

Using Professional Learning Communities to Build Teacher Leadership Capacity: Creating
Sustainable Change in Education

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Abstract

During the course of this study, I examine the effective uses of professional learning communities in relation to building leadership capacity among teachers. The literature reviewed illustrates and addresses the need for teachers to see themselves, not only as professionals, but as leaders. This study addresses the effects of this much needed sense of professionalism and confidence within teachers. This study includes interviews with principals and teachers with experience using professional learning communities in this capacity. The interviews not only demonstrate how professional communities can and are used effectively, but also what the effects of their use have on teacher satisfaction and teacher effectiveness.

Chapter 1 Introduction

As an elementary school teacher, I have been frustrated by the lack of effective leadership within my school district. I had always figured that I was *just* a teacher and that there wasn't anything that I could do to make a significant difference. Herein lays an issue with which many teachers are confronted. I believe that teacher voice should be instrumental in decision making circles. Teachers with classroom knowledge and first- hand experience with students and curriculum should be influential in instructional leadership circles.

In this report, I review effective uses of professional learning communities to support teachers as leaders within the schools and district in which they work. Barth (2001) states that, "Teachers' lives are enriched and energized in many ways when they actively pursue leadership opportunities. Rather than remain passive recipients - even victims - of what their institutions deal to them, teachers who lead help to shape their own schools and, thereby, their own destinies as educators" (p. 445). Teachers may be more likely to take on leadership responsibilities if they were part of a group, such as a professional learning community (Barth, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Teachers often feel unable or inadequate to serve as change agents within their schools and district. Many teachers lack the resources, training and opportunities to become effective leaders in education. School climates often deter teachers from taking on leadership roles in their school sites. Currently many schools have adopted a top down model of leadership, in that the teachers are given the curriculum, possibly even a pacing guide and expected to follow both with fidelity. Teachers are often overworked and underpaid. Interestingly it has been found that when asked about compensation, teachers who have been working in a positive and collaborative

environment have reported feeling satisfied with their wages. Whereas, teachers who have been working in less than satisfactory working environments report that they feel that their wages are insufficient (Futternick, 2007).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine ways that professional learning communities can empower teachers as leaders. I examine effective practices that foster professional growth in teachers, while developing specific leadership qualities. My hope is that this research can be used to implement effective professional learning communities with teacher leadership as the central focus.

Research Question

How can the use of professional learning communities empower the teacher as a leader?
To what extent can teacher leadership impact sustainable change within education?

Theoretical Rationale

The discussion regarding sustainable change in education has been ongoing. Education has been traditionally known as adopting a “top down” leadership model, and when the results of this model have been less than satisfactory, it has been customary to bring in an outsider to fix the problem (Fullan, 2005). Bringing in an outsider may not be the best solution to the problem. Often outsiders, whether the situation is at a specific school site, or district wide, are faced with a substantial amount of resistance.

Fullan suggests that creating a school site or district that is full of potential leaders may be the answer to this situation. He asserts that an effective leader should not only be concerned with academic achievement, but also “how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can go

even further” (Fullan, 2005, p. 31). This idea of “planned continuity” would create an environment which encouraged teachers and other staff members to grow professionally as leaders through lateral capacity building efforts (Fullan, 2005, p. 31).

Assumptions

Currently many teachers are suffering from a sense of helplessness and frustration due to the current model of educational leadership in place. There are many teachers who are complaining of having no voice or influence in decision making circles and feel that people with power have no interest in hearing what teachers think would be best for students. Teachers often assume that people at the top do not necessarily have the best interest of the students in mind when many decisions are being made.

Teachers may be motivated and encouraged to take on more leadership positions if they are provided with the necessary resources and support to do so. Using professional learning communities in school sites and district wide may allow teachers to see themselves as leaders as well as give them confidence to take on different and challenging tasks. Having teachers influence instructional and curricular decisions builds cohesiveness and solidarity within school sites and even districts.

Teachers are feeling taken advantage of and devalued, due to the salaries that they are being paid and the unwillingness to look at all of the hard work and emotion that is put in after a teachers duty day. Teachers are willing to put in more time and effort as long as they are being fairly compensated.

Background and Need

Making significant changes in education helps retain teachers. Creating positive, collaborative, and lateral relationships between teachers is important for increasing teacher

retention. Supportive and professional relationships are important factors in creating an environment conducive to professional growth. Teachers want to feel that their opinions matter in decision making circles.

