LAYING THE FOUNDATION TO IMPROVE LITERACY IN A K–12 ISLAMIC SCHOOL THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: A FORMATIVE EVALUATION

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LAYING THE FOUNDATION TO IMPROVE LITERACY IN A K–12 ISLAMIC SCHOOL THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: A FORMATIVE EVALUATION

Hanan Matari and Ruqia Ali
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
December 2018
This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


11.19.16
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

LAYING THE FOUNDATION TO IMPROVE LITERACY IN A K-12 ISLAMIC SCHOOL THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: A FORMATIVE EVALUATION

IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT SAMAD ISLAMIC SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELLs) IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Hanan Matari and Ruqia Ali

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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Chair, Dissertation Committee

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Member, Dissertation Committee

Dean, National College of Education

Date Approved: 1-10-2019
ABSTRACT

To improve professional development, a professional learning community (PLC) was initiated at a small, K–12 Islamic school in northwest suburban Chicago, IL. This evaluation describes and assesses the initiation and year-one implementation of the PLC, and focuses on teachers’ literacy instruction skills. A formative evaluation approach was used to monitor and assess progress and encourage teachers’ ownership of their learning. Teachers collaborated in large and smaller grade or subject area PLC groups to identify, chart, and implement new teaching strategies under peer observation for feedback. Teachers succeeded in establishing school-wide literacy strategies; however, issues challenged the PLC’s future—time, resources, and administrative support.

Recommendations for improvement include: allocating school time for teacher collaboration; implementing differentiated instruction; incorporating regular real-time assessment of student learning; providing administrative support and resources; and working on attracting and retaining teachers.
LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

The intent of this initiative was to develop teachers’ pedagogical and instructional skills so that the students receive the best education possible. Teachers’ continuous learning and collaborating are essential for the growth and success of the school and student achievement. One of the major lessons learned is that, for drastic improvement to occur, school administrators must allot time for teachers to collaborate and engage in reflective practices. Teachers know their students and their classroom environments better than anyone else in the building. Through the PLCs, teachers tackle issues that are relevant to their everyday practices that empower them to experiment with finding effective solutions to achieve desired student progress.

The first lesson learned from teacher commitment is that teachers desire to improve their skills, but they enjoy their learning most when they have time to reflect, internalize, and act upon meaningful learning. The second learning is that taking away a few responsibilities off the teachers’ plates before adding a new initiative helps them to focus and engage in the implementation of an initiative. When teachers were told that a few of their duties, such as substituting for an absent colleague, will be taken away from their heavy schedules, this seemed to convince and motivate them to participate in initiative implementation.

Another important lesson learned is that the teachers can take ownership of an initiative only when school administrators relinquish their own power. If administrators are constantly directing teachers to perform in a certain way, then the teachers become habitual receivers of the problems and solutions. For teachers to take ownership of an initiative, they must feel the power to “helm the ship.” Their creativity and passion will
guide them in the right direction, and they will proudly take ownership of their own learning and growing and assume leadership roles as teacher-leaders.
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the introduction and year-one implementation of a professional learning community (PLC) to enhance teacher professional development and increase student achievement. The study took place at Samad Academy a kindergarten through twelve grade Islamic school in northwest suburban Chicago, Illinois. The focus of the year-one implementation, as decided by the Samad teachers, was to ameliorate a K–12 literacy deficit that existed among students through more effective, targeted professional development. Samad Academy’s intention was to target essential instructional skills that facilitate student achievement and to encourage cultural change so as to build capacity for continuous school-wide learning. It was hoped that this process of change would foster the emergence of teachers as leaders who think, analyze, and evaluate students’ progress to meet their needs.

Rationale

Numerous schools are failing by under educating students, producing unskilled workers, and instilling inefficient critical thinking abilities. For the most part, teachers have been blamed for the students’ and schools’ degradation. Rock and Wilson (2005) reported that after examining The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), experts concluded that American teachers are not incompetent; rather, schools lack ongoing teacher improvement programs and variation in teaching strategies, which impedes academic progress. The authors asserted that American schools need a system in place for continuous improvement of pedagogical and instructional skills (p. 1). If pedagogical and instructional qualities are imperative to student success, should not
teachers excel in their profession? The National Staff Development Council published a report titled *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in The United States and Abroad*. This report claims that 57% of teachers receive less than 16 hours of professional development; a minimum of 50 hours are required in a given subject area to influence teachers’ quality of work (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p. 5). The importance of teachers’ instructional quality and pedagogical understanding cannot be over-emphasized. Teachers require consistent support to analyze, evaluate, and refine essential skills. Providing teachers opportunities to attend professional development days is one method to enhance instructional quality. The rationale behind providing instructional strategies through a professional development plan is the fact that teachers influence students’ aspirations, attitudes, values, learning, and achievement more than any other individual in the school. Students provide teachers with opportunities to teach them just by their mere presence; teachers must have the ability to grab this chance to instill what is required for students to learn.

**Goals**

The primary goal of this evaluation was to build a foundation for a teacher-led action-oriented, sustainable, professional learning community (PLC) at Samad Academy. The PLC would work collaboratively with school administrators to generate a common vision and mission to increase student achievement. Teachers and administrators would be accountable for the short and long-term goals of building teachers’ instructional and leadership capacity to achieve desired student achievement results. Therefore, another goal of this PLC-led professional development initiative was to identify, learn, and
monitor teacher classroom application of new pedagogical approaches and instructional skills designed to tap into students’ innate intellectual and behavioral abilities. Perry and Lewis (2009) directed educators’ attention to the fact that traditional professional development only concentrates on teachers’ behavioral changes, hoping for student achievement. The goal of professional development should be to change students’ thinking and learning behavior due to teachers’ choices of instructional actions. The authors advocated that centralizing student thinking only improves the quality of professional development and a renewed sense of teachers’ confidence (pp. 378–379).

**Research Questions**

The primary research question that guided this study was: Through the introduction and implementation of a PLC, how can Samad Academy develop and implement job-embedded, sustainable professional learning for its teachers that results in increased student achievement?

Addressing this question required first introducing the concept of a PLC to faculty, then modeling and practicing the PLC approach on an identified educational problem, in this case, student literacy. The model was rolled out through a series of six professional development days, each focusing on a particular aspect of how a PLC functions. Thus, the foundation was being laid for the Samad teachers to begin to take a more active role in their professional development, a leadership role that puts teachers at the helm of their own professional learning.

