could use to explain what they do.

Goulet told me,

> In my stress of having things heaped up on top of me, [the model we created] helped me put things in perspective as far as if you are doing one of these major things you are hitting multiple things at the same time, ideally, so that the tasks given to us don't seem so overwhelming.

Leigh stated that the new model helped to "emotionally ground" her, and that she felt more in control as a result of having constructed it.

I think anytime you are given the time and the task to take a multitude of things and in some way organize them then it's forcing you into consciously or unconsciously prioritizing or at least questioning how you categorize something and how important it is to you… I had control over how I was going to categorize things. It then gave me the power to say because I'm the one categorizing it I'm going to be more conscious of how I use my time and not allow outside forces to tell me how to use my time.

Hunter told me that at first she really resisted having to continually examine the growing list of teacher responsibilities (the reader will recall that I posted that list at each meeting). But by the end, in retrospect she saw the value of the exercises, and now, the power of the organizer she helped create. She said,

The [organizer we created] was invaluable because you had that list that probably touched the floor by the time we were done with it and you had that list and I was like "whoa", and anytime we were at a faculty or department meeting we knew more could be added to that list every single time we met with other people… You get really demoralized like I can't even hack it this year as it is because of this schedule change and these demands and now there's more and more so you can say at the end of those meetings there's really three areas I need to focus on and by focusing on those areas I'll be able to hit 99% of what's on this chart which was really really helpful…Now I have more focus and am less frazzled so I can bring more to the classroom now that I have less to think about as far as the outside mandates day-to-day. ..I feel that I'm addressing the outside mandates more now because I know that when I'm in a certain mode and when I'm focusing on a certain thing and I'm like ok, I'm going to focus on a,b,c right now. So that is actually helping me do my job better. Well it's in the classroom. The students responding to it, I think the more I can give them a situation to handle and identify that they already know or could be creative and put their finger on that's definitely helped a lot.

Participants Now Plan to Act with More Awareness of Social Justice and Diversity Issues

Nine of the Participants interviewed said they would like to act in increasingly inclusive ways in the future. Five said that they wished to build more inclusive, positive classroom environments. Chantal wanted to create a classroom in the future that would consistently reflect what she had recently done for one student who was moving out of

town. In this related critical incident, she wanted to involve the entire class in a "proper send-off" for the student leaving. She reported that she now recognized a new sense of

> Confidence to extend myself with him was because of this experience [in this PLC…the send off] made me feel happy too [and it is] good positive energy and a good way to value people and be with people. I'm sure the PLC supported me in that value.

Her last sentence indicates a spiritual sense of support from the PLC, and itself is a powerful indicator of the beneficial effects of the PLC.

Three planned in the future to learn more about who their students truly were. They spoke of the value in learning more of students' diverse backgrounds both for their own value, and as a teaching moment. John stated that he would "like to do more activities in the future that would raise students' awareness of diversity and how diversity can be oppressed…"

Participant-Created Organizer Could Help Other Teachers and Administrators and Outside Stakeholders

During the last meeting, the Participants began talking about future steps. Four, at different times during the meeting, made a realization that the information we had been creating--especially the new graphic organizer--could help other teachers who, in Chantal's words, were "stressed teachers who are not seeing the big picture," and would find the graphic organizer a useful tool. The tool could be used to focus attention on essential issues that would also positively address other apparently unconnected professional duties. And an extended community of educators using the tool could also enhance it. In addition, Chantal saw our organizing graphic could act as a "huge tool to help administration," who probably do not have a way of globally understanding the mandates and other duties facing the stressed teachers. Theresa then asked the group,

"How can we get on the same page so that we [teachers] are allies with administrators and not adversaries?" Several postulated that if all educators were familiar with this organizer, administrators could use it to roll out new initiatives and continue to connect to the pre-existing ones.

Faye felt revitalized by her experiences in this PLC, and wished to rally teachers to work together in addressing the difficulties in teaching. She told me that this PLC

> Reinforced some of my existing need or ability to speak up when I see things I perceive as injustices…Change is inevitable but there's so much going on and we start something then we never finish it and there's no follow-through then something changes, and there's just so much I'm overwhelmed, and I talked to my colleagues and I figured if I'm feeling overwhelmed that's just me I'm having some time management issues, and I can work that out...but when all of my colleagues feel the same way, all of them, not just one or two or a couple of new teachers, everybody is saying the same thing then something is wrong and somebody has to speak up and it can't be 1 or 2 or 10 people out of 100 person faculty it has to be 70 or 80 or 90 to get them to listen. So now how many people can I poke to get them to go stand up with me…

Faye was passionate when she was telling me this. Her account of what she observes in her fellow teachers brings us back to the public high school teacher's current challenges and unprecedented public scrutiny, discussed in Chapter 1. Here, Faye is acknowledging the challenges for herself, but is identifying this PLC as a source of empowerment that is encouraging her to extend the community beyond the 11 to include all of the teachers.

During the last two sessions, there was general consensus that the organizer could be used as a common point for teachers to talk with other teachers, with administrators, and with outside stakeholders such as parents, politicians, and board of education members. Goulet stated that,

> It would be interesting if [this organizer were] released to the general public, and hopefully they would understand. It's that specific that people would realize and

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get it there is a lot of bad press going around about teachers... this is how I can explain what my job is like to someone who may or may not have an idea of what is dealt with on a daily basis in teaching.

Irish stated that in the school currently, "there's [sic] a lot of people hurting right now." When further prompted, she identified both teachers and students as hurting, and opined that the PLC's reaching out to other teachers would help them "because we are all in the same boat and feeling the same pressures internally and externally…kids need to know they are valued and we understand them and that we empathize with them…"

All Participants Wished to Voluntarily Continue Meeting

Throughout the last session, because of the stated desire to continue what Irish termed the "good that we began," each Participant declared a desire to continue to voluntarily continue to meet as a PLC after the seminar concluded. Two present said that while they would have liked to meet, a job change for one and family obligations for another would prohibit them from doing so. Faye wanted to open the PLC to other volunteers, hoping to help them manage the teaching demands. She told me it would be worth it, even if this future PLC

> Can help two or three people, and there are a couple of people in my department I can think of right off the top that are practically screaming for help, and they are people who have been teaching a lot longer than I have and are just overwhelmed by this. Anything we can do, everyone is going to be a better teacher if everyone can get a little bit of help. Then we will be better people because we won't be burned out from our jobs.

During the interviews, each stated the desire to continue to meet as a community; some a very strong desire, using words like "would love to see it continue." Those unable to do so cited scheduling conflicts prohibiting them.

Hunter told me that she initially chastised herself for agreeing to attend this 10 week seminar. But she was "shocked" by how much she benefited from it, and wanted it to

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continue. She told me that just before starting the seminar, she had serious misgivings

and second thoughts about joining.

> I was really concerned about adding more to the plate, but I was like well,
> [Hunter], you're ridiculous because you can't even get it done and now you're
> signing up for a PLC that's going to take more time out of your day but in the end
> it felt a lot like working out. I block off that time and I can mentally unplug. It's
> that time you set aside for you because you are getting rejuvenated. So it was like
> there's no way I've got something on Wednesday and it was shocking, I did not
> expect that at all. We had work, we had reading, it wasn't like everything you can
> do you do during this time so it never felt like, well I'm not going to lie
> sometimes it was tough to get the readings done because there are so many other
> things to do, but I never resented the time that the reading took or that the meeting
> took and I was shocked at that.

Hunter was an especially enthusiastic advocate for the group to continue meeting after

the study ended.

John, who during the previous year, led a PLC in the administrative-directed

professional development program, said that this PLC was a superior professional

development experience for him, in large part, because teachers voluntarily attended,

were responsible primarily to each other, and were empowered.

> I think as a group, as a faculty, we need to push towards having the PLC time. I
> think if they let us organize it ourselves…I remember that moment where we lost
> control of it, it was sort of like we did this grassroots, we pushed for it and asked
> to do this thing and at some point they were co-opted and I felt like we lost that
> freedom. ..But this [PLC] was completely voluntary and it wasn't during contract
> or school time that we got control of it back and I think that PLCs are such
> valuable learning experiences and they build morale. I feel better about myself
> when I'm getting better at something or I'm working on improvement.

Because John had been talking about the administration, I then asked if it affected him in

some way because of the fact that this PLC was not driven by, or answerable to,

administration. He replied,

> Oh yeah, it's a safer space without accountability to administration. We had
> creative control over it too. I think that was an important part…I felt better
> leaving the room than when I came in every week. I felt like, Wow this is good,

I'm doing something important and working with other people and talking has been really helpful.

John then told me that he wanted this kind of PLC to continue for his professional growth and sense of connectedness, since isolation is a professionally diminishing experience.

Participants Commended and Valued my Modeling Facilitation

At some time during the last meeting, each Participant commented positively about my facilitation, using adjectives such as "masterful" and "remarkable." Faye told us at the last session, and me during the interview, that this 10 week seminar was the "best use of a professional development that I've had in 16 years." All wanted me to continue as facilitator if the meetings were to continue. My notes also indicate that at various times throughout the sessions, and at times between them, Participants would provide positive comments about how I was running the sessions. It was during the interviews that six provided more specific comments.

Goulet told me that he liked the flexible format of the PLC. He said, "I appreciate that the PLC seemed to be not really set in stone, but trying to achieve more consciousness raising, instead of 'we are going to be doing this, and then do this.'"

Leigh told me that her experience here was entirely unique among her previous experiences with professional development. She said,

> It's the first time that I really felt there was a direction and expectations and that we were on task the entire time and the time was almost too short and we had so much more to talk about…It was a worthwhile time commitment that I didn't resent. ..[As opposed to her experience with] previous PLCs, [which felt like] an add-on and I resented it because I never felt like it had any direction or that there was anything constructive about it …[and] I don't remember anything positive that came out of it.

Jackie, a 42 year teaching veteran, stated that the PLC was "empowering…[and] extremely helpful, much more than I had anticipated [because] the structure that was

underlying all the conversations helped take some of that maze of material we are trying

to work through and put some kind of sense to it."

John stated that he "…like[d] that when we showed up we were going to do an

activity right off the bat; that was energizing. I think you're an excellent facilitator. I

liked the way you ran the PLC, the material was engaging…"

Chantal said, "…you are an outstanding facilitator. I think you are very responsive to

us and that you balanced what it was you needed us to experience with exposure with our

needs to process out loud some of what we were wrestling with." She said she

appreciated my having structured this PLC in the manner of a socially just, responsive

manner. She said that I was "…totally open to the [possibility that] this [PLC experience]

may be helpful or it is maybe not." She also offered a critique:

> I would love to [see the PLC continue because] it's a great place for support and
> further discussion, Phil, as I was mentioning earlier. I certainly feel that there are
> times when you are awesome in your facilitation of us, but I felt like there were
> times that it would have been really valuable to continue discussion on certain
> topics.

Theresa said that I "…managed [meetings] just right. You had a really good sense of

just how long to let it go, and this is really meaningful to people and will help us with the

next piece."

In closing, as of this writing, about one half of the original Participants continue to

meet with me, biweekly. I have continued to keep field notes, and the members continue

to support each other in addressing the still-mounting educational changes and additions,

though only one clerical duty has been removed from the list above. The members

continue to work towards supporting each other in their efforts to act in ways consistent

with celebrating diversity and promoting social justice in their classrooms and in the

building.

CHAPTER 7

THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL BENEFITS OF THIS PLC

In the last chapter, I reported that each Participant unequivocally stated during the final meeting and during their personal interview that the PLC seminar helped him or her in numerous ways. In this chapter, I interpret those benefits and apply them both to my research questions and to the research foundations I examined in Chapter 2. Throughout this chapter I will make comparisons of the PLC group with the Control group, and also include data from the quantitative measures, the recorded final PLC session, and my log notes. The Participants thrived in this PLC, and as we will see, their reported benefits led to significant personal changes, and to some remarkable personal actions. The findings I discovered from my design of a PLC that was social justice-based and facilitated offer promising implications for future PLCs for teachers.

My two research questions produced six specific outcome dimensions. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how my research findings answered those six dimensions.

In the second section, I interpret the discoveries that surfaced outside of the research questions. That will include discussion of Participants' reported personal changes, and very positive sense of affiliation with the PLC. In this section, I also return to the concerns and challenges the teachers themselves stated prior to the PLC, and determine if the PLC was successful in addressing those. After all, in addition to my own purposes for this dissertation, I sought to design and facilitate a useful intervention that would be responsive to teachers' stated needs.

Finally, not all of the teachers' stated needs were addressed in this study. I will reserve those as topics for future study, in Chapter 8.

PLC Facilitation Process is Integral to Analysis of Reported PLC Results

When considering all the findings from this study, I emphasize that all results emanated from a PLC seminar that I facilitated in a socially just manner (see M. Adams et al., 2007, esp. 1-113). Consequently, in addition to introducing Participants to social justice as a philosophic and academic discipline, I provided Participants with the *experience* of learning—and facilitating--in a socially just way. The Participants cooperated and fully participated with that format throughout the seminar, and we frequently did brief personal and group reflections during the sessions. Therefore, both the process and the content were equally emphasized and valued. Such a practice contrasts with a traditional, "banking" learning environment in professional development—including this site's PLCs—in which, like the traditional classroom, "the focus is primarily on cognitive learning via content or information delivery and is most often one-way…" (Griffin and Ouellette, in M. Adams et al., 2007, 89). I facilitated an ongoing dialogue among the Participants as an essential component of a democratic process of "addressing the world, which is to be transformed and humanized" (Freire, 1970, 88-89).

My facilitation helped create a learning environment that produced unanimously positive comments from Participants. At various times during the seminar, in their open field answers, or during the interviews, all mentioned their positive regard for their observations that this PLC consisted of a group of interested volunteers, and that I was not pushing an agenda, but rather used my published seminar curriculum as a flexible

structure for the meetings. Recall that this was a voluntary second PLC for these Participants, who were also assigned by administration to other PLCs that met approximately three times per month, before classes began in the morning. All volunteered to accept my invitation to participate in this PLC, which met weekly after school. The voluntary nature of this PLC is in sharp contrast to required attendance in other PLCs, and based on the fact that all Participants mentioned the volitional element as significant, I must conclude that it had a positive effect on community, commitment, and relational trust. Perhaps it contributed to the rapid level of trust among the members, something in contrast to what Hord and associates said took semesters to develop in sites they visited (S. M. Hord & Tobia, 2012). By contrast, none of the Controls mentioned positive affiliation or regard for their PLC; nor did any of the Participants regarding their administrative-assigned PLC they also attended.