Teachers are leaving the profession due to inadequate working environments. Twenty two percent of teachers in California leave after their first four years in the classroom (Futernick, 2007). Teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of collegiality among the staff. Teachers reported a need for a shared vision or collective goal. The professional relationships among staff members has been reported as being very important to the teachers involved in this study. “They [teachers] lacked a strong sense of team at their school—i.e., a sense that all or nearly all individuals working at the school are focused on creating an environment that fosters student learning; trusting, respectful professional relationships among teachers and other staff; and a collaborative, mutually supportive approach to leadership between teachers and principal” (Futernick, 2007, p. 6). Retaining high quality teachers is reliant upon creating an environment that fosters professional growth and values and supports teachers.

Students and schools have a lot at stake with such a low rate of teacher retention. With such a high rate of teacher turnover, especially in high-poverty schools there is a loss of teacher experience and expertise, which the students so desperately need. Twenty-eight percent of teachers reported that they would likely return to their profession provided that there were significant changes made to create a more positive and supportive teaching environment (Futernick, 2007). The school’s loss of experienced teachers negatively influences the continuity, community and morale (Futernick, 2007).

Coyle (1997) stated that The National Commission on Teaching & America’s Future reported, “A career continuum that places teaching at the top and supports growing expertise

should...anticipate that teachers will continue to teach while taking on other roles that allow them to share their knowledge” (p. 238). These ideas would require a shift in the way that society views teachers. Teachers need to be provided ample time and compensation to be active participants and decision makers with regard to educational leadership as well as to hone their craft as teachers (Coyle, 1997).

Fullan (2005) quotes his colleagues, Hargreaves and Fink, who define sustainability in the following way, “Sustainability does not simply mean whether something will last. It addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment now and in the future” (p. ix).

In regards to sustainable reform, Fullan states that “Leadership (not leaders) is the key to the new revolution” in education (Fullan, 2005, p. xi). Rather than focus on one primary leader it is suggested that the model of leadership is more important. Education should no longer sit and wait for one hero leader to make a decision that the rest of the community should follow. Schools need to create a critical mass of leaders (planned continuity) to ensure that sustainable change will be evident in the system (Fullan, 2005, p. 14). Teachers need to be a part of that critical mass.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Historical Context

Historically professional learning communities have been traditionally developed to enhance teaching and learning to ensure academic achievement (DuFour, 2004). Using the idea of a professional learning community could be a valid way of creating leadership capacity among teachers. A professional learning community is a focused group of professionals that have a central focus or a collective purpose. Professional learning communities, as stated by DuFour, “is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (2004, p. 8). DuFour discusses a culture of collaboration, in which teachers work in teams that promote deep team learning through a cycle of questions focused on a specific topic (2004). This process, if applied to the topic of empowering teachers as leaders would then promote higher levels of leadership capacity in teachers.

“Collaboration can affect achievement only when it is used to pursue clear, explicit achievement goals; that collective restraint must be balanced by creative freedom ... and that teams are most effective when their instructional accomplishments are recognized and celebrated” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 86). This type of environment establishes a forum for teachers to grow professionally and to take part in deep learning surrounding leadership and what that may look like for each individual, staff, school site or district.

Collaborative Leadership vs. Managerial Leadership

Currently many school sites are operating under a managerial type of leadership model. According to the September 1996 report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future noted, “Far too many people sit in offices on the sidelines of the school's core work, managing routines rather than improving

learning” (Coyle, 1997, p. 236). Teaching is often burdened by a managerial type of leadership (Coyle, 1997).

Fullan (2005) discusses the importance of professional learning communities and collaborative leadership throughout his book, *Leadership and Sustainability*. Fullan points out those professional learning communities are invaluable in lateral capacity building. He discusses the need for teachers to be involved in the leadership of the schools in which they work. In regard to changing school cultures he states, “Changing school cultures for the better is difficult but not impossible. Some of this can be done through capacity-building training that fosters and embeds professional learning communities” (p. 60). Fullan asserts that the teaching profession should provide opportunities for all teachers to become leaders from the first day of their job as teacher and even into teacher preparation. He states that “Teachers’ experience during the first 5-7 years of teaching determines the quality and quantity of the pool of future leaders” (Fullan, 2005, p. 95).