Through the utilization of research on best practices in adult learning and teacher professional development, the researchers provided scaffolding for the emerging PLC through six workshops over the course of one school year. At the same time, teachers
were encouraged to implement in their practice and in their classrooms what they had been learning in the workshops about best practices in literacy instruction and about the value of teacher collaboration. In dynamic interplay, an introduction to and implementation of PLCs were happening at the same time. To assess this ongoing dynamic, three related secondary research questions were also explored:

- To what extent were teachers taking ownership of the PLC and for planning and implementing a workable and sustainable professional development plan?
- How can it be ensured that teachers are applying the new instructional strategies that are being imparted at the professional development day workshops?
- Are students demonstrating progress in classrooms or state mandated academic achievement assessments?
SECTION TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research and literature informing the study is drawn from: characteristics of effective professional development, professional development in literacy, challenges of professional development, PLC teacher-led professional development, and ends with a brief summary.

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

Because Samad Academy’s leadership desired to initiate a professional development program in the school, it is essential to focus on what makes professional development effective. Professional development converts teachers into learners by refining their instructional skills and by promoting enhanced student learning results. On the basis of research, most experts concur on a few common components that make professional development effective.

Purpose

Fullan (2001) explained that moral purpose is essential for educators to feel successful and gratified. In general, people want to be part of success and a positive change; people are mobilized by a sense of a moral purpose and feel intrinsic commitment to the mission (p. 101). The New Jersey Department of Education (2013) described the purpose of professional development as delineating the practices that amend teacher and student achievement (para. 1). To helm Samad Academy in the direction of success, investing time in conveying its moral purpose and religious values is essential to its foundation. Convincing teachers and administrators to perceive professional development in the context of a higher cause to humanity will be the driving force for improvement.
**Vision**

Collins (1999) defined a vision as a “compelling picture of the future that inspires commitment.” Teacher-owned vision leads to effective professional development that provides experiences that fulfill their defined vision (p. 17). A school’s vision provides teachers with experiences that merge abilities with skills to achieve desired student learning. Dunne (2002) presented a vision for professional development in a creative way, stressing that a vision of a successful classroom is critical in designing effective professional development. This vision anchors the main idea that professional development targets for teacher and student improvement are: student learning, instructional strategies, and quality academic content (p. 68). A vision for professional development, therefore, acts as a “bridge” between teacher learning and student achievement.

**Collaboration**

Collaboration among teachers is one of the most important aspects of the teaching and learning job. Caine and Caine (2010) provided evidence that school-based teachers’ learning communities enhance teaching and learning. They asserted that there are four types professional learning communities worth considering when piloting a new program: study groups, action research teams, communities of practice, and conversation circles.

Study group participants read about an assigned topic(s) prior to their congregation and re-congregation. One benefit of the study group is that the team analyzes, evaluates, and understands in-depth what is being advocated school-wide. Action research involves real-world setting, reflections, discussions, and data collection. Communities of practice are defined as learning that occurs through informal
conversations with colleagues and other professional community members. The authors cautioned, however, that many times the informal conversations between colleagues are belief-based rather than research or evidence based. Last, conversational circles are defined as educators sitting in a circle to talk regarding issues and experiences needing attention (Caine & Caine, 2010, p. 101).

Teachers must decide which type of learning community will embody their school needs and fulfill their professional learning needs. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) claimed that teachers learn best when professional development focuses on instruction, collaboration with colleagues, teachers’ reflective activities, and theoretical understanding. Learning in a collegial collaborative format confirms student progress, and social interactions advance knowledge, skills, social resources, and provide moral support (p. 101). Collaboration also develops teachers’ ability to lead, builds teachers’ capacity, and fosters accountability and trust among teachers themselves and with their administrators.

**Developing Teacher Leaders**

Professional development provides teachers with opportunities to become leaders. Dunne (2002) maintained that leadership opportunities enhance school performance dramatically. Collaborative professional development teams, teachers, and administrators alike, make decisions on all aspects of their careers (p. 69). This gives practitioners a sense of accountability and ownership. Additionally, Fullan (2001) asserted that sustainable leadership portrays five capacities: moral purpose, understanding the changing process, collegiality, knowledge building, and coherence making. Fullan argued that the ultimate test of leadership is the kind of leaders one has produced in his or
her team. Professional development builds capacity and illuminates a cultural change that reflects collective mindfulness through cooperation and commitment (p. 101).

**Building Capacity**

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) urged American educators to invest in human capital. The three most academically successful countries, Finland, Singapore, and Canada, address school-wide improvement by building teachers’ capacity. These authors elaborated on three types of professional capital: human, social, and decisional. Human capital investment refers to the enhancement of individuals’ qualities. Individual improvement is more advantageous when it is complemented by social capital. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) explained social capital as group work which focuses on substantial improvement. Decisional capital is the ability to assess situations to bring about the best results. When teachers attain professional capital, they become wise, committed, and talented. With such qualities, teachers will positively meet student needs on all fronts (p. 1).

**Distributing Accountability**

Collaboration brings a collective responsibility for student success that is spread across all teachers and the administration. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) remarked that mutual accountability makes the whole school responsible for student success, rather than blaming an individual teacher or an external mechanism, such as high-stakes testing. Collective responsibility results in collective growth, reflective pedagogical practices, ongoing learning, professional norms, student growth, and empirical data analysis (p. 101).
Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, and Hargreaves (2015) described two types of professional accountability: internal accountability and external accountability. Internal accountability occurs when teachers individually and collectively take responsibility for student learning. Through collaboration, teachers become committed to student success as a “school.” Schools with a collaborative culture, collective expectations, corrective actions, and collective responsibility attain higher student achievement (p. 4).

Fullan et al. (2015) defined external accountability as the constant presence and support of administration, interventions designed to help individual teachers, and transparency of results. However, external accountability is dependent on internal accountability. The effectiveness of internal accountability is expressed in another external accountability measure that of student performance on standardized achievement tests (p. 4).