Goulet's comment to me during his interview illustrates the general feeling of Participants: "I appreciate that the PLC seemed to be not really set in stone, but trying to achieve more consciousness-raising, instead of 'we are going to be doing this, and then do this.'" And Chantal told me about the uniqueness of this PLC, when she said, "I don't think that I've been part of a PLC quite like this where it was completely voluntary [and] where it was around what we think it is." I discuss the Participants' views on their PLC more fully in the second section of this chapter.

Therefore, the following outcome dimensions can be separated from the learning process for analytical purposes, but must be contextualized within the communal experience for fullest appreciation.

PLC Benefits Teachers across Range of Six Outcome Dimensions

To review, my two research questions are:

1) How can a voluntarily-attended PLC, facilitated in a holistic, socially just manner, and using a holistic model also based on social justice principles, help public high school teachers face the challenges of the school year? In particular, how can a volunteer, teachers-only PLC help teachers regarding the following outcome dimensions of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy?

 2) How do teachers report, find or believe that a voluntarily-attended PLC, facilitated in a holistic, socially just manner, and using a holistic model also based on social justice principles, helps them to respond to the range of challenges they face?

There are the six outcome dimensions (bolded below) derived from the research questions. Each is followed by the categories I coded during analysis.

a) **Increased Knowledge**: of self; specifically: of personal triggers; reminder of personal values, of assessing and identifying what participants need to learn; of students, especially of their diverse social identities; of social justice and social justice education; of the entirety of the current mandates, and a new way to organize them. These increased knowledge claims are indications of "Knowledge-*for*-practice"; "Knowledge-*in*-practice"; "Knowledge-*of*-practice" and inquiry as stance (M. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 250.)

b) **Skills**: paradoxical finding. PLC questionnaire does not correspond with Participants' self-assessed post PLC skill level.

c) **Increased Self-efficacy:** Increased Personal Teacher Self-efficacy and General Teacher Efficacy.

d) **PLC did help Participants recognize and deal with challenges of student diversity within the classroom**: expanded awareness of student social identities; strategies to include those various identities in learning process.

e) **PLC did help Participants recognize and deal with mandates from external stakeholders that address student diversity**: the outside experts have not as yet operationally defined "student diversity," or how to effectively teach students with diverse backgrounds, but this PLC provides an important initial step in dealing with diversity, in light of the fact that Participants reported beginning to understand the scope of student diversity.

f) **PLC did help Participants recognize and deal with the entire range of competing demands teachers experience from the multiple sources.** Participants inventoried professional duties and mandates, constructed their own organizers to more efficiently address those duties and to then acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to meet those duties.

Participants Report Increases in Several Knowledge Categories

Participants' reported increases in personal knowledge across several domains: of self; of students, particularly in their diversities; of social justice content; of the entirety of the current mandates, and a new way to organize them; and of others in the community. Three of my outcome dimensions were directly impacted by these knowledge increases: dimensions (d), (e), and (f); and the other two dimensions--(b) and (c)--were indirectly impacted.

Knowledge of Self

From the second meeting until the end, as relational trust was established and strengthened, Participants shared insights with each other. Participants shared their insights about personal issues like emotional triggers and deeply-held values. They also began to explore how those issues interacted with students, and with their curricular and pedagogical choices. This is evidence that this PLC helped elicit more humanistic exploration, which is in opposition with the mechanistic focus of only content and skill in the traditional PLC format.

Additionally, Participants grew to share with others many of these insights in the PLC because of the relational trust (Palmer & Rudnicki, 2009; Wagner, 2002) which was achieved in a very short time. I will discuss the dynamics of this PLC later in this chapter. Here, I mention that Participants did share with increasing frequency their insights with the community, which was always met with acceptance and validation. For example, as their knowledge of diversity increased throughout this PLC, Irish, Leigh, and Faye admitted to previously having a narrow understanding of diversity. As presented in the previous chapter, Faye publicly disclosed her biases toward a class that she did not like, then changed her approach by actively seeking to learn more about the diverse identities of each student. Her insight, then, led her to take action which she decided involved her intention to learn more about her students and their diverse social and personal identities. This, in turn, led to a more receptive learning environment; and not surprisingly, to Faye enjoying the change. Importantly, Faye's honest initial insight was met with a nonjudgmental response in the group (which maintained a sense of safety and trust within the group, adhering to its own group-constructed norms), and when she returned the

following week to report (excitedly) on her intervention and the results, the PLC was unanimous in its praise of her actions.

Faye's case is empirical evidence of Adams' (2007) assertion that social justice educators must continually critically examine themselves during the learning process:

> In the social justice classroom, we often struggle alongside participants in our classes with our own social identities, biases, fears, and prejudices. We, too, need to be willing to examine and deal honestly with our values, assumptions, and emotional reactions to oppression issues. Accordingly, the self-knowledge and self-awareness that we believe are desirable qualities for any teacher become indispensible in social justice education (Adams, in M. Adams et al., 2007, 381).

Faye's experience also provides empirical evidence of Bandura's (1994) sources self-efficacy: mastery experiences (Faye's perception that her work has been successful); vicarious experiences provided by social models (especially powerful when observers perceive similarity to the models); and later, social persuasion, or the verbal assurances that others had what it takes to succeed in similar situations, as Faye went on to encourage others in the group of their abilities to do the same in their classes. Faye has also demonstrated North's (2009) "relational" social justice competency.

Another example of a Participant who accepted the invitation for self-reflection, and then application of the pertinent findings to the classroom came from Irish. She noticed her increasing discomfort throughout the first session of the PLC. At the end of the meeting, she wrote on the "Insights" sheet (see Chapter 3 for details of my procedures) that she felt uncomfortable and that "now I know what the students must go through." After a few meetings, she became more comfortable in sharing her fears with the other Participants, and that disclosure apparently transferred to her taking a new and different approach in her classroom. During her interview, she said that "one of the biggest skills [I learned here] was to be more open with my students in terms of me showing my

weaknesses." And the next part of what she said is of critical importance. She also had learned the importance of interrupting inappropriate comments which she had previously heard, but ignored. She said that she learned of the importance of interrupting pejorative comments, and applied that knowledge to her class. She told me, "I learned how to approach kids when we hear an inappropriate comment in class. Taking a step back and really looking at the situation and addressing it right then and there."

I believe that the second disclosure is especially meaningful. First, it is a clear example of a heightened awareness, or additional knowledge, leading to applying that knowledge at the appropriate time (the skill). Later in this chapter, I will discuss the influence of Teacher Self-efficacy on that action. Secondly, from my perspective as a professional development provider and as a state-certified mentor teacher, I have seen that teachers often anticipate that their showing their own weaknesses to students will result in students' perceiving the teacher as weak and easy-to-take-advantage-of. That may then subconsciously manifest into that teacher ignoring student "imperfections," or student transgressions, because of the fear that the teacher may then be subject to an unwanted "calling out" of his or her "hidden" weakness by the students. Irish "tried out" sharing her insecurities first in this supportive PLC, where she had established trust and safety. She then transferred that successful experience into action in her class. Irish's decision to be more open about her own weaknesses with her students was balanced with a strong sense of fairness, coupled with her confidence in maintaining her own and students' safety in the classroom.

This exemplifies the clear application of the utility of self-knowledge, in specific ways that helped the teacher—and, I would assert, the students as well—face challenges in the

classroom that are often related to tolerance or acceptance of diversity issues of personal and or social identity issues. This finding presents a promising basis for future research in bridging what Pfeffer and Sutton term, the "Knowing Doing Gap," which is essentially identifying the factors that inhibit a person within an organization to act, or in turning knowledge into consistent actions (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). It also provides promising research data on this type of PLC based on social justice principles and content, and how it could help teachers effectively manage diversity issues in the classroom.

An activity I led that was designed to build trust while exploring deeper personal truths below the surface led one Participant to make a powerful realization. While engaged in the activity called "On Common Ground," Jackie identified herself as having been homeless, or knew someone who was. When debriefing, she spoke of how she was struck by the reality that some identities were highly significant, but invisible to others. That experiential learning activity led to a rich discussion of hidden identities of students, and how and why teachers should create space for those as part of the learning dynamic.

Regardless of any particular insight, the fact that teachers are engaged in actively examining who they are and the role they play in the educational process is a very significant finding. From an SJE perspective, the teacher is an integral part of the learning process, and when analyzing power issues, self examination is a critical component in that it creates the "inquiry-as-stance" receptivity in one's self and in the classroom dynamics (M. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Self-reflection is also a form of metacognition, which is a valuable thinking skill. The kind of insights that Participants had in my PLC included those mentioned in McCormick's (2003) and of Darling-Hammond & Bransford 's studies (2005). To review, McCormick's work with pre-

service teachers and metacognition focused on its use in the importance of "knowing *how* to use strategies, knowing *when* to use strategies, and knowing what you do or do not understand" (2003, 82). M**y** Participants showed that that they had learned how to use new strategies, and when to use them. For example, John used strategies which he said combined both his newly-gained knowledge and skills, to interrupt and redirect intolerant remarks made by some students during class and in the media center.

At some time during the interviews, all Participants reported having learned or been reminded of something important about themselves. They needed to be self reflective to come to that awareness. This finding supports Darling-Hammond & Bransford's (2005) claim that metacognition is an extremely important principle of adult learning because it assists teachers in becoming adaptive experts. The kind of metacognition knowledge the Participants displayed here is "the understanding of one's own thinking and developing strategies for planning, analyzing, and gaining more knowledge" (Flavel, in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, 376). These findings are connected to Participants' continual self-reflection throughout the seminar, a practice consistent with several social justice writers (for examples, see M. Adams et al., 2007; Freire, 1970; M. Griffiths, 2003). Self reflection also led Participants to additional personal discoveries.

In summary, increased self knowledge had a positive impact on these outcome dimensions: increase in skill (b), increased Personal Teacher Self-efficacy (c), and it helped them to better deal with student diversity (d).

Personal Triggers

As I reported in Chapter 6, five Participants mentioned both an increased personal knowledge in recognizing their own trigger points, and a greater skill in then planning

how they would deal with those triggers if they occurred in class. The fact that four of those five also modeled for students effective ways to deal with triggers is a clear and practical application of that self-awareness in the classroom. This is a tangible way in which the PLC contributed to the teachers' knowledge (a) and skills (b), and in facing the challenges of student diversity in the classroom (d). It also fosters a safer, more affirming, and equitable learning environment (d) (M. Adams & Love, 2005).

Successful experiences such as helping students work through their own triggers in class by properly modeling the teacher's own, provides what Bandura (1994) terms a "mastery experience," and is the powerful source for raising self-efficacy beliefs.

An important additional source of raising self-efficacy beliefs is "vicarious experiences provided by social models" (A. Bandura, 1994, 71). In this case, this occurred when teachers listened to other teachers' experiences. This was accomplished when Participants such as Faye shared their successful stories of dealing effectively with their own triggers in their classroom, and modeling for students how to do so. This dynamic of this effective PLC is based in part on Bandura's suggestion that the impact of vicarious experiences provided by social models "is strongly influenced by perceived similarity to the models" (71).

<div align="center">**Reminder of Personal Values**</div>

This PLC awakened a dormant internal sense of fairness and equity for five Participants. Faye said that the PLC re-invigorated within her a lost sense of crusading for justice. She told me, "I think [the PLC has been] a reinforcement of the self confidence I used to have when I see something that's an injustice I'm quick to speak up for the kids, but when I saw injustices being purported towards my colleagues I would

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start doing the same thing." I see this as another very important finding because being grounded in an authentic sense of self is an important quality to have as a teacher, most especially during this time when teachers are under an increased stress during this time of heightened scrutiny.

As we will see below, this recognition of personal values, validated among the community, is also a source of both Personal Teacher and General Teacher Self-efficacy (d), which research has shown to be an important motivating ingredient in a teacher's decision to act upon her knowledge. The PLC, then, was a safe place for at least this group of teachers to rediscover who they genuinely are. The fact that this was done in an atmosphere that was void of administrative assessment and evaluation helped make this possible. However, it is easier to connect this finding to a way of addressing teachers' pre-PLC account of feeling isolated in their practice. Such outcomes will be discussed in the second section of this chapter.

Assessing and Identifying what Participants Need to Learn

As reported in the previous two chapters, five Participants came to realize that they did not know as much as they thought that they did about diversity. The fact that teachers were able to self-assess their content knowledge deficits is another important finding. Though humbling, it is empowering for a person in a professional position to be able to openly reflect on her knowledge gaps in a safe and supportive environment. Ideally, the PLC would help provide potential resources for knowledge acquisition, including using each other as knowledge sources. Or, as we modeled from the Adams & Love article, we used each other as "curriculum" for the seminar, in addition to the resource materials.

The PLC also identified an important content area in which they needed additional instruction. After they created their own organizing chart (see Figure 6.1) which I will discuss below, they created a second chart which graphically presented areas of growth in order to better meet their professional duties (see Figure 6.2). While the Nielsen, Barry, and Staab (2008) study of K-3 teachers involved in a PLC did report that aspects of the PLC format were changed in response to the participants' suggestion, my findings are unique. In that two year study, teachers received a task and agenda (student literacy) from administration, and after a while, made modifying suggestions to that plan. They also became more assertive change agents, advocating for materials needed to complete the task. My Participants voluntarily met and determined for themselves both the sum and substance of their professional demands, applied a holistic model of teaching and learning, adapted it to fit their reality, then formed a graph outlining the professional development areas they would need in order to better meet their re-organized duties and challenges. In this way, greater self knowledge (a) led to their better understanding of what they needed to acquire in order to better deal with the entire range of competing demands (f).