Sustainable Change and Teacher Leadership Capacity

Coyle discusses the need for teachers to have more power within their own classrooms to eventually begin to see themselves as leaders. When the power has been taken away from teachers for so long it is easy to see why teachers may not feel empowered in a leadership capacity. She goes on to say that, “Unless we flatten the present hierarchies that result in long-distance management of teaching and create structures that empower teachers to collaborate with one another and to lead from within the heart of the school, the classroom, we will discourage the best and the brightest from entering the field and remaining in it” (Coyle, 1997, p. 239). Currently many teachers see themselves as leaders only within their respective classrooms. The

thought of individual teachers seeing themselves as leaders beyond that is seen as too complicated, time consuming and threatening (Coyle, 1997).

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future as cited in Coyle (1997), traditionally the only means for the advancement of teachers would be to leave the classroom for an administrative position. This same commission also states that "In contrast [to the United States], many European and Asian countries hire a greater number of better-paid teachers, provide them with more extensive preparation, give them time to work together, and structure schools so that they can focus on teaching and come to know their students well" (Coyle, 1997, p. 237). It is imperative that time be allotted to teachers to work together, have time for collaborative reflection and decision making which are all key components in an effective leadership model (Coyle, 1997).

Fullan states that "longer-term, sustainable reform requires the deep ownership of teachers and principals" (Fullan, 2000, p. 582). It is imperative that teachers take responsibility for their pedagogy and professional development to keep their instruction current and relevant. "This means that teachers must become experts in pedagogical design. It also means that teachers must use the power of technology, both in the classroom and in sharing with other teachers what they are learning" (Fullan, 2000, p. 582). In order to create instructional ownership and leadership capacity among teachers, there needs to be a feeling of respect and trust among teachers laterally and with teachers and principals vertically (Fullan, 2005).

York-Barr and Duke (2004) cited Hart's (1995) description of three efforts that came from teacher quality initiatives from the 1980's which were mentor teachers programs, teacher career ladders and shared governance. Mentor teacher programs were described as programs that drew on the expertise of master teachers to help support teachers new to the profession. This

program was also designed to create opportunities for master teachers to influence not only professionals, but school district policy and practices. Career ladder programs were developed generally to identify and support different degrees of teaching expertise and reward teachers based on their varying levels of expertise. These career ladder programs also allowed for teachers to have differentiated work opportunities such as decision making roles in regard to curriculum and staff development. The idea of shared governance was brought forth to allow for teacher expertise and teacher influence on decision making regarding instructional, classroom and organizational issues. This allowed for decisions to be made that were informed by teachers and the necessary implementations to be established.

Using a New York City school as an example, Landeau, Van Dorn and Freeley highlight the success of one particular school. Many ideas grew out of a school retreat in which the teachers participated. Ideas that surfaced from this retreat included making time for meaningful collaboration, allowing teachers to provide input on professional development topics, and creating opportunities for teachers to observe one another's best practices. Teachers also decided to create a protocol to address students' social and personal issues that lead to academic problems. Teachers also wanted an opportunity to look at middle schools outside of their district that were successful.

“Building leadership from within takes purpose, vision and most of all, buy in from staff” (Landeau, 2009, p. 58). Because the school surveyed the teachers they found that there was increased teacher buy in which in turn led to increased success. Leaders began to emerge from this retreat and soon teachers began to share the positive experience that they had at the retreat and these new teacher leaders were focusing on the opportunity to truly be part of the decision making process. These teacher leaders formed study groups to address best practices, they

created teacher-friendly visitation schedules and walk-through plans, they surveyed other staff members to examine their interests in regard to new learning, and they developed an action plan for changing the physical environment of the academies. The team began meeting bimonthly discussing the aforementioned topics as well as analyzing student work, technology integration, action research, and improved pedagogy. Each department had at least two teacher leaders. These teacher leaders represented their department at the sustainable growth team meetings. These teacher leaders were also delivering much of the professional development. Because of this the school found that the information was well received and implemented. The school leaders/administrators saw much progress and professional learning communities began to develop surrounding the following topics: English language learners, team teaching, and gifted and talented education. Although the school initially saw much success, many problems began to arise. Teachers felt that the teacher leaders were seen as the “chosen ones” and resentment began to surface, sometimes during collaborative work it became very difficult to reach a consensus, and team members also began to be committed to their own personal agendas. The school realized that they had stumbled on to something extremely positive but during reflection realized that it needed to be adjusted. The school stood by their desire to stick with the model of shared leadership and to create leadership from within. In Landeau (2009), the sustainable growth team split into six smaller committees: inquiry/action research team, student conferencing committee, technology team curriculum committee, data team, and active learning committee (Landeau, 2009).