**Building Trust**

Northwest Regional Laboratory (NWRL) published a report entitled, *Building Trust Relationships for School Improvement: Implications for Principals and Teachers.* The authors of this report, Brewster and Railsback (2003), posited the myriad benefits of trust that are essential for the improvement of schools. Trust amongst colleagues reduces vulnerability, especially when they are committed to a new and uncertain task or reform. Trust promotes problem-solving strategies, cooperativeness, and unity. This report indicated that trust creates a community that encourages partaking with minimal supervision or external pressure. Members of the school community play their parts and take responsibility for their performance. Additionally, trust instills ethical and moral values, guiding the school community through the designed vision and mission (p. 7).
Brewster and Railsback (2003) listed a few essential components of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Benevolence is described as the confidence one has in his or her colleagues for maintaining the community’s best interest at heart, and this interest will be protected for the betterment of the individual and school. Reliability is defined as dependence on one another for confidential support and assistance. Competency is trust in ones’ abilities; it’s the ability to perform the assigned task diligently and honorably. Honesty is another dimension of trust which demands integrity, character, and authenticity. Last, openness is extremely important; for example, a person’s honesty and trustworthiness is questioned if the required information is not completely shared. Brewster and Railsback noted that the size of a school or school district matters, admitting that small schools have a higher chance of succeeding in building and maintaining trust than do larger schools (p. 4). Building trust through PLCs can be accomplished because many larger schools and districts have demonstrated this; it just takes a little more persistence and a while longer (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

**Professional Development in Literacy**

A central component of Samad Academy’s initial PLC mission and vision statements is to increase student achievement through professional development designed to improve curriculum and instructional practices (see Section Four: Mission and Vision). Because literacy is a strong lever in raising student achievement in most if not all subject areas, Samad teachers collectively decided that the focus for year one of their PLC-led professional development would be on improving K–12 student literacy. This meant re-thinking both the literacy curriculum and adopting new instructional strategies.

**Curriculum**
In *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*, Jacobs (2010) referred to the Latin origin of the word “curriculum”: “In Latin, curriculum means a path to run in small steps” (p. 2). Jacob adds that besides identifying the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be proficient in a subject matter area, curriculum “also should aggressively cultivate a culture that nurtures creativity in all of our learners” (p. 17).

The Glossary of Education Reform identifies curriculum as

The lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program. [Additionally,] curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet; the units and lessons that teachers teach; the assignments and projects given to students; the books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in a course; and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate student learning. (“Curriculum,” 2015, para. 1)

When planning effective teacher professional development, the following contextual curriculum considerations need to be taken into account: subject matter, job-embeddedness, coherence in teacher thinking, and students’ learning needs.

**Subject matter.** According to Harwell (2003), the basis of professional development should be curriculum and instructional strategies for a greater probability of affecting student achievement. Student achievement is vital for a school; therefore, teachers must concentrate on improving practical instructional strategies that are needed the most (p. 4). Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and Yoon (2001) argued that professional development requires attention to the duration of time allotted to enhance
subject specific hands-on activities and training that teachers implement in the classrooms (p. 935).

**Job-embeddedness.** Croft et al. (2010) indicated that job embedded, content-specific professional development intensely engrosses teachers in subject matter and refinement of instructional strategies. Therefore, effective professional development should be job-embedded, non-episodic, and subject-specific. Job-embedded consists of “departmental, across departments, grade level, and vertical” (pp. 4–5). Mizell (2010) determined that “professional development is most effective when it occurs in the context of educators’ daily work,” and insisted that job-embedded professional development helps educators analyze, evaluate, create solutions, and address student needs effectively based on student achievement data (p. 7). The reasons for Samad Academy to initiate a professional development committee for improvement were to target job-embedded skills, eliminate episodic professional development days, and concentrate on one subject at a time.

**Fostering coherence.** Professional development that engages teachers in relevant and coherent activities is beneficial in improving student learning. Zech, Gause-Vega, Bray, Secules, and Goldman (2000) emphasized that teachers need to understand how students’ think and learn the subject that is taught to them. Learning communities that are collaborating and reflecting on instructional strategies will help develop an understanding of students learning (p. 207). Zech et al. claimed that content knowledge and instructional strategies are developed through collaborative inquires. Basically, collective efforts help in scaffolding content understanding. Teachers begin to perceive
themselves as constructors’ of knowledge and this gain of perception and knowledge makes a learning community sustainable (p. 214).

**Students’ learning needs.** Educators must take responsibility for providing effective professional development to address students’ learning needs. Mizell (2010) stressed that educators must conscientiously engage in professional learning to enhance their skills and declared: “When educators learn, students learn” (p. 19). DuFour (2004) explicitly explained that educators must acquaint themselves with the three crucial driving questions that will surface repeatedly. What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? DuFour (2004) replied to the last question by suggesting educators address student learning difficulties by providing additional time and support, immediate interventions, and directive. Directive is the required time a student must devote to master the concepts. Interventions must be systematic and must not be confused with remediation (p. 8).

**Instruction**

Using a health and wellness metaphor in “Reducing Literacy Failure through Teacher Development: Implementing a Balanced and Flexible Literacy Diet,” Willow (2008) asserted that a “literacy diet” is essential to the health of a child’s education and described this as having two major nutrition groups: reading and writing. These two groups contain essential learning components. Teachers need to understand why, when, and how to provide this healthy diet. Willow also noted, however, that not all students are going to enjoy the literacy diet; therefore, teachers must integrate other subjects to keep students motivated and encouraged to continue learning (pp. 22–23).
Wisniewski, Fawcett, Padak, and Rasinski (2012) isolated five essential literacy components: phonetic awareness, phonics and word coding, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. In a multicultural schools like Samad Academy, Wisniewski et al. emphasized that teachers of all grades and subject areas need to employ a variety of instructional strategies to tackle each of these essential literacy components to produce the desired student results (p. 101). Willow (2008) warned that not investing in in-depth, long-term professional development of teachers’ literacy instruction skills and understandings may result in immeasurable loss (p. 24).

According to Markwick (2013), high levels of student literacy have multifaceted benefits beyond competency in reading, writing, and oral communication and the roots of behavioral infractions can often be traced to inadequate literacy skills. Literacy helps improve poor behavior, detrimental attendance, and low self-image. Markwick (2013), similar to Willow, contended that failure in achieving literacy skills drastically diminishes chances of a student excelling and succeeding in life (p. 14). Willow (2008) however, takes this a step further, claiming that literacy is so pivotal in the early years of a child’s life, that if a student does not achieve basic literacy skills by the third grade, his or her chances of becoming fully literate as adults decline considerably. While in school, the lack of literacy skills has a desultory effect on learning seen in the depreciation of achievement in all academic areas (p. 20).