This finding also proved that teachers could produce helpful content to the research field by providing empirical evidence for the theoretical benefits of Cochran-Smith & Lytle's optimal inquiry as stance disposition of teachers in a PLC (1999). Furthermore, in addition to avoiding the trap they mention of acquiring a new knowledge or skill as the end of learning, my PLC participants actually produced data that was useful to them, and has great potential of utility to others. Put another way, in addition to the authors' warning about the limitations of acquisition only, when teachers passively ingest

professional development material, they actually perpetuate the Freirean banking method, thereby becoming conduits in oppressive, de-humanizing systems. Not only did my Participants avoid this, they did add something significant to the field, and as we will see at the end of this chapter, several also directly acted in ways consistent with their view of social justice.

Knowledge of Students

In this section, we see a clear connection between increased knowledge (a) and dealing more effectively with increasing student diversity (d) and subsequently with mandates requiring teachers to do so (e). The realities of the range of student diversities present significant challenges to teachers, and within this state, although there is a directive to teach in a culturally responsive manner, there is no unified approach, or research-based studies that offer specific ways to accomplish that. As stated earlier, this state is one of 45 that have adopted the federal teaching standards for Math and English and Language Arts teachers in the public schools. One of the skills required is for English teachers to require students to demonstrate multiple cultural perspectives (Staff, 2010), Therefore, my study's finding that seven Participants reported gaining knowledge of student diversity presents rare and promising specific steps in training teachers in matters of student diversity (d and e). This finding will add to what presumably will become a growing body of research.

Six Participants told me that they now felt better equipped to face the challenges of student diversity in the classroom because of their "greater awareness" of diverse social identities of students. Also, four of those Participants reported gaining valuable knowledge from the group dialogues on student diversity. In contrast, no Control teacher

reported any gains in facing the challenges of student diversity from their work during the same 10 week period. Yet the issues of social justice education are multifaceted, and realizations require intentional and ongoing work (M. Adams et al., 2007, esp. 35-66).

A specific example of a Participant's broader understanding of diversity is expressed through Faye's sharing with the group. She said she learned that she has to now look beyond the "visually obvious" racial diversity of students and to discover other social identities. She now routinely asks what is important to the students, and important for her to know about them so that she could relate the curriculum better to them, and be more authentic during the process. This directly addresses the question I sought at the beginning, concerning the kinds of knowledge Participants would seek to gain from their students. Subsequently, at least three Participants (John, Theresa, and Goulet) told me during the interviews that when Faye and others shared those kinds of interactions during meetings, it served as inspiration or motivation to do likewise. Coincidentally, those sharing their interactions reported feeling validated by the community. That cyclical, reinforcing dynamic was a key feature of the value of the PLC to the Participants.

Faye and the others, then, learned more about the complexities of student diversity, especially those that are beneath surface appearance. Their increased knowledge of student diversity has led them to change their pedagogy and relationships with the students. There was no such reported change in the Control open-field question about how they have handled student diversity during the same time period. Indeed, not only was there no apparent gain in the Controls' knowledge of student diversity, or reported motivation to learn more about who the student was and what pedagogy would best work, but two of the Controls stated that there was little student diversity in the school. Two

Controls reported that they seldom if ever had a problem associated with diversity in their classes. And I interpret the silence of the other respondents on the topic to be diagnostic of what some social justice theorists term the injustice of *non*-recognition, or *mis*-recognition (for example, Fraser, 2007). I noticed a similar sentiment in two of the Participants, which warrants some further analysis.

Goulet, a Participant who expressed beliefs similar to the Control member named Anonymous, did not indicate that he had gained additional understanding of diversity within his classroom. Yet it is Lisa's following comments about apparent classroom diversity issues that expose us to a subtle but important aspect of social justice education.

In Chapter 6, I reported Lisa's observation that in one of her classes there were no problem with issues of diversity, but there was a problem in the other class that, prior to this PLC, she had been "pushing out of [her] mind." She planned to address that class's problem more directly. Lisa's assessment of the lack of diversity issues in her first class was similar to assessments made by Goulet, and two Controls. Were there truly no diversity-related issues in those classes?

The journey to creating an optimal, social justice classroom is long, and filled with growing self-awarenesses within the role as social justice educators (M. Adams et al., 2007, esp. 381-395). It is notable that Lisa and the others think the only time to be concerned about social justice or diversity issues is when *they* perceive a problem. This is an example of the limits of a singular view in *social* justice and in the limits of using only one's empathy as the primary technique for becoming aware of diversity issues. That position supposes that there is only one main person whose opinions ultimately count, and if that person does not see something, it must not exist. That realization is an

important aspect in the power analysis of majority groups within society. Lisa's next sentence about "[her] other class" confirms the disposition that "something only exists if I see it." Social justice education reminds us that there may indeed be issues beyond the awareness of any one adult, who herself has been socialized within a cycle (Harro, B. in M. Adams et al., 2000). A parallel discovery is when several Participants "discovered" additional realities of student diversity below the surface ones like race (although, of course, a student could have a multi-racial heritage, and "pass" as white). This, too, is another example of *non*-recognition of diversity, of social injustices, and of power inequities. If this were to arise during a group discussion, it would be important for someone (the facilitator, if no one else notices it) to challenge the statement and pose a question which would probe the realities of diversity currently hidden to the participant (or the students, if it occurred in a classroom). The lack of one's intention to harm does not remove the felt sense of injury to the victim or triggered recipient. I believe that future PLCs should address this element more directly, as some of the worst harm is done unknowingly. Such an apparently-benign disposition by the teacher actually reproduces societal inequities and silencing.

Another by-product of the traditional education approach is student apathy or more overt classroom disruptive behavior, due in large part to fact that the student's voice is not of equal importance in the social exchange of learning. Finally, I believe that this traditional type of approach to education is also a hidden precursor to violence. That is, violence towards students begins when teachers see them essentially as de-personalized recipients—even recipients of the teacher's imparting of knowledge, which is what Freire called the "banking" practice of traditional education. He believed that "Violence is

initiated by those who …fail to recognize others as persons" (1970, 55). The de-personalization by the traditional educational approach is a subtle but real form or de-humanizing, and when the humanity is reduced or stratified, the system of oppression is reproduced, and as authors such as Young (1990) have pointed out, violence is a necessary component maintaining it. When students do not share a legitimate voice in the learning process, when students' issues exist only through the eyes of the teacher, and are not valued as personal truths, no matter how incredulous or uncomfortable, injustice and the seeds of violence are "benevolently" being sown. This kind of reflective PLC infused with a social justice perspective helps Participants realize these insidious effects of exclusive use of the traditional educational methods, as it applies to both them and to their students.

A promising early finding in this PLC, then, is the beginning of recognition of a range of social identities, some of which are hidden, but no less impactful. Faye and the others provide evidence that increased awareness of the complex and sometimes hidden nature of diversity can lead teachers to respond in more culturally sensitive and appropriate ways in the classroom. In summary, increased knowledge (a) of student diversity led to teachers recognizing and beginning to effectively deal with the challenges of diversity they face in the classroom.

Increased Content Knowledge of Social Justice and SJE

As reported in the last chapter, seven Participants reported gaining an increased content knowledge of social justice, SJE, and in student (and human) diversity. Hunter and Chantal especially found the required readings instructive. Hunter told me that "The assigned readings really opened my eyes to the incredible influences, pressures, and

developmental changes in my students and in myself as a teacher." However, each of the 10 said at one time during the sessions, or during the interview, that because of the density of those readings, each needed more time with them to more fully comprehend, and then apply them to the classroom. That is a predictable finding, and is indicative of the amount of new content an in-service teacher should be expected to assimilate and apply during a school year. As this study has qualitatively demonstrated, teachers face numerous competing mandates, challenges, and duties. Significant content material in professional development, such as SJE, would demand more focused attention from teachers.

Increased content knowledge (a) did in some cases lead to effectively deal with student diversity (d), but Participants were not able to report with confidence that they were adequately cognizant of social justice in education.

Reorganization of Personal Reintegration of Mandates and Duties

I reported in Chapter 5 that all 20 teachers in this study stated their desire for increased knowledge, skill and or self confidence in dealing with the numerous challenges they face inside the classroom, and with the mandates issued from outside stakeholders. As I reported earlier, both groups of teachers separately accounted for the challenges they had faced, currently confronted, or expected to have to deal with. The total numbers are alarming. See Table 7.1 below.

Both Sets of Teacher-Identified Mandates and Professional Obligations	Total Number
Pre-PLC Participant-Identified Teaching Challenges	43
Pre-PLC Participant-Identified Outside Mandates	30
Pre-PLC Control-Identified Teaching Challenges	43

Pre-PLC Control-Identified Outside Mandates	35
During PLC Participant Identified List of Professional Obligations	34
During PLC Participant Identified List of Additional Duties	16

Table 7.1 Total Numbers of Teacher Professional Obligations from Both Sets

I emphasize that merely accounting for this simple inventory by teachers of their professional challenges and obligations is unique in the education reform literature.

Participants reported on average that after the PLC, they had greater knowledge of the challenges, mandates, and duties they faced. Several told me during their interview, such as John and Goulet, that merely accounting for the duties, then ranking them, was itself helpful.

Participants did report that the Adams/Love model helped them to recognize and deal with the challenges of diversity in the classroom. They also found that the model helped them to more critically analyze that range of competing demands from the multiple sources. Therefore, from their perspective, greater knowledge (a) led them to recognize and later deal with the range of external mandates about diversity (e) and others (f). Controls did not report a more complete understanding of the range of professional challenges after the PLC concluded.

We have discussed how increases in knowledge across several domains have positively addressed the seven outcome dimensions from my two research questions. We turn next determine if participants identified any increases in their skill levels after the PLC, and how those reports compared and contrasted with the Controls.

Participants' Paradoxical Self-Reports of their Post-PLC Skill Levels

For this study, I defined the term "skill" to refer to the teacher's demonstrated ability that is performed at the appropriate time. In their conversations during the sessions, and during their interviews, Participants often used the terms "knowledge" and "skill" interchangeably. I recorded several instances of skillful behaviors from Participants. Yet in their closed field questionnaires, Participants on average reported a negligible decrease after the PLC in their self reports of skill level (-0.1). This finding corresponds to the three Participants who shared their awareness of the limitations of their knowledge about social justice education and the range of human diversity. I also noted that throughout the sessions, Participants would share uncertainties about how they would handle the numerous potential issues they now increasingly understood to be within the fuller range of diversity and social justice. I interpret their Post-PLC self reports as predictable indicators of increased knowledge and awareness. That is, when they became aware of what they did not know, they became somewhat more tentative in applying what they were learning. It is also consistent with Piaget's account of discomfort and uncertainty when a person is trying a new skill. I have also observed that kind of uncertainty as a coach, when I would be introducing and then drilling players on new skills.

Four Participants identified as a new skill their ability to reorganize the existing challenges and mandates. When prompted further, they reported feeling more relieved, and less stressed about the tasks. This is a very important finding for at least two reasons. First, all 20 teachers participating in the study indicated that they desired increased knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy in order to more effectively address their teaching

challenges and outside mandates. Post- PLC Participants reported feeling less stressed about the numerous demand than did the Controls.

A second reason that Participants' perceived reduction in stress level is important is that they could, in theory, more effectively exercise their "generative capabilities" and more efficiently apply their knowledge and skills (A. Bandura, 1993). Reduced stress levels, then, is an unexpected but beneficial discovery of this enhanced PLC design.

Five Participants said they were humbled by what they did not know concerning the extent of social injustice via social identities and oppression, especially in relation to what they thought they knew coming into the seminar. As a result of their accretion, these Participants began to think more realistically about the skills they possess regarding social justice educational practices and diversity awareness, and evaluated themselves lower than before the PLC. They also began to appreciate the skill levels required in order effectively deal with issues involving social justice. But Participants also reported being aided by the readings and the discussions within the PLC. Therefore, their self assessment is a paradoxically positive finding: the PLC *helped them* by providing content knowledge, which led to more accurate insight, then creating an openness to learning how to more skillfully and appropriately respond professionally.

Conversely, Controls showed a slight increase in skills self-assessment. I believe this is due to the fact that of those Controls who reported increased knowledge and skills gained during the time of my seminar, 100% wrote that they had learned specific aspects of external mandated requirements. Those included learning technological additions, and in some cases, having re-written some curricula in the required format. While certainly useful in performing certain professional tasks, no Control reported the kinds of personal

insights and powerful modeling for students that Irish reported. No Control member reported the whole-person benefits that the Participants did. In effect, Controls' findings mirrored the mechanistic manner of instruction of their PLCs, as did Participants' reports of whole-person positive effects reflected the holistic manner in which this PLC operated.

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2007) would term this aspect of my PLC findings as "building shared knowledge," which they define as "learning together [because] when members of a PLC are called upon to resolve an issue or make a decision, they consistently attempt to learn together by clarifying questions and accessing the same information and knowledge base" (434). Also, the nuanced, enhanced understanding of social justice education and social identities the Participants demonstrated would be termed "capacity building," which the DuFours and Eaker define as "developing the collective ability—the dispositions, knowledge, skills, motivation, and resources—to act together to bring about positive change" (R. DuFour, 2007, citing Fullan, 464).

What capacity building does not account for, but my study did account for, is that even though Participants on average reported in the closed-field responses no increase in skill level, they did act skillfully in their interactions with students and administrators. That presents another paradoxical discovery. Within this averaged lower skills self-assessment is the fact that five Participants reported having acted in what I would assess as *skillfully* with students and or with administrators. In those cases, those teachers acted in ways consistent with social justice, and all 10 Participants stated that in the future, even though not all currently doing so, they wished to act in ways consistent with what they learned in the PLC. I will discuss their reported actions in the second section of this

chapter. I believe that Participants' modeled scenarios increased the Personal Teacher Self-efficacy in others, and Personal Teacher Self-Efficacy is vital in planning to act.

Yet even when factoring in their skills assessment, almost every Participant in my seminar reported feeling greater self confidence, as we will see next.