Perceived Qualifications for Teacher Leadership

Individuals who have taken on roles as teacher leaders have been reported to be strong teachers and their opportunities for leadership have grown from their successes within the

classroom setting. Through their success in the classroom they have reportedly gained the trust and respect from their fellow teachers. In York-Barr and Duke's (2004) article they refer to a study (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), which points out the specific factors which contributed to teachers assuming leadership roles within their respective school sites. These factors include "...excellent professional teaching skills, a clear and well-developed personal philosophy of education, being in a career stage that enables one to give to others, having an interest in adult development, and being in a personal life stage that allows one time and energy to assume a position of leadership" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p.267). This suggests that many see teacher leaders as successful classroom teachers who are in the middle of their career that have the desire and recognition from their colleagues to pursue a leadership position.

Although experienced teachers may seem to be the obvious choice to be tapped for a school leadership position, there is something to be said for the enthusiasm and new ideas that a less experienced teacher may bring to a professional learning community or a teacher leadership position. Fullan discusses the importance of purposeful interactions within and across learning communities that serve as ways to mobilize and moral commitments and energies (Fullan, 2004).

School Cultures and Relationships: Effect on Teacher Leaders

York and Duke (2004) report that Smylie (1992) found that it is possible to have a collegial and open environment yet that may not necessarily have a positive effect on teacher leadership. It was only in cases where the teachers were seen as equals where complete openness was reported. The openness and collegiality was not shared between teachers and teacher leaders. This was found to be because of the relationship being hierarchical which went against previously established professional norms of independence and equality (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Chapter 3 Method

The researcher decided to use a qualitative approach by using interviews with principals and teachers in the San Francisco Bay area who are using professional learning communities to build leadership capacity among teachers.

Sample and Site

A purposive sample of San Francisco Bay area principals and teachers participated in this study. These participants were chosen because of their experience with professional learning communities, as well as using them as an innovative approach to building leadership capacity among teachers.

Access and Permissions

All subjects that participated in this study were given consent forms approved by Dominican University of California's institutional review board that clearly stated the goals and purpose of this study. Furthermore, all subjects were assured that their participation in this study was voluntary and that all information remains confidential. Names or other identifying factors were not used in the summary report.

Data Gathering Strategies

The researcher purposefully selected the subjects for the interview process of this study because they are experts on using professional learning communities to build leadership capacity among teachers. The researcher conducted a face to face interview at a convenient public setting, so as to make the process easier for all of the participants. The researcher also conducted an interview via telephone.

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Data Analysis Approach

All data and information collected was reviewed and analyzed, then organized into major reoccurring themes.

Ethical Standards

All procedures met relevant local, state, and federal regulations regarding use of human subjects in research. The study adhered to the ethical principles in the conduct of research with human subjects as set forth by the Dominican University of California RBPHS Handbook. The research proposal was reviewed and approved by my faculty advisor.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Description of Sample

The first interview participant is currently a principal at a public elementary (k-5) school in Northern California. The second participant involved in this study is a third grade teacher at the same elementary school. Currently the school has approximately 900 students. There is an ethnically diverse student body. This school is made up of approximately 30% Asian, 30% Indian, 20% Caucasian 15% African American and 5% Latino students. This particular school is reported to have a diverse socio-economic background as well. Currently there is a range of families who are living in million dollar homes to others who are living in section 8 housing developments. There are many new housing developments in the surrounding area.

Response to Questions

When the first participant was asked about her previous experience with professional learning communities (PLC), it was evident that the participant was very knowledgeable about the many functions of a PLC. One of the examples that she discussed as an effective use of a PLC was when looking at data for struggling students. She has created a Response to Intervention (RTI) team which is comprised of one teacher from each grade level and other support staff. This PLCs function is to monitor RTI students and identify areas of concern and possible strategies to improve student achievement. The grade level representative then goes back to their grade level and reports on findings within the RTI PLC.

In addition to the Response To Intervention (RTI) PLC, the participant has also created a grade level professional learning community. These grade level PLC's meet twice a month. During these meetings all teachers at the grade level meet and discuss a variety of topics. Often times there will be a selected teacher who will give a mini-lesson, which is representative of a

strategy used in his/her classroom that is to be shared with the PLC. Other times they will use assessment data to guide and monitor their instruction.

She often uses the PLCs to help guide the professional development of the staff. There was a specific incident where one teacher asked to have a professional development program devoted to working with difficult personalities within a PLC, and the participant brought in an expert to train the staff in that specific area.