Finally, having a high level of literacy helps students across all disciplines, not just in language arts. Schoenbach, Greenleaf, and Hale (2010) contended that it is a responsibility of all teachers, in their area of expertise, to assist students to read, write, talk, and think critically. Teachers can modify and adapt literacy strategies to implement
in their disciplines (p. 39). Because language permeates all disciplines of knowledge, the power of literacy cannot be undervalued.

**Best Practices in Professional Development**

There are two best practices models in professional development that particularly apply to PLC-led teacher learning: lesson study and peer observation.

**Lesson Study**

The genesis of professional development at Samad Academy can emerge as lesson study to advocate for a school-wide literacy program. According to Lewis, Perry, Hurd, and O’Connell (2006), since 1999, American educators have been gravitating towards exploring the lesson study style of professional development, a Japanese professional development approach emphases on improving teaching and learning. Lewis et al. (2006) claimed that lesson study not only focuses on the superior quality of lessons for students, but it also enhances teachers’ knowledge, instructional skills, student observation, data analysis, and collegiality (pp. 274–275). Rock and Wilson (2005) asserted that lesson study prepares teachers to emerge as reflective practitioners, confident professionals, professional literate and education experts, skilled instructional leaders, and supportive peer coaches (p. 79).

Lesson study not only develops instructional strength but it is also a primary means of collegial support contained within the steps involved in its implementation. Rock and Wilson (2005) have listed eight characteristics of an effective lesson study cycle: (a) defining and researching a problem, (b) planning a lesson, (c) teaching and observing a lesson, (d) evaluating and reflecting the effects of the lesson, (e) revising the lesson, (f) teaching and observing the revised lesson, (g) evaluating and reflecting on the
lesson, and (h) sharing the results (p. 79). Joanne Meier, Director of Literacy Programs at Orange County Public School District in Orlando, Florida, explained that steps in a lesson study cycle are not engraved in stone; lesson study style of professional development is flexible and adoptable depending on a school’s needs and circumstances. Furthermore, Meier (2008) also pointed out what lesson study is not a rigid professional development script to be followed by educators; it is not a panacea. It is not a method of producing perfect repository lessons.

If lesson study is an effective means of professional development, then it is imperative to examine the conditions that foster school-wide teacher and student learning. According to Perry and Lewis (2008), student learning is the center of lesson study; student learning roots through their “thinking” and understanding. Therefore, evaluating a students’ thinking before, during, and after a teacher’s lecture is the focus of lesson study. Perry and Lewis (2008) suggested that to make lesson study a success, teachers need to collect data vigilantly on student behavior(s) to anatomize their thinking, anticipate questions, and redirect difficulties encountered during the instructions. Data collection should be discussed, including student mistakes, to redesign better instructions for the next instructional series. By centralizing student thinking and the learning process, teachers are honing their skills to channel knowledge effectively and innovating. Teachers learn when schools provide opportunities for collective efficacy. Lesson study helps teachers, students, and the school to excel as a team (pp. 376–379).

**Peer Observation**

Peer observation is one of the best ways of enhancing and encouraging teacher learning. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2007) maintained that peer observation
helps in three ways: it values teachers’ professional learning accountability; it enhances practice through personal reflection; and it precipitates discussion and dissemination of best practices (p. 2). The authors add that there are three models of peer coaching. First is the Evaluation Model; in this model, senior staff evaluate teachers’ performance which may result in promotional prospects for the teacher. Second is the Developmental Model; in this particular model, experts provide recommendations for teachers’ improvement. Third, the Peer Observation Model provides teachers an opportunity to observe each other and to discuss and reflect in a non-judgmental environment. Peer observation is the only practice that emphasizes mutual observational practices, reflection attempts, and indulgent feedback (p. 5).

Richards and Lockhart (1992) elaborated on the benefits and process of teacher-to-teacher observation, claiming that peer observations have immediate and long-term benefits. Richards and Lockhart (1992) considered peer observation to be an opportunity to collaborate as co-researchers to aggregate valuable information from each other’s’ classroom (p. 5). Additionally, the authors elaborated on the practices that make teacher-to-teacher observation effective. They suggested that teachers should work in pairs to observe each other. Richards and Lockhart also recommended that only a targeted task or an aspect of the lesson must be the focus of observation; teachers are not to evaluate the whole lesson. After the observation, teachers must meet to discuss and reflect on the observations noted. The authors advised that the teachers should not delay the post-observation meeting for a prolonged period of time; teachers should meet at their earliest convenience (pp. 2–3).
Drago-Severson (2009) asserted that when teachers observe each other’s practices and “conduct a peer review,” they assume leadership roles and embrace their own learning (p. 129). Drago-Severson elaborated on the point that adult learners benefit from the challenges and supports provided to them to grow by learning from other’s developments and supports (p. 277). One most important lesson learned from Drago-Severson’s (2009) work with schools, districts, and educator leaders is the importance of deepening trust and implementing new approaches to working with each other (p. 277). When teachers observe one another, they build collegial relationships (p. 73).

**Challenges of Professional Development**

Professional development is an ongoing, lifelong learning. Nicholls (1998) noted the purposes of professional development purposes to be: “developing a new mind set, learning to promote and market one's skills, networking and cultivating relationships, developing self-insight and taking personal charge and developing a range of competencies.” To sustain professional development and consider it as long-life learning, schools need to allot time for teachers to collaborate, practice, and reflect, while following different professional development approaches, such as the framework of lesson study, the PLCs cycle, and the effect of peer observation on teachers’ professional growth in the short and long terms.

**Time Requirements**

Professional development is an ongoing learning process that ensures refinement of skills and practices. Texas Instruments Educational and Productive Solution Division (2004) reported that effective professional development occurs over time; participants learn, practice, reflect, and receive feedback (pp. 6–7). Fullan (2001) pointed out that
cultural changes occur at a slow pace; trying to hasten the process will be counter-productive because it does not change the underlying mindset (p. 101). Mizell (2010) added that professional development is a continuous cycle of improvement that hones pedagogical skills and instructional practices to ensure highly expected classroom results. Mizzel insisted that the participants of professional development should work and stay as a team for a common cause and goal as long as the mission demands cooperation (p. 12).