Participants Reported Greater Self Confidence after PLC

To review, for this study, I define Personal Teacher Self-efficacy as a teacher's beliefs in her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce desired goals within the interactive quadrants of the classroom. General Teacher Self-efficacy refers to the teacher's beliefs in his capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce desired goals within the professional duties outside the classroom, involving mandates and duties assigned to the teacher, and including meaningfully affecting his work environment.

Participants used the term "self confidence" instead of "self-efficacy."

Nine Participants told me that they could identify some increase in self confidence after having taken this PLC seminar. Overall, answers to this question were the lengthiest of all interview answers. Five teachers provided critical incidents, with three sharing more than one incident. I got the strong impression during the interviews that they had a lot they wanted to share about their new confidence level. As I reported in Chapter 6, Participants like Hunter and John unequivocally stated that their decisions to act in new ways was based on the knowledge they gained, and the confidence that their actions would be supported by the group. Seven Participants shared at least one story indicating an increase in Personal Teacher Self-efficacy. Five relayed stories in which they demonstrated General Teacher Efficacy (there was overlap).

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The fact that my PLC group reported greater self-confidence than the Controls could explain their increased willingness *to act* on their knowledge by speaking for non-present voices. This supports the research linking self-efficacy to effective action (A. Bandura, 1998; Hoy & Spero, 2005).

The Participants also averaged higher scores across the three subscales of the construct-validated questionnaire I used, which I will now discuss.

Higher Average Increases than Controls in Each Subscale in the OSTES

The Participants reported a higher average increase in each of the three subscales within the construct-validated Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's OSTES.

The PLC's higher post-PLC assessment in their Classroom Management subfield bears closer examination. Although not a statistically significant difference in scores between the two groups, Participants rated themselves slightly higher after the PLC, at a .6 positive increase. Strikingly, the Controls scored themselves an average of *-4* during the same time period. Generally, teachers' attitudes change during the course of a year. My pre-survey was taken by all teachers in mid October, and the post-survey was taken between December 23 and January 6, 2011. During my 30-plus years of teaching in the public schools, I have noticed that when teachers approach the end of December, they tend to have a fairly established view of their full-year classes. That opinion, based on the interactions and experience of 16 weeks of almost daily contact with the students, is often in contrast with their new-year optimism in September. I have heard many teachers lament the behavior of some of their students by December, once the "honeymoon" of the new school year had worn off. Therefore, the fact that Participants did not score negatively, and in fact increased slightly in that dimension, is another indicator of the

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value of this kind of PLC to teachers. I believe that bears further research, as I will discuss in Chapter 8.

Research Question Outcome Dimensions Summary

So far, we have seen how the PLC has helped Participants in the research questions' outcome dimensions of knowledge, skill, self-efficacy, and student diversity. We have discovered that in the course of discussing the PLC's benefits to them, in contrast with the Controls, Participants also spoke of feeling less stressed, more connected to their inner values, and felt that they were managing their classes well.

We have seen that Participants identified and listed the range of professional demands inside and outside of the classroom. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Adams and Love model of teaching and learning served as the PLC's organizing tool, and they used it each week to more fully explore each of the four quadrants. In the process of doing that, Participants discovered that there were other duties and pressures they faced, beyond the four quadrants, and those pressures also influenced what transpired within the classroom. Pre-PLC, teachers reported feeling "overwhelmed" by those additional demands, several of which were clerical tasks that were time consuming. As the seminar progressed, Participants collectively requested that the proposed agenda be altered to better meet what they determined to need. Participants were requesting something that had never been granted to them in prior PLC experiences: the power to direct their own learning according to needs they identified. We turn next to examine more closely the results of that exciting development.

Discoveries Beyond Research Questions

Participants Gain Greater Sense of Empowerment

Philosophically, "power" can be defined as the ability to effect a change. The Participants demonstrated power as a collective when they inventoried all the professional expectations, examined them through the lens of the Adams/Love holistic model, then constructed their own organizer. Those constructive actions directly affected (changed) how they perceived their work, and as we will see, for each, directly impacted what they had done or planned to do. This set of actions certainly answers how the PLC has helped the teachers face the challenges of the school year. More importantly, these accomplishments in the PLC gave each a sense of ownership in important elements of their job and workplace. Those are attributes of societally and legalized recognized professions of some of their workplace. As I have written in another volume, autonomy over work conditions is an identifying feature of a profession (Harak, 1988). Hord & Tobia (2012) also believe that PLCs, modeled on established professions, and dedicated to the ongoing acquisition of knowledge and skills to improve student learning, is an essential step towards raising the occupation of teaching to that of a profession (7-17). Collectively and individually, Participants felt more "expert" in their own realm after the seminar, thus approximating movement towards a stronger partnership in current educational reforms. Therefore, as an antidote for the debilitating personal and professional effects of being disempowered, teachers working within this type of PLC can claim an immediate sense of empowerment. They need not wait for recognition of their professional status by lawmakers and pundits; they can act within their own sphere

of influence and continue to produce meaningful learning for themselves and for their students.

Additionally, by the PLC demonstrated a critical "inquiry as stance" approach advocated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) by not merely consuming the content knowledge which was, in this case, a sound research-based holistic model. It also counters the "banking method" used by dominant, oppressive systems (Freire, 1970). When these Participants were encouraged to frequently inquire within and about their surrounding system, and encouraged to decide for themselves, they produced both a organizer that categorized their duties (following the Pareto Principle), and a second organizer indicating the training and actions they would need to take to enact the first. This is indeed a promising outcome of this PLC. There were other instances of Participants acting in powerful ways.

As facilitator, I often encouraged Participants to explore actions they had taken or could take in situations involving diversity and social justice, and what had empowered them to act. An example of a personal growth within this PLC comes from Hunter's story. She told me that she felt she had changed as a result of the PLC, and when prompted to provide evidence, she told me that it began with her first trying out a new approach in the PLC:

> By becoming more vocal in the group, we're going to become more vocal in the school because we've already practiced it in a safe place. I know that's worked for me because now when I go out into a larger group or with people of authority, it's really helped me. It's been a model for me to become more of an advocate.

The PLC provided a safe but challenging environment that helped her in ways beyond the scope of the research questions. She has gotten in touch with a part of her, had identified and gone through a "learning edge," (Griffin, in M. Adams et al., 2007, 54-55)

and has exercised a power within herself when in relation to others with whom she previously felt silenced. The PLC, in Hunter's own words, through modeling, significantly increased her General Teacher Efficacy. Chantal also showed an increase in that scale.

Another noteworthy specific instance of empowerment occurred when Chantal shared in meeting nine her further reduction of the interactions within the classroom into "curriculum and relationships with students." During the last meeting, she said that what I had been "walking [the PLC] through is all very connected to real research and real theory, and there is a design to it…[are the external mandates] anchored in something that resembles the truth [of our experiences]?" This kind of critical questioning and synthesis of research and experience is empowering to teachers. Participants were clearly feeling that they were exerting their power within their professional circumstances. This development was in stark opposition to their initial feelings in the seminar, when they felt like powerless recipients of the mandates and additions.

Taking more direct control, and acting constructively within their work place, is a powerful professional action. Healthy empowerment is also a hallmark of social justice, and one need not be a member of a typically-oppressed minority to fall victim to abdicating one's rightful power to exercise control, and to truly facilitate an equal exchange among students. If teachers have internalized powerlessness, how can they embody empowerment to another typically dis-empowered group? The inequitable power structure of public education perpetuates social injustice, and most assuredly ensures continued reproduction of social inequity, where the disempowered, non-recognized seek

unhealthy and unfair ways to assert its own brand of what usually turns out to be dominative power over, not power with.

This kind of PLC, then, could produce learning from teachers, and then, to students, that could help educate the public about the advantages of educational experiences that are holistic, and include the social, emotional and social justice aspects for all learners. Rather than perpetuate the current mechanistic, traditional trends towards compartmentalizing within a skill-only emphasis, teachers who collaborate from within this kind of PLC better equip their to read, then to re-write their world in ways that promote equity and social justice. The healthy empowerment of educators and learners, then, is another promising outcome of this study.

For those six Participants, the PLC helped them find and have confidence in using their voice to enact social justice. The PLC seemed to remind them of a sense of moral imperative to act. But even when they acted away from the PLC, they each shared a striking similarity in their sense of connectedness with each other, and it is that discovery we turn to next.

Participants' Positive Attitudes about this PLC

In my attitudinal scale, Participants rated their attitudes about PLCs on average 4.7 higher than prior to taking the PLC, statistically different than the Controls' assessment of the value of PLCs of 0.6 (p = .04). This is especially meaningful because each Participant had previously been a member of a PLC in this school prior to this seminar. And although all were also concurrently part of another administrative-designed team of teachers, not one Participant mentioned their work in those teams during the interviews. None mentioned that team of teachers they were assigned to as a "PLC," or as having had

an impact on them as a learning community. Interestingly, none of the Controls mentioned their community as a value in their open fields, and that is supported by their relatively slight on-average increased attitude about PLCs.

What is notably absent from the Controls is any mention of relationships with colleagues, positive or negative. Only one mentioned a positive experience within her PLC, and that comment was parenthetical. When answering the question about new skills, she wrote, "…not all activities are successful for all learners and that by talking to colleagues, I can utilize a different approach to reach more learners." The Controls' closed and open-field responses about PLCs puts them somewhere between the "We meet" and "We Collaborate" groupings described by Hord and Tobia (2012, 39-42). In their field research, the authors categorized the three types of PLCs they observed. The "We meet" PLC meets regularly, but with little understanding about intentions or long range goals. The "We collaborate" group focuses on the group solving a series of tasks, such as the curriculum revision that the Controls mentioned. But seldom is there any note of the requisite teachers' learning…[and] [o]ne wonders whether it is assumed that they already have this knowledge and skill…if they are not in the knowledge based and skills sets of teachers, how do teachers develop the deep content knowledge and practice the envisioned skills to employ in support of student learning? (40).

The authors' question is precisely the realization that the Participants continued to voice, as they discussed the slew of new and additional requirements, most of which they had no knowledge of how to execute. This awareness was evident when the Participants followed their constructed organizer (see Figure 6.3) immediately with the realization

that they needed additional training in UBD in order to successfully implement meet that

requirement, as well as the others they branched from UBD (see Figure 6.4).

During the interviews, six Participants emphasized the value to them of a supportive

community of teachers working within a teacher-responsive PLC. Theresa stated that

"the part of the PLC that's really useful is having those conversations about best practice

in the class and what really helps people connect better and learn from one another."

Most Participants commented to me about the safety and comfort they during the

meetings. This was typified by Hunter's observation that "people cared …a healthy, safe

place to talk about teacher issues and so we were able to unconsciously absorb how to

handle different things, and just being with like-minded colleagues will give you that

which is great."

I would also attribute the positive finding to the rapidly-built trust among the

members. As Hord and Tobia point out, trust is an essential component of a successful

PLC (89). Trust was built rather quickly in this PLC, which allows for the kinds of

personal sharing of their knowledge and skill, thus opening them to the "scrutiny of their

fellow teachers, for better or worse" (88).

Participants also reported being helped by the fact that they were not alone in their

range of feelings of inadequacy, of being overwhelmed, of guilt about not meeting all of

the requirements on time, and the like. Goulet captured that sentiment well, when he told

me,

> The PLC was definitely helpful in that it helped get some perspective about me
> not being alone in my anxiety, in my stress of having things heaped up on top of
> me, also it helped me put things in perspective as far as if you are doing one of
> these major things you are hitting multiple things at the same time, ideally, so that
> the tasks given to us don't seem so overwhelming.

My observations have led me to postulate that another positive element for Participants was the favorable environment that this volunteer, committed group of similarly-interested teachers provided. At some time, each commented that the group always stayed on task, with a clear focus and progression, which was not only unique in their prior experiences in professional development seminars and PLCs, but it helped give them tools, or sharpen the tools they possessed, to more efficiently and more calmly deal with the apparently impossible task of doing all the requirements on time, and equally well.

In this way, this PLC has helped to begin to give them that spiritual, emotional support, as evidenced, in part, by their enthusiasm about it, not wanting the PLC to end, and most significantly, the fact that several of us have continued to meet biweekly to this day.

All Participants characterized this PLC in one or more of the following: helped them also by providing a place in which they could count on being heard by the others; that it was a safe place, free of judgment; one that maintained confidentiality.

From this supportive community, Participants told me about some important changes they planned to make.

Participants Plan to Continue Changes

When I interviewed the Participants and asked them what if anything that learned in the PLC that they were not currently doing, but would like to do in the future, nine shared plans of specific actions related to teaching. Five wanted to build more inclusive, positive class environments. As a result of understanding the importance of "knowing our students," as analyzed in the seminar, three teachers stated that they will intentionally

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seek to learn more about each student. This new knowledge would be valuable in redesigning curriculum and pedagogy, in better understanding the teacher's own attitudes and beliefs about certain social identities of students, and serve another aspect of social justice education. As John said to me, by learning more about each other, the knowledge would "raise students' awareness of diversity and how diversity can be oppressed."

The others said that they planned to continue to research the subjects of diversity and social justice in education, or to alter the curricula to reflect greater inclusion of those subjects.

These findings again provide empirical support for how the teachers found that this holistic PLC would help them recognize and deal with the challenges of student diversity in the classroom. But it surpasses just that research question, in that teachers plan to undertake additional research and to redesign curriculum in ways consistent with social justice and mindful of the range of their own, and students' diversity. This finding certainly supports North's (2009) final social competency of "visionary" literacy.

In closing, I found the next data particularly exciting, in that it is experimental evidence of praxis.

When Teachers Change: Participants who have Acted as Agents for Change/Social Justice

The most powerful outcome of this PLC related to SJE has been that six Participants have already become agents of social change (For some examples of agency in SJE, see Bell, L., in M. Adams et al., 2007; Freire, 1970; Freire, 1992; E. Gutstein, 2007; hooks, 2003). As I reported in Chapter 6, three teachers interrupted students' verbal injustices. At two separate times, John interrupted two different students who were speaking

derogatorily about the targeted groups of Jewish people, and people with mental disabilities. John told me during our interview that he "definitely" felt inspired and motivated by the PLC. He continued, "Finding out other people are doing it and finding out I'm part of a movement within the faculty to enforce principles of social justice…that camaraderie and that shared responsibility is a huge motivator from the PLC." This reveals a spiritual connection among members, even when not meeting.