The participant feels that using PLCs in these ways helps to build shared leadership among teachers and staff. In her experience she has seen PLCs build leadership capacity in teachers. Teacher leadership is the backbone of her school site. The participant feels that it is her responsibility to build leadership capacity among her staff members. She does this through highlighting individual strengths, which builds confidence and in turn raises teacher leadership capacity. She often encourages teachers to challenge themselves. The participant spoke of a time when she sent a group of teachers to a professional development seminar and the condition was that they were to present to the entire staff. Many of the teachers involved were less than confident in their public speaking skills. The participant encouraged the shy teachers and let them know that she had confidence in their abilities as leaders and as teachers. The participant reported that the presentation left her inspired and proud. When she spoke with the presenters they felt proud of themselves and have since taken on more responsibilities at the school.

Within the school district in which the participant works there are also PLCs in place. She discussed that there is a cross district literacy PLC. This PLC has a representative from each school site and during the meetings various issues regarding literacy is discussed. The same goes for Mathematics in this particular district. The participant thinks that this is very helpful in having teachers voices heard at the district level and keeps the schools informed of decisions and

changes being made. Another PLC that is in place at the district level is the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) PLC which consists of parents and teachers. Here issues are discussed regarding the GATE program.

The participant reported that approximately ninety percent of the teachers on her staff were willing to take on leadership roles and be active participants in the school; there were a reported ten percent of teachers who were reluctant. The participant felt that it was her job to motivate the teachers that fell in the ten percent. She works to motivate less than enthusiastic teachers through having, what she called “courageous conversations”. These were described as conversations that were often uncomfortable, but necessary. The participant reported that often teachers were unaware that they were not contributing to the PLC, or weren’t taking on additional roles in the school, or were unaware of the expectations of them as teachers. She went on to say that after these “tough conversations” took place, often times the problem was remedied. Because these conversations were so necessary and effective at her school site she went on to mentor and train the assistant principal to have “courageous conversations”.

The participant spoke about the importance of creating a critical mass of potential leaders within her school site. She thinks that building leadership capacity among the staff is crucial to having a cohesive and high achieving school. There has been a bit of transiency among her staff and without the capacity building work that she has done with her staff she would have to start from the beginning. It is easy to see that there is a shared goal and vision among the grade levels as well as the school as a whole.

Looking forward, the participant plans to implement more professional learning communities at her school site. She is looking into creating a PLC for individual content areas. A PLC would be developed for science, math, language arts, social studies, and so on. These

PLCs would have representatives from each grade level. Teachers would then be able to discuss possible curriculum decisions, engaging lessons or strategies that are pertinent to the content, field trip ideas, or bringing in outside community members to enhance the curriculum. The participant uses PLCs in a variety of ways to empower teachers as leaders as well as to create a positive and innovative place for teaching and learning (elementary school principal, personal communication, June 21, 2010).

The second participant is a third grade teacher who works at the same school site as the aforementioned principal. This teacher has been working at this school site for five years. The participant stated that she has seen professional learning communities (PLC) used in many ways at her school site. There is a specific PLC designed to focus on specific content areas. She called this the Curricular Leaders Team. This allows teachers to take on leadership roles in regard to specific content areas of passion or interest. This PLC meets every six weeks to discuss the content in area in relation to the district and school site goals. The participant currently has committed to taking leadership with regard to multi-cultural issues. She is looking at student data and working to better address the needs of all students. She is required to research this specific area and then report back on her findings. The participant stated that this is a very interesting and effective way to learn from her peers, while being provided ample time and support to be successful in her own research and reporting.

The participant's school site also uses grade level representatives, another example of a professional learning community. The participant reported that this PLC met once a month to discuss various issues that had arisen amongst their respective grade level members, as well as a chance for discussion across grade levels. This school site has also been involved in The Silicon Math Initiative, which is essentially an a model of lesson study borrowed from Japan, that uses

PLC's to focus on lesson study in relation to mathematics. This is a cross grade level program that focuses highly on student thinking. The members collaboratively plan specific lessons, teach the lessons and then focus on the students and the thinking surrounding the concepts presented. Because of the nature of this initiative, it is important to have the support from the school administrator. The participant reported that ample release time is provided to the members of this PLC. The members of this PLC also receive additional compensation for the time that is devoted to this initiative outside of school hours. The participant is also part of a special assignment through the district which is an inquiry study designed to focus on African-American students and math proficiency. This is a study which requires student observation and investigation. The participants are then provided release time by their principal to discuss their findings.