**Sustainability**

Fullan (2006) believed that leadership qualities and teachers cooperation are essential ingredients to attain a sustainable and effective reform. Fullan mentioned a few qualities of sustainable leaderships: depth (leadership matters); length (leadership lasts); breadth (leadership spreads); justice (leadership does no harm to and actively improves the surrounding environment); diversity and resourcefulness, and conservation (leadership learns from the past and puts effort for the betterment of the future) (p. 101).

Participants also need qualities that assist in the sustainability of the cultural reform process. Fullan (2012) offered Ontario, Canada’s reform as a successful example that demonstrates high professional qualities. Fullan lists these qualities as relentless focused leadership, ambitious goals, building capacity, research and empirical data for decision making, and transparency regarding outcomes and practices (p. 3).

**Time for a New Approach: Teacher-led Professional Development**

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) exponentially increase teaching quality and impact students’ learning through the continuous ongoing process of teachers’ collaboration, inquiry, and action research practices (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016, p. 10). Provini (2012) defined PLC as “the institutionalization of
a focus on continuous improvement in staff performance as well as student learning.”

(Para. 3). Hord (2009) recognized the importance of PLC:

We can all agree that the purpose of schools is student learning, and that the most significant factor in whether students learn well is teaching quality. Further, teaching quality is improved through continuous professional learning. The context most supportive of the learning of professionals is the professional learning community. (p. 40)

DuFour (2004) expressed the importance of PLCs in a school by pointing out that PLCs help shift the focus from teaching to student learning:

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools. (p. 6)

DuFour et al. (2016) identified several other shifts in the culture of teacher development through PLCs, such as shifts in the purpose, the focus, the type of assessment, the response to students who do not learn, the work of teachers, the school culture, and the professional development practice (pp. 258–260).

Teacher professional development is key to improving student learning. However, in order to be most effective, this professional development must be ongoing, job-embedded, and most of all, teacher-led. The U.S. Department of Education (2009) Policy and Program Studies Service Report Highlights stressed the importance of professional development: “NCLB [No Child Left Behind] emphasizes professional development as a key strategy for improving teachers’ skills and effectiveness and also
increases the minimum qualification requirements for Title I—funded paraprofessionals who provide instructional support” (p. 1). With its emphasis on the importance of teacher development, the report suggests schools design professional development to build teachers’ instructional capacity within and to target areas most in need of improved student learning.

As a result, schools across the country have accentuated the importance of ongoing teacher professional development; therefore, it is critical to understand the benefits of a greater emphasis on teacher learning. One benefit is that greater teacher learning is reflected in greater student learning. DuFour (2004) clarified that schools’ missions are not to ensure that the students are taught; rather, schools must guarantee students’ learning (p. 8). DuFour (2009) asserted that “the quality of the individual teacher remains paramount in student learning, and the PLC concept is our best strategy for creating the system that ensures more good teaching in more classrooms more of the time” (p. 2).

Likewise, Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) stated that American educators must increase teachers’ capacity in order to improve student learning. The achievement bar for the students is only as high as the achievement bar of the teachers. Fullan and Hargreaves equated increases in teachers’ instructional capacity, however incrementally, to an aggregate growth in “professional capital,” and they suggested investing in teachers’ capacity gives consistent and strong returns as enhanced student achievement (p. 31).

The research of Garet et al. (2001) supports Fullan and Hargreaves’ contention that sustained commitment to teacher professional development, over time, builds
professional capital. Thus, over time, teacher learning translates into higher levels of student learning. PLCs that concentrate on subject matter and hands-on learning will enhance teachers’ instructional skills even more (p. 935).

Mizell (2010) pointed to another benefit of teacher professional development done within a PLC; it is an effective way of providing support to veteran and novice teachers alike. Veterans and novices in regular interaction learn with and from one another. Teachers who do not experience effective professional development early in their careers may fail to learn, practice, and fully develop the set of instructional skills needed to move their students to ever higher levels of achievement. Novice teachers struggle with a multitude of difficult situations, particularly those without support. To ensure effective and continuous support to those teachers, school leaders should encourage them to participate in a PLC and job-embedded professional development, which are more likely to develop counterproductive teaching behaviors (p. 6). Counterproductive teaching is not only non-educative, but at worse, mis-educative (Dewey, 1938). Echoing Mizell, Garet et al. (2001) argued that schools need to invest in high quality professional development that fosters the desire to learn and to go on learning in both teachers and students (p. 397).

**Summary**

A school-wide effort is required to effectively change school culture to promote learning and excelling. Professional development can transform schools by building human capacity to bring about this sustainable change. Some basic characteristics of effective professional development are purposeful mission, teachers’ collaboration, subject-specific skills improvement, ongoing learning, fostering coherence, and job-
embedded leadership opportunities. Empowering teachers with pedagogical and instructional skills is the best way to succeed in accomplishing desired student results. Building teachers’ capacity is equivalent to building student capacity. Excellence is possible only when teachers and students become eagerly engaged learners.
SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Evaluation Design Overview

Founded in 2008, Samad Academy has always believed in providing teachers with opportunities for advanced learning and leading. However, effective, sustained and affordable professional development was an area in need of improvement. To improve the situation, teachers and administrators at Samad Academy agreed to create and implement a PLC to address the problem. A formative evaluation approach would be used to assess and monitor the roll out of the PLC. Patton (2008) described improvement-oriented evaluation approaches: “Improvement-oriented forms of evaluation include formative evaluation, quality enhancement, learning organization approaches, and continuous quality improvement (CQI), among others” (p. 116).

The formative evaluation paper was initiated early in the 2013–2014 school year and continued until April 2014. After reviewing students’ academic data, the Samad Academy principal reached out to the researchers for help in designing and establishing professional development for teachers to improve their instructional skills through collaboration. In our first meeting with the principal, she expressed concern about students’ academic achievement and her wish to create a more effective model of professional development that meets both teachers’ and students’ learning needs.

Eventually it was decided that the first year of PLC-led professional development would concentrate on improving literacy throughout the grade levels. To begin, with the approval of the principal, the researchers convened a meeting with all of the teachers to show how traditional professional development practices have had little impact on raising student achievement levels. A sense of urgency for making a change was created when
students’ IOWA scores from previous years exhibited students’ stagnating low performance in literacy. To improve student learning, teachers needed to significantly enhance their instructional skills.