Three Participants challenged administrative directives they thought unfair and not considerate of teachers' existing demands. Goulet's rationale for speaking was that he now believed that as a teacher, "we have a right to participate in the design of how [and when we perform our duties], not just responding [automatically] to the directives and orders and mandates." This is action consistent with a rightful sense of empowerment.

Coupled with Participants like Irish and Jackie, who now felt it helpful to be more transparent about their emotions and personal weaknesses with their students, greater teacher recognition of the range of injustices that students reproduce in the class and interruption and modeling—all provides evidence of new teacher agency in acting and reflecting (Freire, 1970, 125).

All Participants, then, have either acted or planned to act in ways that are consistent with positive agency for change. An expressed desire is an indication of the greater capacity for awareness, itself a form of knowledge that can lead to the greater possibility of positive actions. That is, people have the awareness, language to imagine what they want to do, using some seminal research points as the "theory to illuminate" those actions, as Freire termed it (125).

But besides acting, another remarkable finding is that like John, the others also felt that the PLC was with them in spirit. This finding provides evidence of the powerful holistic changes that this type of PLC can produce in individuals and in a community.

In summary, as a result of their experience within the PLC, Participants reported personal changes that impacted them in a holistic way; that is, on levels in addition to the intellectual measures of knowledge and skills, and include spiritual and emotional dimensions. This is an empirical finding of the Freirean term of "praxis," which requires theory, to which "action, reflection, the word, and the work" are fused (87).

Conclusion

My analysis of the range and impact of what Participants gained from this PLC helps fill three voids in the literature, presented in Chapter 2. The first is the relative lack of completed analyses of what knowledge teachers acquired, reported by Wilson and Berne (1999). The second is the absence a PLC design facilitated and operated from a social justice perspective, comprised of motivated, invested teachers who voluntarily attended in the hopes of helping each other to effectively manage a wide range of teaching challenges and mandates. The third is inclusion in the academic literature of in-service teachers' self-identified concerns, and their contributions to the academic literature which includes their construction of organizers that helped them integrate their duties, and then to determine the kinds of knowledge and skills enhancement they would need to best meet those demands.

Participants within this uniquely designed PLC attempted to gain control over their own domain, and to bring their own voices to the complex task of teaching. By inventorying, discussing, synthesizing, and then creating a new model that deals with the

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totality of mandates and challenges, Participants used their intellect and experience within the company of others in a shared journey. Their efforts and the results of this study provide a product that can be used in efforts to reform public education. Even if teachers are not granted professional status, they can employ professional powers in their classroom, and within a like-minded community of professionals. There, they can continue to develop professionally, help each other equitably deal with the growing "diversity gap" between their students and them, and to journey together in this noble enterprise.

If administrators and other stakeholders would "risk" structurally empowering teachers to collaborate in their own professional development, as this piloted PLC did, teachers will bring their unique and necessary perspectives and expertise to the complex enterprise of teaching and learning. In so doing, such empowered teachers will provide healthy and appropriate enactment of personal power and agency to students living in an increasingly complicated and diverse human family.

CHAPTER 8

CURRENT APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this chapter, I provide two sets of concise recommendations. Based on the entirety of the research experience, data, and interpretation, I position this work as a new starting point for current and future consideration in teacher professional development. I will not fully develop each suggestion. In the first set, I suggest several ways in which my study's findings can be applied to teacher professional development; specifically, to the PLC format. In the second set, I indicate that certain findings from this study imply future research on empowering teachers so as to optimally enhance teaching and learning in the public high schools.

Applications of this Study for Ongoing Professional Development in PLCs

1) *Merge a social justice education (SJE) perspective with the best-practice procedures of current PLCs:* A SJE perspective greatly enhances a participant's focus on the four dynamically interacting elements of teaching and learning. Equally important is the emphasis on the process, empowerment, identifying and challenging reproductions of injustice and privilege within the PLC, so that teachers can provide a more holistic, humanistic educational experience for students. The ability to recognize levels of diversity beyond learning styles is of critical importance to the increasingly white teachers, facing an increasingly diverse student body. This practice will also counterbalance the mechanistic, de-humanizing trends in current educational reform that tend to focus only on specific, often detached, student-demonstrated skills in standardized tests.

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In addition, this kind of PLC will increase a teacher's understanding of student diversity beyond learning differences. With a fuller appreciation of the kinds of challenges students face through their targeted identities, teachers will come to better understand that not all differences are "equal," and therefore work more diligently in leveling the field in the classroom.

2) ***Encourage teachers to be co-creators of the PLC from its inception, through its content, process, applicability to classroom, and accountability procedures:*** This study has clearly shown that when teachers are engaged in matters of importance regarding professional issues, grounded in their practice with matters they regularly confront, they are highly motivated to find practical approaches in problem solving. But this study also showed that teachers were interested in working "smarter." That is, when they could reorganize the challenges and mandates to work more efficiently, they created an organizer to account for what they did do that met requirements. They also determined preliminarily specifically what they needed to do in the future, and that included additional knowledge or training. When teachers are legitimately empowered—or act on their own without waiting for others to empower them--this study provides evidence that they act like professionals in that they address issues relevant to their practice.

3) ***Allow teachers to also experience the learning in the PLC inductively, and to be cognizant of serendipitous discoveries. This will likely encourage them to provide parallel learning processes for students:*** The standard format of PLCs currently asks that teachers work together in finding ways to address and to execute current mandates established by outside experts. This practice limits

teacher "ownership." For example, suppose that teachers in a PLC are instructed to revise a curriculum to include new state or federal student skills. That task-based assignment can be effectively accomplished within current high-functioning PLCs. While it is important to focus on a task such as that, if that becomes the sole focus, teachers are likely to be fooled into thinking that their learning stops there. They are less likely to continue to inquire about the interaction of curriculum with pedagogy, teacher, and student (M. Adams & Love, 2005), and not consider the kinds of "grassroots change" (M. Cochran-Smith, 1999) that would more likely occur if teachers kept an inquiry stance and kept mindful of the discoveries that could happen while attending to the outcome goal. Additionally, a skills-only approach to learning greatly impoverishes the potentially rich enterprise of a holistic, humanistic, socially just approach to teaching and learning, in that the latter addresses core issues to humanity, and seeks to involve all aspects of the human experience.

In my roles as teacher mentor and PLC facilitator, I have observed that committed teachers often share the quality of enjoying the process and outcomes of learning and *sharing those discoveries with others.* In this study, when Participants learned a new process technique, they often immediately took it to the class. I suspect that if teachers remain excited about their own learning process—which is more likely to occur if they work in a teacher-responsive PLC—they are likely to share the learning process with their students.

4) ***Knowledge is power, if used:*** When a PLC is operated with the principles of a social justice perspective, it is more likely that teachers will acquire a more

nuanced knowledge base from which they can identify a broader spectrum of injustices, and could therefore choose to act in a more socially just, fair way. The PLC could serve as a safe arena to share ways in which teachers can challenge and support each other in dealing with student and school issues. If Participants in my study are typical of teachers elsewhere, school systems which employ this kind of PLC can expect its participants to act with a sense of moral imperative and a sense of connectedness and support from that PLC, even when acting outside of that PLC.

5) *Encourage teachers and administration to determine together which of the challenges and mandates are primarily the teacher's responsibility, and which require others for successful completion:* In my study, all 20 teachers indicated high stress levels and uncertainty about their roles in meeting all the classroom challenges and external mandates. They tallied over 50 challenges and external mandates that they currently face. Increased stress levels have a negative effect on self-efficacy (see A. Bandura, 1994), and the more disempowered the teacher feels, the less likely the teacher is to become an equal, empowered partner in the educational process. Participants in my study reported increases in knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and a more positive association with working within a PLC than did the Controls. Participants also reported feeling less stressed, less confused about the connectivity of the challenges and mandates, and more hopeful. When teachers are empowered to determine what their primary and secondary responsibilities are, it will reduce their stress levels and create more realistic expectations. If this process can be done collaboratively with

administration, it will greatly improve communication among educators as well as providing the basis for reasonable partnership in the teaching and learning process. I also suspect that a broader collaboration with teachers and administration would enhance self-efficacy and confidence of all involved.

6) ***Facilitating a PLC with a social justice perspective accelerated the relational trust necessary for any PLC to function well:*** Facilitation style is essential in this kind of PLC. A necessary first step in any facilitation is to help establish a trusting environment in the PLC. Several elements are necessary in building a trusting environment. Some are obvious: assurances of confidentiality, no administrative evaluations, voluntary status (anyone can leave at any time without retribution). Other were intentional, such as asking teachers what behaviors they expected from themselves to make the PLC a safe place, and facilitating activities that explored people's social identities. Trust can be established in a relatively short period of time, and that leads to more authentic sharing and efficient work during the time spent together.

7) ***When the whole person is considered in a PLC, the teacher is affected on an intellectual, emotional, and spiritual level:***   This PLC attended to the whole teacher. In that way, it "embraced the idea that teaching and leading must embody personal, spiritual, and emotional dimensions…" (Palmer & Rudnicki, 2009, 195)**.** This kind of holistic, humanistic engagement requires continual self-reflection and engagement with others that require authenticity and vulnerability. Therefore, the importance of a safe, supportive PLC is underscored. This need is

even more urgent when accounting for today's culture, in which public school teachers are highly scrutinized.

Researchers and practitioners in SJE have advocated for strong communities while working in the field (for example, M. Adams et al., 2007; M. Griffiths , 1998; S. Nieto, 2000; North, 2009). Many others in different fields have also extolled the value of the community, including Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Beloved Community" concept, and many others who work for peace and justice. The benefits from a supportive community are extensive.

Implications for Future Research on Teacher Professional Development

In this section, I recommend areas of future research, based on this study's limitations, my observations, and of course, my research findings.

1) ***Would a mandated socially-just based PLC produce similar results?***
   Participants repeatedly emphasized the unifying aspect of each member's volitional attendance as being a shared element that probably helped them quickly trust and work well with each other. They had a shared interest in the purpose and focus of my study, and I assured them that I would not be reporting my findings to the administration, nor was I going to evaluate them. If the reverse of those factors were true, would the resulting PLC produce similar process and learning outcomes?

2) ***Broaden the Sample Size and Demographics:*** Will similar results occur in PLCs consisting of mixed ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and various other social identities? It would be interesting to purposely populate a PLC with a variety of people with different social identities. But once there is intentional

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grouping of teachers according to social identities, years of teaching experience, and the like, care must be taken to keep the "inquiry-as-stance" posture towards teacher learning. The experimental purpose of such grouping would be to determine if the participating teachers would add to the learning experience. The basic design would be the same, in that the unifying threads would be the flexible learning and teaching model, and the teachers' collective responses to identifying, re-organizing, and taking empowered steps in addressing their local challenges.

Similarly, future research could be conducted in a variety of geographic areas, including urban and rural settings.

3) ***Is the organizing tool the Participants created useful and applicable to other high school teachers?*** Teachers who created this tool in this school site did so during session 9 of 10, and the 10th session was a wrap up that did not provide enough opportunity for this PLC to field test their tool. Certainly the process of developing it can be reproduced in a future study by any PLC, but it would be of interest to determine if the actual organizer were useful to other high school teachers. Perhaps a different PLC would construct an organizer that was useful to them and to their identified needs and challenges.

4) ***What is the most effective and efficient way to incorporate this kind of PLC into the teacher's work load?*** High school teachers do not want or need additional things to do; they tend to abhor add-ons. In a clear movement towards teacher empowerment, teachers need to determine what kind of PLC they need, review both the traditional, current, and this kind of PLC to

determine which best meet their needs, then try it and reassess. The PLC of this study helped teachers face the challenges of their school year. Would this same PLC help others face their local challenges, including how their state and local district has adapted the federal mandates and incentives?

5) *Can this kind of PLC renew teachers' commitment and enthusiasm for teaching?* At least one Participant in this study implied that this PLC staved off her burn-out; all stated that the PLC helped them in a variety of ways, including spiritually and emotionally. Given the added stress and declining teacher satisfaction with their jobs, could an empowering and immediately relevant (because of its ongoing responsiveness to teacher issues via the framework of a social justice perspective) PLC invigorate participants and counter the debilitating effects of added scrutiny and building demands? Additionally, most Participants in this study reported frequent feelings of dissatisfaction with themselves that they could not do all that was required equally well. Future studies using this model can account for pre- and post- attitudes about one's job satisfaction as another discreet subfield.

6) *Conduct a metastudy on the use of social justice perspectives within PLCs:* In my research, I did not find studies in the high school that duplicated my design. A metastudy could determine of Freirean or other SJE-based designs ground current or past PLCs.

7) *What are the effects on student learning and behavior by teachers who are actively engaged in a PLC of this type?* There are a variety of measurable benefits of this PLC in terms of increased knowledge, skill, self-efficacy, class

management, and effectiveness in dealing with student diversity. This has been teacher self-reported. Future studies can provide second party observations or standard, secondary indicators such as frequency of student discipline referrals, student questionnaires, and the like to compare and contrast with the teacher self reports. How have students reported their learning experiences in classes facilitated by teachers in this kind of PLC? Are students engaged in different pedagogical experiences? Has the curriculum been altered? Do students feel different about their valuation in the class?

8) ***How effective are teachers who use this PLC model in dealing with their classroom challenges, external mandates, and clerical duties?*** Building from the previous research topic, this study would determine the efficiency and effectiveness of teachers within this type of PLC in dealing with their professional duties, as determined by self reports and various others from outside stakeholders, such as administration, parents, and local board of education.

9) ***Survey this type of PLC teachers' colleagues and Significant Others to determine if there are positive effects of this PLC that generalize:*** Participants in this study quickly developed a caring sense for others in their community. By the end of the seminar, most were talking about sharing their organizer with their colleagues in the hope of alleviating their burdens. A future study could determine colleagues and significant others' views of those participating in this kind of PLC. What qualities do they present at work, if different? Are they less

stressed at home? Information from this kind of attitudinal survey could provide additional, supplementary evidence for its beneficial effects.