Her school site has been recognized as having a very successful Reader's/Writer's Workshop. Due to the success of their program, the school site has been inviting other school sites as well as districts to come and observe this program. The participant emphasized the importance placed on having an "open door" policy at her school site. The participant reported that it is very common for teachers to observe each other and many welcome the opportunity for growth.

When the participant was asked about her views on teacher leadership, she paused to collect her thoughts and attempted to define it. She defined teacher leadership as using one's expertise, passion and focus; to study, share and practice new information. Shared learning lifts everyone in the process.

When asked about her relationship with her principal the participant stated that the principal was able to hand pick the teachers working at the school site because it was a brand

new school. The participant felt that it allowed for a very positive working environment that supports and fosters teacher growth and leadership. The participant reported that she appreciates all of the various opportunities provided for personal and professional growth.

During the interview we discussed the willingness of teachers to take on leadership roles, and the participant stated that overall there was little resistance. An exception which the participant spoke of was new teachers who were unsure of the school culture or their own ability to lead in area in which they felt less competent. In addition, some teachers felt hindered by time constraints and family responsibility when thinking of taking on a new leadership role.

Although there seemed to be few instances of resistance overall, there were many motivating factors which contributed to a high level of participation in leadership roles among teachers at this particular school site. The participant reported appreciating the growth opportunities and the challenge. She made the assumption that many teachers also felt that others wanted to improve their craft and shared a strong sense of commitment to the students and the work. Other motivating factors for being part of a PLC or taking on leadership roles in a school site is the pride and excitement that the participant feels when being a part of a community that loves teaching and learning as she does. The participant also mentioned that the feeling of “being seen” or recognized is also a motivating factor for her and other teachers.

The participant stated that sustainable change needs to be valued and lived out. According to her this is a vital piece in sustainability. She reported that it is imperative that teachers need to be the change in that, that is who is working with students. Having teachers highly involved also leads to higher levels of teacher buy in, motivation, commitment and dedication. The participant states that without teachers on board and part of decision making there will inevitably be a higher level of resistance.

When asked to think of other ways in which the participant could see PLC's used effectively, she reported that it would be beneficial if this model could be used in more of a macro model especially when looking and state and federal policy. She states that the PLC model is more widely used in academia, but should be integrated into educational policy making circles (third grade teacher, personal communication, October 4, 2010).

Chapter 5 Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

After completing two interviews and reviewing much literature in relation to using professional learning communities as a way to build leadership capacity among teachers, I have found that it is imperative that teachers feel that their work is not only valued, but supported. In both interviews as well as within the reviewed literature I have noticed a reoccurring theme relating to the importance of teachers' involvement in school site decision making as well as instructional leadership when creating sustainable and positive change in education.

Relationship of Findings to Previous Literature

Teachers should be given leadership opportunities that support professional and personal growth. As teachers seek new opportunities and expand their professional capacities, they should also benefit from having room to grow without being micromanaged by administration. Teachers are directly working with students and curriculum daily and therefore may be the most knowledgeable.

It is important that teachers are also provided with adequate professional development to provide them with the necessary tools to be effective teachers as well as leaders. Many teachers would welcome additional training regarding the uses of technology as a collaborative tool as well as effective uses within the classroom. Not only will teachers benefit from training given by experts, but from learning from each other. This is where the true power of PLC lies; teachers learning from one another and allowing each other to grow and be supported by others with a common interest, the students and their learning.

Limitations/Gaps in the Literature

The literature contains small and purposive samples. There is also a limited amount of research on this topic, as using PLC in this capacity is a relatively new concept that is still being explored.

Implications for Future Research

Because the idea of using PLC to build leadership capacity among teachers is in its infancy there is room for additional research on the impact they may have on teacher leadership and creating sustainable and positive change in education. There is a need for additional research as to how and in what ways professional learning communities could be used to create positive and sustainable change within educational policy.

Overall Significance of the Literature

The significance of this study lies in its ability to bring attention to the effectiveness of using professional learning communities to create professional confidence in teachers. This professional confidence spreads to build leadership capacity and motivation among teachers. This study also highlights the importance that the school and district administration has on teacher leadership. It is shown that with a heightened level of principal/administrative confidence in teachers as well as continued support of teachers, there is a higher level of shared leadership among teachers.

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