The quality and effectiveness of professional development can only improve if teachers understand its importance and purpose. Working collaboratively to institute a professional development plan was essential for the teachers’ understanding of its purpose so it could guide them to take ownership of their professional development. The principal and the researchers provided teachers with a structure for designing the professional development for the upcoming days. Teachers were provided with substitutes when they performed classroom peer observations.

Samad Academy has nine professional development days in its yearly school calendar; six out of the nine days were selected to be used for the introduction and implementation of the PLCs. The purpose of this formative evaluation was to gather information to strengthen and improve the creation and implementation of a professional learning community at Samad Academy with the goal of increasing student achievement.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question that guided this study was: Through the introduction and implementation of a professional learning community (PLC), how can Samad Academy develop and implement job-embedded, sustainable professional learning for its teachers that results in increased student achievement?

Because the introduction and implementation of a PLC were the focus of the primary question, the following three related secondary research questions were also explored in this formative evaluation:
• To what extent are teachers taking ownership for creating and planning a workable professional development plan?

• How can it be ensured teachers are learning and applying the new instructional strategies that are being imparted at the workshops?

• Are students showing progress in classrooms and on state academic achievement assessments?

**Participants**

The primary stakeholders and participants in this program evaluation were the Samad teachers and principal. All teachers were invited to participate in the formation of a PLC committee charged with planning six professional development days. Even though Samad was a small school, 11 out of its 17 teachers agreed to participate. Thus, from the beginning, teachers were involved in the planning, creation, and implementation of a PLC in charge of professional development. The committee selected a leader to ensure effective operation of the professional development days. Through dialogues in the initial meetings, it was decided that the perspectives of all PLC participants were to be valued and considered in the creation of the professional development plan. This approach modeled how an effective professional learning community functions through discussion and collegial interactions.

**Data Gathering**

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the evaluation by the researchers and the teachers. Quantitative data were collected by the researchers using the PLC Behaviors Checklist (see Appendix A), an observational tool developed by the researchers to assess teachers’ individual and collegial interactions during each of six
professional development days. The researchers also collected qualitative data in the form of observation notes taken during each of the six professional development days.

Teacher data gathering tools included a tool that was developed and used by the teachers themselves, the Peer Observation Tool (see Appendix B). Teachers observed one another teaching a new literacy strategy and made an assessment of the effectiveness of the lesson using five categories of effectiveness. The observing teacher was encouraged to write additional notes or observations on the back of the tool before it was shared and discussed with the teacher being observed. However, the data obtained from the Peer Observation tool, at the request of the teachers, was not used by the researchers for this study, nor was it shared with administrators. The researchers agreed with this request because it was viewed as being a part of the process of building trust between the teachers and the researchers as the nascent PLC was just getting off the ground. However, the teachers did share these data at their smaller grade or subject area PLC meetings, along with reflections, thoughts, and observations about the PLC initiative taken from personal journals that some teachers kept. These personal reflective journals also were not shared with the researchers or administrators.

**PLC Behaviors Checklist**

During each of the six professional development days devoted to PLCs, the researchers observed and recorded teachers’ individual, small group, and whole group interactions using the PLC Behaviors Checklist which was shared with the teachers. Data were collected over a period of six months. Seven behavioral characteristics of the teachers were observed: (a) collegial learning, (b) equity of voice, (c) consensus, (d) time and focus, (e) enthusiasm, (f) on task, (g) attendance, and (h) commitment. We selected
these particular behaviors because they were the characteristics of effective professional learning community identified by DuFour et al. (2008). From the 11 teachers who participated in the formation of the PLC, four smaller grade level or subject area PLCs evolved. These smaller PLCs worked together separate from the larger PLC whole group professional development day meetings to share and discuss new instructional strategies and arrange for classroom peer observations.

The researchers collected data using a three category checklist instrument that included the responses: “Yes,” “Partial,” and “No” (see Appendix A). We used this instrument to evaluate the teachers’ behaviors as group participants. “Yes” stands for full participation of the teachers; “Partial” stands for partial participation of the teachers, and “No” stands for zero desire or participation of the teachers. The following definitions were used to ensure the two researchers had a common understanding of the collection of data.

*Collegial Learning:* Harris and Anthony (2001) defined collegiality as “the expectation that any interaction that breaks the isolation of teachers will contribute in some fashion to the knowledge, skill, judgment, or commitment that individuals bring to their work, and will enhance the collective capacity of groups or institutions” (p. 372).

*Equity of Voice:* Equity of voice is “simple, truthful conversations where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well” (Wheatly, 2002, as cited in Foster, Cartwright, Lum, Kuryliw, & Baugh, 2009, p. 36).

*Consensus:* The researchers understood consensus as collective decision making and acceptance by the majority of the professional development team members.
According to Hoerr (2010), “consensus means that most people accept the decision; it's tolerated” (p. 89).

*Time on Task:* The researchers observed teachers to see if they concentrated on activities for the entire time allotted as well as if the teachers were on task at all times.

*Enthusiasm:* The researchers observed the level of the teachers’ excitement, energy, and zeal for learning as well as their participation in the professional development days.

*Attendance:* Attendance was observed in each professional development day.

*Commitment:* Razak, Darmawan, and Keeves (2009) explained teachers’ commitment as “an internal force coming from within teachers themselves who had needs for greater responsibility, variety and challenge in their work as their level of participation in education had grown” (p. 344).

The Behaviors Checklist was used to collect data on participants’ enthusiasm, motivation and collegiality, equity of voice, consensus, and proactive attitude—all indicators of an effectively functioning PLC in action. Data gathered through the Behaviors Checklist, which also included space for the researchers’ own observation notes, were part of an ongoing formative assessment that also included recommendations for improvement to the teachers throughout the establishment and implementation processes of the PLC.

**Teachers’ Personal Journals**

The teachers were encouraged to maintain a personal journal as an aid for reflecting on their classroom practices and their perspectives on lesson implementation.
using new strategies. These reflection journals were not collected by the researchers, but were shared by the teachers within their smaller grade-level or subject matter PLCs to help the group reflect upon, analyze, evaluate, and improve their instructional practices.

**Peer Observation Tool**

Classroom peer observations were conducted as part of the study to ensure that the new literacy instructional strategies introduced and discussed at the workshops were being appropriately implemented. Teachers observed their colleagues on the execution of the new strategies in the classrooms. As a team, teachers were to design a Teacher-To-Teacher, or Peer Observation Form. This form only targeted and scrutinized the skills that were learned by the teachers in the workshops provided by the school. This form was not used by the school to evaluate teachers, nor was it used to collect data for this research. This form was used only to guide the observing teacher’s concentration on the newly learned instructional skills.