10) ***What are the negative effects, or "costs" of acting in a more socially just manner both in classrooms and in the school environment?*** Participants in this study reported a predominantly positive set of experiences when acting in ways that matched their chosen values and beliefs (praxis), and when acting in ways that were consistent with their new knowledge about students and about the interactions among the four quadrants of dynamics in the classroom. In time, such actions may prove more "costly," and follow-up interviews could reveal the long-term costs of acting in such a manner.

11) ***Would the learning experience of members differ if PLC were facilitated by someone they did not know?*** Proper facilitation is essential in running this kind of PLC. Although all volunteered to be part of my study, all Participants knew me beforehand in some capacity, either as colleague, former PLC facilitator, committee member, etc. How transferrable is this design if facilitated by someone not known or well known to the members?

12) ***Would the learning experience of members differ if PLC were facilitated by someone who did not have expert knowledge of SJE?*** Do facilitators need to have training first, or is it better to have them learn along with the participants?

13) ***Do facilitators need their own supportive PLC?*** Facilitating requires specific knowledge and skills in order to maximize process and learning among all. Who supports them? Would a separate PLC of facilitators, akin to what psychologists and other mental health professionals employ (called "supervision") be useful,

and even provide a beneficial community of different learners within educational settings?

14) ***How can administrators be assisted in building this kind of capacity for their teaching staff, and what kinds of support will they need?*** Certainly this kind of PLC requires a power shift on all levels. What kinds of shifts in thought and in system are required to build this systemic capacity, and what is needed to sustain it?

15) ***Since this PLC has alleviated stress in participants, and counter-acted self-described "burnout" in at least one teacher, could this kind of PLC provide an answer to the large numbers of new teachers who leave the profession by year five?*** Because this PLC intentionally addressed many aspects of the teacher's personhood, many found it more than just a place to learn about how to do their jobs better. They felt more in touch with what was important to them, and more closely affiliated with each other. Could those results be duplicated, and in long term studies, would participants in that kind of PLC stay in the profession longer, and report greater overall satisfaction?

16) ***Call for more teachers to conduct PLC research on their own work sites.*** An important step towards legitimizing teachers as practitioners and researchers is to have more teachers conduct research on PLCs, using this study's method of pre-study focus groups, interviews with all stakeholders, and surveying the challenges of teachers so as to create a design responsive to teacher needs. Public high school teachers certainly share challenges, but there are many that are particular to local culture and expectations. The more teachers that can

conduct research that gives voice to the realities of those closest to the situation, the more empowerment and legitimization teachers, as a collective, will earn. Teachers who model responsible empowerment for the good of all, would certainly provide a valuable example for young people.

SYLLABUS FOR HOLISTIC, SOCIAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Meeting dates: October 13, 20, 27. November 3, 10, 17. December1, 8, 15, 22.
Location: Room 100
We may need to move to a classroom to have the space to so some physical activities.
Time: Immediately after school, for one hour (2:05-3:05): Is 2:05 a reasonable start time for all? I need 1 hour of learning time. Is 2:10 a better time that guarantees each of us to be here, ready to start?

Meeting 1: Introduction
- Content Objective: To begin to build a safe learning community
1. Start with an introductory activity: 2 truths and a fib/unreality/inaccuracy (avoid term, "lie"!) We will state 2 accurate statements about ourselves, our past, etc., and one inaccuracy. Me: Both my parents immigrated to this country from Lebanon, I piloted a plane from Oahu and Maui, and back; and I hit a ball high off the Green Monster in Fenway. (10 minutes)
2. You have read and signed the consent form…and each of us has hopes and concerns about our time together here. We have our own experiences with working in groups of people, and with PLC's. So, let's take a moment to fill out this 3X5 card, anonymously, with our HOPES on one side, and CONCERNS on the other. We will shuffle the cards, and each of us will read the cards aloud. The goal: to create guidelines to help us achieve our goals and to avoid or diminish our concerns. Use NEWSPRINT paper for group guidelines. (15-20 minutes)
*Explain the use of 2 post-it sheets posted in room. The first is a chart of the wisdom, insights, or "ah-ha's" that come to us, that we could share for the group's benefit.
The second is a sheet (a "parking lot" or "off-topic" list) for the cares, concerns, topics, questions, practical applications, requests for additional materials or sources, that (A) do not fit with the current conversation, and or (B) does not fit with the day's agenda topic. I promise to address each of them, BUT I INVITE EACH OF US TO REMIND EACH OTHER TO USE THAT SHEET IF WE ARE GETTING OFF TOPIC. (3 minutes)
- 3. Read Wasserman and Doran's (1999) article, "Creating inclusive learning communities" (in Cooke, Brazzel, Craig, & Greig, 1999, pp. 307-310). Read from top of page 31 in TDSJ, concerning experiments in group processing and intergroup communications by Kurt Lewin.
- Read it to yourself, and I suggest that when you read the 11 suggestions, mark the ones that you think, in knowing yourself, may present particular challenge. NOTE: stapled to the back of the Wasserman & Doran article are two excerpts, from two sources, on guidelines that help foster greater self-awareness within groups like this, and lead to more efficient group functioning. (20 minutes)
- Activity: We will end by having the group list the variety of challenges and mandates teachers currently face. (10 minutes). This can lead our next session, if we run out of time today

- Homework: Read Adams and Love's (2005), "Teaching with a social justice perspective: A model for faculty seminars across academic disciplines." We will focus our next meeting on the first quadrant from their model, "What our students as active participants bring to the classroom." If strapped for time, the minimum to read for next week is: pp. 586-591, to quadrant 2. The focus next week will be on the student within the interdynamic relationship of student/teacher/course material/pedagogy.

Meeting 2: Students, 1. Challenges within our classroom

2:15-2:20: Card game opening activity.

2:20-2:30: Post and review group norms. Begin with "why are we here"---Deb's question. We will explore the practical usefulness of a professional learning community (PLC) for high school teachers who face a variety of competing challenges from both inside and outside the classroom.

I emphasize: issue of confidentiality. That is, the person who says something is the only one who "owns" that sharing, and therefore is the only person who gets to share that outside our room. Care must be taken to avoid tracing what was said back to the person saying it. In my dissertation, I may need to quote or paraphrase some of what is said here, but I will make every effort to conceal identities, starting with the fact that I will never identify this school, or even this state, and that you will only be referred to in the pseudonym you chose…Be careful with what you share. Even though we hear something here, we do not get to tell it outside the room. Only what we say/think/feel etc. is what we can share with others. This really helps keep the space safe to share.

2:30-2:35: Review of list of challenges we face as teachers. Ask if they want any of the above in a "For Additional Information" bank.

2:35-3:00: Review the social justice lens from the author's perspective. Hand out the Glossary, and have them read the two definitions of SJ and SJE. Given THAT perspective, why is "knowing our students" even a consideration in a classroom? HOW IS IT RELEVANT TO STUDENT LEARNING? (RECALL THEIR STARTING POINT IS THAT THEY WISH TO ASSIST INSTRUCTORS IN "THEIR EFFORTS TO CREATE MORE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS AND TO INTERACT ACROSS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES MORE EFFECTIVELY (586)…that seeks to practice inclusive learning *and* teaching?) Let's count on our collective wisdom to address the following questions, in small groups of 3:

Post these questions: What do you want to know about our students? What do we need to know about them? How do we get to know our students? What theory and knowledge bases help us understand them? (example: learning styles, multiple intelligences, etc.) What do you want them to know about themselves, about each other, and about us?

One way of know our students is to examine the "experiential education framework." A core premise of reforms in education, ones that provide pedagogical frameworks for SJE, is the assumption that "all learning is experiential" and that most formal, traditional classrooms focus too much on the content at the expense of the process. The primary impetus behind experiential education is through the work of John Dewey, who introduced the concept of "reflective practice" into educational discourse. It refers to the process by which the personal and social meanings of experience interact and become one. The interaction of reflection with experience is core to the work of experiential educators.

Kolb has done much work in theory, research, and practice of experiential education. See handout. How might this help us to know our students?

ALSO: REVIEW THE QUESTIONS ON PP. 589-90 IN ARTICLE, AND DISCUSS ONES THAT STAND OUT TO YOU…OR THAT CREATE A KIND OF *TRIGGER OR LEARNING EDGE.* SEE HANDOUT.

3:00-3:10: After they work in groups, each group reports out one key contribution to the collective.

3:10-3:15: Return to the list of challenges and mandates. Which ones are addressed by our focus on the student?

- Content Objective: To engage participants with a variety of considerations of students, such as learning styles, cognitive development models, and social identity models (M. Adams & Love, 2005, p.590). Ask if they want any of the above in a "For Additional Information" bank.
- Texts: Kolb, (Not done: Witkin learning styles). For further reading: Appendix on Social Identity model. My Glossary of Terms (handed out)
- Homework: re-read pp.591-595 of Adams and Love article

Meeting 3: Teachers, 1. Challenges within our classroom

- Content objective: To engage participants with a variety of considerations about their own socialization processes, and levels of awareness of their own social identities, and social justice issue awareness level (see M. Adams & Love, 2005, pp. 591-595).

2:15-2:25→Opening Activity: Review confidentiality rules, and point out our listed (and posted) group norms. Explain that we will be standing in a circle. I will read a list of statements. If the statement applies to you, take two steps into the center of the circle. YOU CAN PASS ON ANY ONES YOU WISH TO BY REMAINING ON THE OUTER CIRCLE. Another important component of this exercise is to remain silent throughout, and to notice not only who is where, but also notice the thoughts and feelings you have as you look at the circles… Intentions: you get to see who has common ground with you, in a range of identities and experiences, and that it is a physical activity that can be fun.

- After we process, explore our own assumptions. Non-visible disabilities, for example, show that I am not only what I appear to be.

2:25-2:45: Complete Appendix B and share in small groups. Ap. B indicates that we do not have a lot of experience across racial difference. We may or may not across class, religion…

POST THESE QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION IN THE SMALL GROUPS:

Starting with B: "How do you develop experience across racial, ethnic, religious, sexual difference? How do we develop cross-cultural communication skills? Comfort? How do we learn to question assumptions that we make about people who are different?

Then, "What are some of the ways you try to learn more about groups?" Help each other out with this…For future reference, keep a journal, only for you, and you may want to spend a couple of silent minutes visualizing your classes. As you do so, are there students whose difference are challenging to you? Or that you feel you are making stereotypes, and do not know enough about. We will come back to that the second time around…

This is hard to talk about…do any of you have examples of students you have made assumptions about that were incorrect, that you'd be willing to share with the group?
SUPPLEMENTAL: HARRO'S CYCLE OF SOCIALIZATION HANDOUT
2:45-3:10: Trigger Points:
Everybody has triggers…they often come from our marginalized/target identities. And our students have them too. When we talk about these identities, we will often trigger each other, so, how do we learn to manage that and to turn that into a learning activity for those who are triggered.
We all have experiences of being triggered…I will begin with talking about my Christianity, my Arab heritage…
Brainstorm: what are personal triggers with you?
The challenge for us as instructors is to know in advance what our triggers are, and to think in advance how to manage them, because we don't have the luxury of being reactive to them in class, with our students. One of the reasons that SJE educators do so much work with triggers is that when we are triggered, we have a plan in place.
End the activity by having us reflect deeply on our trigger points, and ways in which to best respond to them in class.
Brainstorm about what to do when triggered: one of the things we can do is say, "This was a very interesting statement. I wonder if others of you have a way of reframing that." Or, "Take a moment to take some notes so we can talk about this."
Key: Do not want to blame the "trigger-er," while all learn what the triggers are in the classroom.
Example: "all the Latinos have the whole family in one room…" and you want to work with that remark, even if no one is Latino in the room. Letting it go, the silence of the teacher, reinforces the stereotype and does not interrupt a verbal expression of a social injustice.
So, how do we do it without demonizing the speaker? But all can think about what to do?
END BY GIVING THE APPENDIX ON TRIGGERS…
3:10-3:15 SHARE TAKE-A-WAYS FROM TODAY'S SESSION…
- Process Objective: To have teachers share their own social identities and socialization process.
- For further, optional reading: Harro's (2000) "The cycle of socialization"(in M. Adams et al., 2000, pp. 15-21).
- Homework: Review pp. 595-596 in Adams and Love's article, and complete Appendix C-1 for one of your courses.
Meeting 4: Curriculum, 1. Challenges within our classroom
With curriculum, there are two important questions they need to consider:
  o It is important for you to convey all the ways that curriculum is conveyed: the textbook, the lesson plans for the day, what the teacher says that day…are there other parts of the curriculum? Assignments, videos, posters or pictures on the wall? What are all the different ways in which cur. Is conveyed to the students? Now, let us think about inclusion…think about the cur. In your courses, and whether they think it is inclusive of experiences, information, role models, that reflect the diversity of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, disability, class…

Obviously, we are not saying represent everything. That is impossible, but the question is: does the curriculum feel inclusive so that it is not mono-focused, or one thing? Understand that curriculum can mean the speakers we bring in, what we put on the classroom walls, what we put up on open house…what IT IS THAT CONVEYS THE LEARNING THAT STUDENTS HAVE. ALL THE DIFFERENT LEARNING MATERIALS.

IN MATH, ARE STUDENTS AWARE THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT NUMBER SYSTEMS? NOT THAT THEY ARE NOT GOING TO LEARN THEM ALL. BUT EVERYBODY COUNTS, AND DOES MATH, AND THE WAY THAT THEY DO IT IS DIFFERENT.

WHY IMPORTANT? BECAUSE IT HELPS STUDENTS LEARN THAT WHAT they do is culturally informed and embedded. That is huge lesson to learn, because. It moves asides their ethnocentrism. That what we do is the right way and the only way. Rather, what we do is culturally western. Challenges the cultural ethnocentrism.
Suggested reading: Young's "Five faces of oppression."

Want to think about that we will be going from curriculum to pedagogy and we want both of them to be inclusive.

What are some of the ways, for example, that women can see them selves in science, when all of the images they see on TV is of men?
What are some of the ways African Americans and Latino children can see themselves as scientists? Are there pictures we can show them of scientists in Africa or in America of Blacks and Latinos doctors or scientists? How can we produce images or readings that are written by women?

When we use female scientists as readings, people default to "he." Why? Let's think about this.

Are there films that we might have about interesting science projects in which use women, or people of color. Can we talk with our students about how whites and Asians do science, and blacks and some Latinos do sports? Why do we use these stereotypes.

The point about being more inclusive: young people can see themselves in the subject matter, and can master and mistress the subject matter. And not say that math is a field for white men: I can't do it because I am a girl.

Ask: watch the film "Stand and Deliver." What was he able to do to encourage and motivate people of color.

And regarding pedagogy, in a look ahead, what are our pedagogies to include all?

The point is for all of us is to begin the long process of becoming more flexible, open and inclusive about being more open and available to all. What are some very small things I can change?

- Content objective: To begin exploration of what is conveyed to students about course content through curriculum, materials, and resources. How do students experience different parts of the curriculum?
- Process objectives: To have participants from different content areas address the content objective.
- Plan and Materials: Use Adams and Love's (2005) questions concerning inclusion and student's experience with course content (p. 595).
- Suggested, optional reading: Read M. Adams' (1997) "Pedagogical frameworks for social justice education" (in M. Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, pp. 30-43).
- Homework: Re-read pages 596-599 on pedagogical processes and complete Appendix D, page 609, *ITALICIZED FONT SECTION ONLY*.

Meeting 5, Pedagogy 1. Challenges within our classroom.

Make a worksheet of something they actually do, and share out.
Second worksheet, like the c-2, for curriculum, and consider things they might try doing.
- Content objective: To have participants discuss the influence of how one teaches affects learning in the classroom.
- Process objective and materials: In small groups, each teacher discusses how a pedagogical practice may reflect or interrupt a social inequity or injustice. Refer back to styles from Kolb, Witkin, or other theories when possible.
- Discuss the five convergent principles, pp. 597-599. In Adams and Love (2005).
- Homework: Read Adams, Jones, and Tatum's (1997) "Knowing our Students" (pp. 311-325)

Meeting 6: Students, 2: Outside Mandates
- Content objectives: To have participants revisit the student in the quadrant model, with attention to experienced classroom challenges and outside mandates relevant to the student.
- Process objective: To have each participant share responses to objective from personal experience.
- Plan: Review group-constructed list of challenges and mandates. I will supply a list of challenges and mandates I have compiled. Considering the holistic, social justice perspective, revisit the student, and determine how the teacher can better address individual challenges of diversity. Also, determine which mandates and challenges are covered by the focus on this quadrant.
- Homework: Read Bell, Washington, Weinstein, and Love's (1997) article, "Knowing ourselves as instructors" (in M. Adams et al., 1997, pp. 299-310).

Meeting 7 : Teachers, 2. Outside Mandates.

- Content objective: To have participants revisit the impact their own socialization process and social identities has on the learning process, and to determine which of the challenges and mandates are covered by this focus.
- Process objective: To have participants simulate the actual dynamics of a classroom through role play.
- Plan: Complete Appendices A and L in Adams and Love's (2005) chapter (M. Adams & Love, 2005, pp. 605-606). Discuss in small groups.
- Later, have volunteers do a role-play from a classroom experience in which teacher and student social identities, socialization histories, interact. Group discussion follows, applying learning from readings, as well as from own experience. End with identifying which of the challenges and mandates are covered within this quadrant.

Meeting 8: Curriculum 2. Outside Mandates
- Content objectives: To have participants reconsider the impact a more inclusive curriculum can have on student engagement and learning, and to determine which challenges and mandates are addressed in this quadrant.
- Process objective: To have teachers share with others in like-curricular areas (if applicable), and with entire group.
- Plan: Teachers complete Appendix C-2 in Adams and Love's (2005) chapter (pp.607-608). Group discussion follows, applying learning from readings, as well as from own experience. End with identifying which of the challenges and mandates are covered within this quadrant.

Meeting 9: Pedagogy 2. Outside Mandates
- Content objective: To have participants reconsider how pedagogical practice interacts with the other three quadrants, and to determine which challenges and mandates are addressed in this quadrant.
- Process objective: To have teachers share their analysis in pairs and with entire group.
- Plan: Teachers complete Appendix D, ROMAN FONT in Adams and Love's (2005) chapter (p. 609). Group discussion follows, applying learning from readings, as well as from own experience. End with identifying which of the challenges and mandates are covered within this quadrant.

Note: The format of this meeting is changed from original. Due to group decision, I facilitated the following:
Began with introduction to the Pareto Principle. Explain that the 80/20 rule means here that 20% of the correct focus on the mandates and expectations will produce an 80% gain in overall management.

Meeting 10: Look Back and Look Ahead.
- Content objectives: To conclude the PLC by reflecting on learning, by reviewing and reapplying to the four quadrants the list of challenges and mandates, and to look ahead at sustaining the efforts begun here.
- Process objective: To have each teacher reflect on objectives and share them with entire group.

- <u>Plan</u>: Begin with each reflecting on his or her learning, sticking points, learning edges, successes, shortfalls, and the like, during the previous weeks. Then, revisit the stated challenges and mandates, and assign them as a group to each of the quadrants. Brief discussion. Project future mandates from external stakeholders, and assign the imagined one(s) within quadrants.

Time allowing, complete and discuss Appendices E, F or H or I in Adams and Love's (2005) chapter (p.610).

APPENDIX B

ORAL ADDRESS AND EMAIL TO FACULTY: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN MY HOLISTIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Welcome back. I am offering to the teaching staff a terrific opportunity. I have been doing some research as part of my doctoral studies, and I have listed a number of current challenges and requirements, or mandates, that we are currently facing as teachers from both inside the classroom and outside, from other stakeholders. Those include the state's expectations of teaching skills, revising curricula in UBD format, using data-driven decision making in the class, using differentiated instruction, teaching in a culturally responsive way, and so on. My preliminary interviews with faculty last year indicated a desire that we teachers would like a comprehensive model to work with in helping us to better understand and manage these mandates.

I will be facilitating a ten week professional learning community that will propose and try out a holistic model that I hope can help us to identify and then better organize and address the amount and variety of challenges and mandates we face. We will work with it and reflect on it as a professional community. In addition, this model is also comprehensive in that it presents a learning and teaching framework from a social justice perspective, which I believe will also be very helpful.

I feel that I am offering something that will be especially useful to you as teachers. I am also conducting this study as part of a requirement for a dissertation, and there will two requirements for this seminar that might otherwise not be part of a PLC. Those are: completing surveys online, and agreeing to be interviewed one on one after the PLC is completed. However, participants in this study will add an important and seldom heard voice to the literature concerning school improvement----the voice of the practicing teacher.

Please be assured that your anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed, and you will have written assurance of that from me and officials at the University of Massachusetts. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are not required to take part in this study, and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty to you.
I currently plan is to run this PLC for 10 consecutive Wednesdays, immediately after school, for one hour, beginning some time later in October. I will let you know of the exact dates and location after I tie up a couple of administrative details. Those completing this 10 week seminar will be eligible to receive 1 CEU upon completion.

This project has also been approved by the administration.

I will have sign-up sheets here after the faculty meeting, or if you decide later, please email me at [school email]. This professional learning community will be limited to 10 to 12 teachers. If I have more than 12 volunteers, I will select members to establish variability in experience, age, content areas, and social diversity in our group.

Does anyone have any questions?" (*to be used during meeting. I can use those questions to write a FAQ list for the written version, which I can send to the faculty via email*).

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Researcher:	**Philip J. Harak**
Study Title:	**Supporting Public High School Teachers in a Context of Multiple Mandates: A Social Justice Approach to Professional Learning Communities**
Faculty Sponsor/ P.I.:	**Dr. Maurianne Adams**

1. ABOUT THIS FORM.
This is a consent form that provides you with information about the study so you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. This form will help you understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It describes what you will be asked to do as a participant and what the potential risks are for participating in this study. Please take some time to review this information and ask any questions that you may have. If you decide to participate, please sign this form for my records; you will also be given a copy for your own records.

2. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY.

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which a professional learning community, using a flexible but structured holistic, social justice perspective, can help teachers organize the wide range of internal classroom challenges and mandates from external constituents, such as the state, our Board of Education, and our high school administration team.

3. PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY.
I am inviting all current teachers at [school name and location]. Interested teachers will then complete a brief demographics questionnaire. I will review the list of interested faculty members, with the completed questionnaires, and seek to construct a group of between 10 and 12 teachers that is as close to the demographics of this school as is possible. If I have a number of interested teachers in excess of 12, I will place those names on a wait-list, with the intention of providing this professional learning community again in the future to those on the wait-list..

4. WHAT WILL YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO.
Those volunteers selected will be asked to participate in a holistic professional learning community that I will facilitate once a week for one hour immediately after school, for 10 consecutive weeks, beginning October 13, 2010, and ending December 22, 2010. I will explain assurances of confidentiality below. Participants will be asked to complete two online surveys both before and after the 10 sessions. Participants will also be asked to do a small amount of reading between some sessions, consider a proposed holistic, social justice model for examining teaching and learning, and to engage in the learning process within the professional learning community as fully as is possible. As soon as possible

after the professional learning community, participants will be asked to engage in a one on one interview with me about their experiences in the professional learning community. Each individual interview should take from between 20 and 30 minutes. I will audio record the interview for accuracy purposes only, and erase the file as soon as I have completed my analysis. If you wish, I will also share any or all of my dissertation writing with you, and provide you with the <u>option</u> of offering me feedback about the accuracy of my interpretations of the information you shared.

5. THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY.
By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to consider ways in which learning in a holistic professional learning community may assist you in organizing and managing current classroom challenges and outside mandates. The materials we will consider may also provide you with additional knowledge, skills, and greater confidence in carrying out the numerous requirements of teaching. In addition, data generated from our group could potentially assist other teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in better understanding teachers' experiences, and what may be needed to assist teachers and students in the learning process and in managing the numerous mandates teachers face. You will also be adding your voice, through a pseudonym, to the body of research concerning school and student improvement.

6. THE RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY.
As a participant, you may experience risks such as discomfort from sharing personal information about your experiences and social background. Similarly, sharing your experiences may bring up emotionally difficult events in your life leading to some distress.

7. HOW YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION WILL BE PROTECTED AND HOW YOUR IDENTITIES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND ANONYMOUS.

For both participants in the professional learning community, and for those on the wait-list who will complete the online surveys, I will do all that I can to protect your confidentiality and anonymity. I will keep all records and data in a secure location. I will use a password lock to protect data stored on a computer and will delete all identifying files (e.g. paper files, audio files, and electronic files) at the conclusion of the study. You will also be asked to complete an Informed Consent form prior to beginning the seminar, which will allow you to choose your own pseudonym. All data will identify you through your pseudonym, and when I write my findings, I will use vague descriptors such as "a suburban public high school in the Northeast." Your email address and personal demographic information will never be shared with any other individual. At the conclusion of the study, if I publish any findings I will again protect your identity using your pseudonym and vague descriptors of this school site.. I will do everything I can to ensure your confidentiality, but I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality in cases of computer theft, tape recorder theft, or a related incident. I will do my best to minimize this possibility.

Those participating in the professional learning community will construct, as a group, guidelines for assuring safety and confidentiality within our professional learning community. I will also explain the other steps I will take to maintain your anonymity and confidentiality, both within the professional learning community, and with any reporting I do of the findings. I will secure the audio taped interview recording in a locked container for which only I will have the key. Again, I will erase the audiotapes after I complete this study.

8. QUESTIONS?
If you have any further questions, please feel free to come to my room, 146, where I usually am by 6:30 AM. You can always email me at [my email address] . My phone extension is 3146. You may also address your questions to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Maurianne Adams (adams@educ.umass.edu). If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact either of us or the University of Massachusetts Amherst Human Research Office (HRPO) at 413.545-3428 or humansubjects@ora.umass.edu.

9. COMPENSATION.
While I will not be compensating you with money, I have been authorized to provide you with the equivalent number of CEU's for your completion of this seminar. 10 hours equals 1 CEU.

10. STOPPING YOUR PARTICIPATION.
You can stop being in the seminar at any time, for any reason, at no penalty to you. The only "consequence" is that you will not earn the 1 CEU.

11. PARTICIPANT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the study described above. The general purposes and particulars of the study as well as possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

_____   _____   _____
Participant Signature: Print Name: Date:

_____
Participant's Chosen Pseudonym

 By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Print Name: Date:

APPENDIX D

APPEAL TO INTERESTED TEACHERS TO PARTICIPATE AS MEMBER OF CONTROL SET

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in working with me in my Holistic Professional Learning Community this fall. You are on a wait-list for the next PLC, and I will work with our administration to determine if they will allow me to facilitate this same PLC next year. If you are still interested, you will be on the list to take it then.

However, I could really use your help this semester to complete my research. As part of my study, I need to be able to compare responses about teacher-preparedness on surveys for participants in my PLC with responses of those who did not participate. This will help me to determine how to best modify the PLC for the next time around.

The surveys will be taken online. Total time for each is about ten minutes. The first is scheduled for mid-October and the second, for mid-December. As a token of my appreciation for your completing the surveys, I will provide you with a five dollar gift card for Dunkin' Donuts.

Your answers will be completely anonymous and confidential.
If you have any questions, please contact me either in person in room 146, by phone via extension 3146, or by email at pharak@educ.umass.edu.

Thank you very much,

Phil Harak

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS RECORD

1. Name : _____
2. Pseudonym you choose for this study, to assure confidentiality:
   _____
3. Your Sex:
   _____
4. Your
   ethnicity:_____
   __
5. Your religious affiliation, if
   any:_____
6. Is there any other personal or social identity you would like to share?
   _____
   _____
   _____
7. Department in which you currently
   teach:_____
8. Please provide your age: _____
9. Please provide your total years of public school teaching: _____
10. Please provide your total years of teaching in this school: _____
11. Have you participated in workshops or courses here or elsewhere concerning
    diversity, multi-cultural, and or social justice issues? If yes, please use the lines
    below to summarize your thoughts about your experience(s).