**Data Analysis**

Because this study is a formative program evaluation, data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted by the researchers throughout the length of the study, from the inception of the PLC to one year after its implementation. Formative evaluation is improvement-oriented, and with that comes “gathering varieties of data about strengths and weaknesses . . . to inform an ongoing cycle of reflection and innovation” (Patton, 2008, p. 116). The three improvement goals of this evaluation were to: (a) successfully implement a PLC at Samad Academy, (b) begin to transition to a more effective teacher-led professional development model, and (c) strengthen and build teachers’ instructional
and leadership capacity. All of these goals were in service to the larger goal of improving K–12 student academic achievement.

With continuous improvement the primary implementation goal, data on how well the PLC was functioning were regularly shared and discussed with teachers and administrators all along the way. For continuous improvement to become a reality, when in-coming data reveal a particular deficiency, corrections in planning and implementation can be immediately made when and where needed to keep the PLC on-track.

The PLC Behaviors Checklist was the primary source of improvement data collected and analyzed by the researchers. Based upon six characteristics of successfully functioning PLCs (DuFour et al., 2008) the checklist not only served as a focused data collection tool to categorically gather behavioral data on teachers attending each of the PLC professional development days, but it also served as a conceptual framework with which to analyze and interpret the data gathered. These data of teachers’ interactions within the PLC professional development days were regularly compiled, reviewed, and analyzed by the researchers and shared with the teachers to see if, indeed, the PLC was functioning up to standard, and if not, why not.

Data for improvement were also gathered and analyzed by the teachers themselves. Personal journal reflections on what they had learned in the professional development day workshops, and how well they were implementing the new literacy strategies introduced in the workshops in their classrooms, were shared and discussed as part of the formative evaluation cycle of innovation and reflection.

Even though these personal reflections and peer observation learnings were shared mostly with colleagues in the smaller grade and subject level PLCs, their impact
was felt and seen within the broader PLC. In these smaller PLCs, teachers were given space and time to reflect upon understandings gained from the professional development workshops, and to assimilate and internalize new practices while pondering old practices.
SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Eleven of the 17 teachers at Samad Academy participated in the study. Six were unable to participate due to various afterschool activities that demanded their attention and physical presence with the students. This group of 11 teachers agreed to participate in a new teacher-led program and initiative to improve professional development through the introduction and implementation of a PLC. These volunteers attended three preliminary meetings to experience and learn about the philosophy behind teacher-led professional development.

The teachers were told that their perspectives, opinions, and collective efficacy are the driving force of this program. They have the power to helm the direction of the literacy initiative and professional development program.

The teachers, with the guidance of the researchers, planned and organized six professional development days with the goal of introducing, establishing, and practicing the PLC approach to teacher development. Each day had a special topic or question. As participant observers, the researchers recorded teacher behavior and interactions during each of the six days using a PLC Behavior Checklist and observation notes. The following sections discuss the topics for each professional development day along with a description of the activities for the day, findings, challenges noted, and interpretation.

Professional Development Day One: Initiation of the PLC

For the first Professional Development Day, three topics or activities were on the agenda: introducing the PLC concept and purpose of the study, introducing the research questions, and whole and small group discussions about what the teachers had heard.
Description of Activities

First, the researchers introduced the study and the urgency to initiate the professional learning committee. The benefits of PLC and teacher leadership were presented. Second, the researchers posed the primary question: How can Samad Academy develop and implement a job-embedded, sustainable professional learning plan resulting in increased students’ achievement? The teachers were grouped based on grade clusters into four groups and were given 25 minutes to discuss the posed question. Afterwards, the groups were asked to share their ideas with the whole group.

Findings

Teachers agreed to move forward with the creation of a PLC provided it was goal-oriented and focused on students’ achievement. The PLC would tackle only one teaching skill or professional practice at a time. The PLC would set short and long term attainable goals; teachers would collaborate, coach each other, share resources, and conduct peer observations. To ensure collective responsibility, the teachers would reach out to each other when needed. Finally, the teachers decided that the purpose of peer observation would be to assess only the implementation of a new teaching strategy, and not be used to evaluate the overall performance of a particular teacher or be shared with administrators.

Researchers’ Observations and the PLC Behaviors Checklist

During the day, after making an opening presentation, the researchers mingled with and among the teachers as they went about their first PLC collaborative work. The teachers were visibly excited, and had a lot to say and talk about regarding the new initiative. They soon began asking for more time for their small group discussions.
The teachers were asked to discuss among themselves the primary research question posed by the researchers: How can Samad Academy develop and implement job-embedded, sustainable professional learning for teachers resulting in increased student achievement? Nearing the end of the time allotted for this discussion, researchers began hearing comments and requests like: “Twenty-five minutes is not enough to discuss this question with the group!” and “We want more time to discuss this question.” The teachers were already beginning to take ownership of their professional learning! An extra 10 minutes was allotted for teachers to discuss and respond to the question.

Back in the whole group, the smaller group members shared what they had talked about and what the new professional development approach should include and focus on to achieve the goal set forth by the primary research question. Collectively, this mutual sharing included topics such as collaboration and the sharing of resources, the professional development should be goal-oriented with short and long-term goals, and that it be focused on improving student achievement. The whole group discussion was lively and productive, but it took up some additional time. Time allotted for the concluding question and answer session also had to be increased.

Table 1 displays the researchers’ data from their observations concerning the initiation of the PLC as noted on the Behaviors Checklist for Professional Development Day One.
Table 1

*Initiation of the PLC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>50% P 50% Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time On task</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>50% P 50% Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>50% P 50% Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y=Yes, P=Partially, N=No.