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

12. Briefly explain the content focuses of professional learning communities you have
    participated in.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

OHIO STATE TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY INVENTORY

Ohio State Teacher Self-Efficacy Inventory: from http://people.ehe.ohio-state.edu/ahoy/files/2009/02/tses.pdf**; retrieved 8/7/2010. Permission to use granted by authors.**
Note: this is the text only. Online version will match inventory's original format.

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale1 (long form)
Teacher Beliefs
How much can you do?
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students ? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) students?

17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
students?
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
21. How well can you respond to defiant students? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

Directions for Scoring the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

Developers: Megan Tschannen-Moran, College of William and Mary Anita Woolfolk Hoy, the Ohio State University.

Construct Validity. For information the construct validity of the Teachers' Sense of Teacher efficacy Scale, see: Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. Teaching and Teacher Education, 17, 783-805.

Factor Analysis

It is important to conduct a factor analysis to determine how your participants respond to the questions. We have consistently found three moderately correlated factors: Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Practices, and Efficacy in Classroom Management, but at times the make up of the scales varies slightly. With preservice teachers we recommend that the full 24-item scale (or 12-item short form) be used, because the factor structure often is less distinct for these respondents.

Subscale Scores

To determine the Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Practices, and Efficacy in Classroom Management subscale scores, we compute unweighted means of the items that load on each factor. Generally these groupings are:

Long Form

Efficacy in Student Engagement: Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22
Efficacy in Instructional Strategies: Items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24
Efficacy in Classroom Management Items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21

Reliabilities

In Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing and elusive construct. Teaching and Teacher Education, 17, 783-805, the following were found:

Long Form Short Form
Mean SD alpha Mean SD alpha
OSTES 7.1 .94 .94 7.1 .98 .90
Engagement 7.3 1.1 .87 7.2 1.2 .81
Instruction 7.3 1.1 .91 7.3 1.2 .86
Management 6.7 1.1 .90 6.7 1.2 .86

1 Because this instrument was developed at the Ohio State University, it is sometimes referred to as the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale. We prefer the name, Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale.

Factor analysis and reliabilities. Principal-axis factoring with varimax rotation of the 36-items yielded four factors with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 58% of the variance in the respondents' scores. A scree test suggested three factors could be extracted. This solution replicated the three factors identified in Study 2Fefficacy for instructional strategies (15 items), efficacy for classroom management (9 items), and efficacy for student engagement (12 items). We reduced the scale by selecting the eight items with the highest loadings on each factor. Using these 24 items, principal-axis factoring with varimax rotation yielded the same three factors with loadings ranging from 0.50 to 0.78. See Table 4 for factorloadings and eigenvalues for the 24-item scale. An efficacy subscale score was computed for each factor by calculating the mean of the eight responses to the items loading highest on that factor. Reliabilities for the teacher efficacy subscales were 0.91 for instruction, 0.90 for management, and 0.87 for engagement. Intercorrelations between the subscales of instruction, management, and engagement were 0.60, 0.70, and 0.58, respectively (po0:001). Means for the three subscales, ranging from 6.71 to 7.27 in the Study 3 sample, are displayed in Table 5. Based on the high reliabilities of the three scales we explored the possibility that an even more parsimonious scale would be viable. When we selected the four items with the highest loadings on each scale, the factor structure remained intact (see Table 4) and the reliabilities continued to be high: 0.86 for instruction, 0.86 for management, and 0.81 for engagement. Furthermore, the intercorrelations between the short and long forms for the total scale and the three subscales were high, ranging from 0.95 to 0.98. Consequently, we tested both the long (24 items) and short form (12 items) in further analyses (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, 799).

The authors have provided blanket written permission to use this instrument.

APPENDIX G

HARAK ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE PRE- AND POST- TREATMENT, GIVEN TO PARATICIPANTS AND CONTROLS

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. "I am knowledgeable about the factors in a student's life that affects his or her learning in a classroom."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

2. "I am confident in my ability to understand goals and objectives underlying the mandates made by external stakeholders "(such as the Federal and State governments, Board of Education, our Administration, and the like)

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

3. "I am confident in my ability to implement the goals and objectives made by external stakeholders"

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

4. "I am satisfied that, as a whole, my students understand that the subject that I teach has relevance to them."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

5. "My own life experiences and socialization play a significant role in how I teach."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

6. "I believe that my assumptions about students' capabilities has an impact on their ability to learn."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

7. "In considering the range of issues of student diversity, I believe I have the knowledge to interact successfully with diverse students."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

8. "I feel prepared to handle diversity issues as they come up in the classroom."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

9. "I need to acquire more skills in dealing fairly with classroom conflicts."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

10. "I need to acquire more knowledge about what is expected of me as a teacher."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

11. "I need to acquire more skills in carrying out what is expected of me as a teacher."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

12. "I need to develop more belief in my abilities to carry out all that is expected of me as a teacher."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

13. "I am confident in my ability to foster mutual respect in my classroom."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

14. "In general, I believe that professional learning communities help me gain knowledge about teaching in the classroom.

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

15. "In general, I believe that professional learning communities help gain skills I use when teaching in the classroom.

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

16. "In general, I believe that professional learning communities help me deal with the multiple mandates made by external stakeholders."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

17. "In general, I believe that professional learning communities help me deal with issues of diversity in my classroom."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

18. "In general, I believe that professional learning communities help me believe more in my own abilities to teach"

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

19. "In general, I I rely more on informal contact with my colleagues that on professional learning communities for help in my teaching practice."

Disagree Strongly		Agree		Agree Strongly
1	2	3	4	5

20. In the field provided, please write about some of the challenges you have faced in the past as a classroom teacher.
21. In the field provided, please write about the challenges you anticipate facing as a classroom teacher in the current year.
22. In the field provided, please write about how you deal with student diversity in your classroom.
23. In the field provided, please write about any new knowledge that you would like to develop in the coming year in order to teach more effectively. In the field provided, please write about the new skills you would like to develop in the coming year in order to teach more effectively. If you have taken a course or have attended professional development on matters of diversity and or social justice, please explain your experience(s) with it (them).
24. In the field provided, please write about any other issue important to you as a teacher that has not been covered by the above questions.

Groupings for Closed: Codes: K= Knowledge, S= Skill, S-E= Self-Efficacy, PLC=Professional Learning Community

Groupings	Survey Items
Teacher's reported assessment of **Knowledge**:	1,2,4,5,6,7,9, 10, 11, 12
Teacher's reported assessment of **Skill**:	3, 8, 9, 11, 13
Teacher's reported assessment of **Self-Efficacy**:	12, 18
Teacher's reported assessment of **Professional Learning Communities**:	14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19

APPENDIX H

POST TREATMENT OPEN FIELD SURVEY QUESTIONS

Post-Treatment Open-field Survey Questions (following the administration of the same close-ended survey questions in Appendices F & G):
For Participants Only:

20. In the field provided, please note briefly whatever new knowledge you gained through this PLC that helped you with your classroom teaching.
21. In the field provided, please note whatever new skills you developed in this PLC that helped you with your classroom teaching.
22. In the field provided, please note whether you gained self-confidence in your classroom teaching through your participation in this PLC.
23. In the field provided, please note the ways in which the PLC has helped you deal with student diversity.
For Controls Only:
20. In the field provided, please note briefly what new knowledge you gained since taking this survey two months ago that has helped you in your classroom teaching.
21. In the field provided, please note briefly what new skills you gained since taking this survey two months ago that have helped you in your classroom teaching.
22. In the field provided, please note briefly whether you gained self-confidence in your classroom teaching since taking this survey two months ago
23. In the field provided, please note briefly the ways in which you have dealt with student diversity in your classroom, since taking this survey two months ago.

APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT INTEVERIEW PROTOCOL

Note: bolded print signifies what I said to Participant; non-bolded italics are personal notes for follow-ups.

Protocol for post-treatment interview questions of all sample participants

Would it be helpful for you to see the questions? *Provide printed copy of directions to those requesting.*
General Probes: For "no," answers, I follow with probes like, "Help me understand why it was not. What could we have done differently for it to have been more helpful."
If it was helpful, probe: "Could you tell me more about how…Could you give me examples?"Another probe: ask for a "critical incident" for each of the questions.
1. Please help me to understand, generally, whether or not the PLC was helpful to you these past 10 weeks.
I am going to ask you separately about knowledge and skills, and a sense of your self confidence regarding these areas.
2. Can you say something about new knowledge you gained from this PLC?
3. Can you tell me something about new skills you gained from this PLC?
4. Can you tell me something about new self-confidence you gained from this PLC?
So far we have been talking about this PLC. Now I'd like to ask the same questions about knowledge, skills, and self-confidence over the ordinary course of things <u>outside</u> the PLC.
5. Can you tell me about any new knowledge, skills, or self-confidence you have gained during these last 10 weeks that was *outside* of this PLC. Please be specific.
Now I'd like to ask you about the model that you used as an organizer.
6. Could you tell me if you think that the four quadrant model was useful as an organizer for your classroom teaching practice?
7. Could you tell me if you think that the four quadrant model was useful as an organizer for managing the external mandates from outside stakeholders?
8. Although it has only been two months, do you feel you are doing anything differently in the classroom? What is it? If so, how do you see the students responding to that?
Now I am going to ask you to think ahead.
9. Are there one or two things that you would like to take away from this PLC, that you would like to do? How would you imagine your students' response to be to that?
Now I'd like us to think about sustaining what you've gained.
10. What of the various things that you have learned, done, or talked about in this PLC that you would like to sustain in the future?
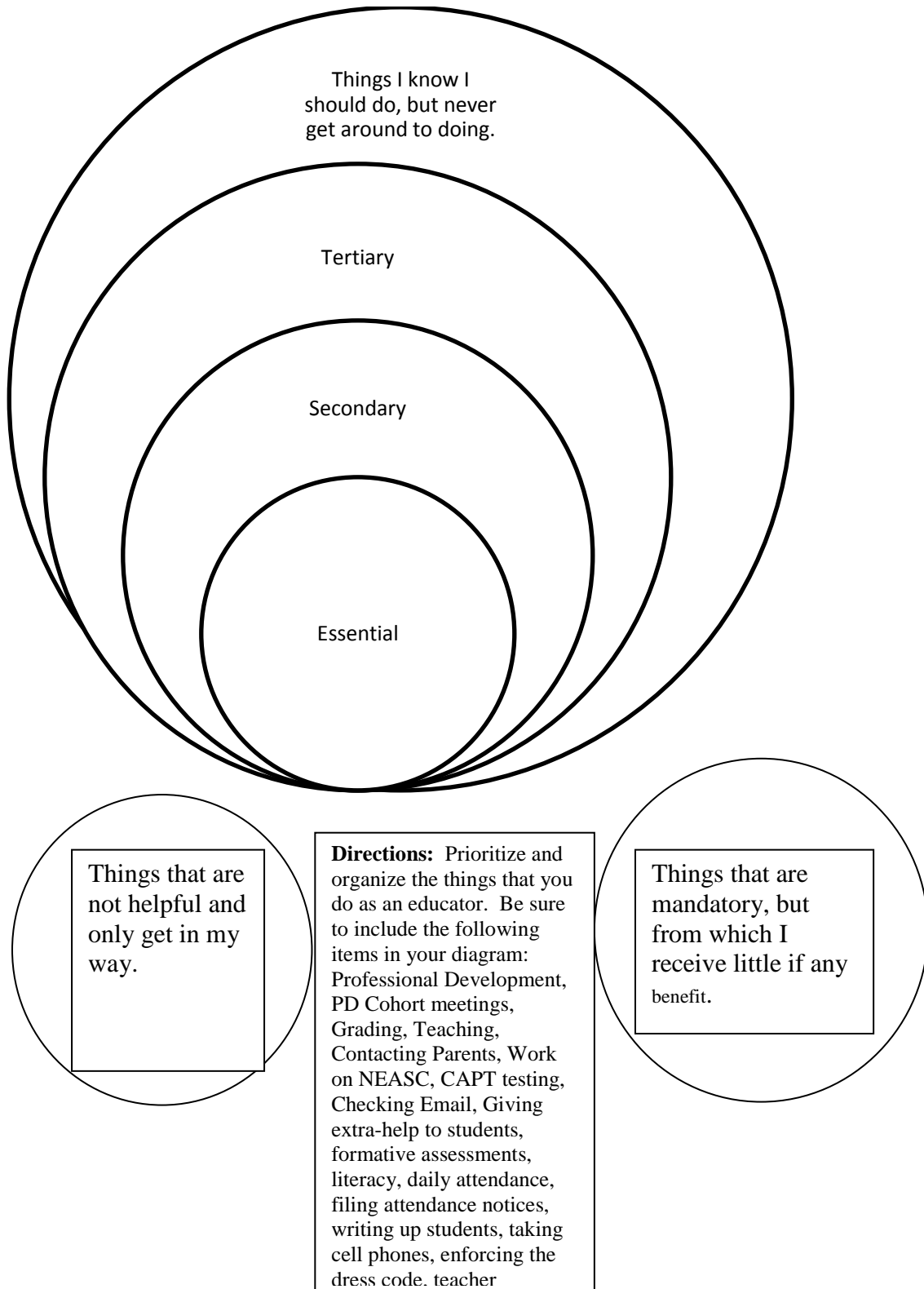11. What thoughts do you have as to how to sustain it?
12. Is there anything more that I have not asked about that you want me to know about concerning your experience within this PLC?
13. Are there any recommendations you would make about this PLC for the future?

ORGANIZING AND PRIORITIZING THE THINGS I DO AS A TEACHER (Developed by Participant John)

Things I know I
should do, but never
get around to doing.

Tertiary

Secondary

Essential

Things that are
not helpful and
only get in my
way.

Directions: Prioritize and
organize the things that you
do as an educator. Be sure
to include the following
items in your diagram:
Professional Development,
PD Cohort meetings,
Grading, Teaching,
Contacting Parents, Work
on NEASC, CAPT testing,
Checking Email, Giving
extra-help to students,
formative assessments,
literacy, daily attendance,
filing attendance notices,
writing up students, taking
cell phones, enforcing the
dress code. teacher

Things that are
mandatory, but
from which I
receive little if any
benefit.

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