As can be seen in Table 1, all four groups express a 100% desire for collegial learning. There is a 100% “yes” for other categories, such as, attendance, on task, and consensus. The “partial” response is given for equity of voice, time/focus, enthusiasm, and commitment. All four groups show a 100% “partial” commitment. About 50% of the teachers present their voice to the whole group; 50% of the teachers concentrate on the activity during allocated time; 50% percent of the teachers are enthusiastic, and only 50% of the teachers are committed to the initiation of a professional development program. Category “No” behaviors are not seen in Table 1 because they were not observed.
Challenges Noted: Teacher Hesitation to Commit

At times, the teachers showed signs of confusion and anxiousness concerning how they would be involved in organizing the professional development days. One teacher exclaimed: “We never did this before. Who is going to guide us? Will we have a mentor to develop this committee?” The researchers also noticed that teachers were hesitant to take a lead or voice their opinions. They were exchanging comments such as, “You say it”; “no, you say it.” Many were concerned about how they could develop the PLC if they were starting the process so late into the school year. Moreover, finding time to collaborate appeared to be a concern as well.

Interpretation

The essential elements to form a committee were discussed and agreed upon. Although teachers were eager to start planning for this committee, limited time and inexperience with such a commitment created anxiety. The concern that echoed the most was the lack of time and the unusually late onset of the initiative. However, teachers devised a plan to move forward with their obligation to improve student achievement by initiating the formation of a professional development committee. The first initiative for the committee members was to devise their set of guidelines. In doing so, they began to realize the depth of commitment that would be required to succeed. Fullan (2001) asserted that through cooperation and commitment, teachers build their own capacity. This changes culture and builds collective mindfulness (p. 101).

The teachers asked the researchers to provide protocols to be followed when initiating a professional learning committee. The researchers provided protocols of the six essential characteristics of PLCs put forth by DuFour et al. (2008) and adapted by
Solution tree (see Appendix D). This allowed teachers to appropriately plan and organize future professional development in-service days.

**Professional Development Day Two: Teacher Leadership in PLCs**

Topics on the agenda for the second professional development day were: teacher leadership, improving student achievement, designing the next professional development day, assuring implementation of new strategies, and questions and concerns.

**Description of Activities**

The researchers started the meeting by posing the question “Who will helm the PLC?” It was imperative the teachers realize that in order for the newly founded PLC at Samad to take hold and succeed, teachers must assume a leadership role in determining, planning, and organizing their own professional development. The group discussed how PLCs can help improve student achievement. After deciding to focus on literacy, the teachers then discussed among themselves what literacy strategies they wanted to learn in the next three PLCs.

Copies of the 2013 IOWA examinations were distributed to the teachers. The intention was to direct attention toward areas requiring improvement and how to design a path to achieve this improvement change. Teachers were given time to examine and discuss the reading, writing, and comprehension test scores. Low IOWA scores stirred discussions in all directions, such as poor attendance, language barriers, dysfunctional families, and more. These issues provided a reason to elaborate on the importance of an effective professional development plan that tackled multifaceted social, cultural, and school problems. However, the teachers decided to concentrate on one topic, literacy, and the practices that are related to literacy skill development. The teachers understood
they would be responsible for implementing the strategies that were learned in their PLCs.

Findings

Teachers decided to target basic learning skills first, such as, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension. They wanted their students to have a solid foundation of basic skills. Teachers also discussed how to ensure that these newly learned strategies were being implemented in the classrooms.

Researchers’ Observations and PLC Behaviors Checklist

When the teachers reviewed the IOWA scores and discussed the root causes for such low scores, they pointed their figures at the parents and the students. One teacher complained: “They are never on time” and another teacher remarked: “Half [of] the time they are missing school.” Another teacher expressed her concern that “most of our students are immigrants. They [are] coming from different countries; they don’t know English.” A fourth teacher said: “They don’t do homework and parents don’t help them.”

Table 2 displays the researchers’ data from their observations concerning teachers as leaders as noted on the Behaviors Checklist for Professional Development Day Two.
Table 2

*Teachers As Leaders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time On task</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y=Yes, P=Partially, N=No.

During the second professional development day, teacher leadership, student achievement, and the professional development day’s progress were the main topics. Table 2 shows that the teachers are fully participating and the 100% “Yes” category is observed in Collegial Learning, Time on task, Consensus, and Equity of Voice. However, a decline in attendance is seen in two of the groups, where only 50% of members are present. Commitment and enthusiasm drop and fall into the 50% category. The participants’ energy level is low as is their commitment.

**Challenges Noted: The Blame Game**

When the teachers discussed students’ achievement and the low IOWA examination scores, they blamed external sources, such as dysfunctional families, poor
attendance, students are English Language Learners (ELLs), as contributing to their students’ failure. Additionally, the researchers noticed that the teachers were not completely confident about the future of the PLC. One of the teachers questioned, “How can we ensure the effectiveness of the professional development days?” Many teachers expressed uncertainty regarding the belief that low IOWA test scores could be raised by the end of the year. They seemed to not understand the extent to which they now had control of their own professional learning. There was some anxiety about planning and organizing the remaining four PLC professional development days that will be geared toward enhancing teachers’ instructional skills to improve student literacy. Where to begin?

**Interpretation**

Because literacy is such a broad topic and given the low IOWA scores, the teachers decided that professional development days must concentrate on developing the basic skills of literacy so as to form a strong literacy foundation. Markwick (2013) acknowledged that literacy skills are vital academically and for practical life (p. 14). One teacher observed: “Since almost all students are foreign born, every aspect of language is difficult for them.” Schoenbach et al. (2010) noted that it’s the teachers’ responsibility to assess student literacy skills; teachers are to identify and adapt effective strategies to implement in their classrooms (p. 39). Participants at Samad Academy brainstormed ideas for possible presentation topics. A few of the suggestions that surfaced were vocabulary, reading strategies, and comprehension. Upon inquiring on how to plan professional development days, the group extracted information from the book *Evidence-Based Instruction in Reading* authored by Wisniewski et al. (2012).
Professional Development Day Three: PLC Vision and Mission

The only topic on the agenda for the third Professional Development Day was a broad one: create vision and mission statements to guide the PLC.

Description of Activities

To begin, in the whole group, the researchers presented several definitions of vision and mission, along with examples of vision and mission statements. Then, in their smaller PLC groupings, teachers were given time to conduct their own research so as to develop a deeper understanding of vision and mission statements and how they might be applied to PLCs. After researching and discussing the difference between vision and mission, they then crafted drafts of PLC vision and mission statements in their small groups. Later, they shared and discussed their small group drafts with the whole group with the goal of coming up with one collaboratively created vision statement and a mission statement that would govern their emerging PLC. Once this was accomplished, the teachers consented to adhere to their PLC’s vision and mission for as long as they continue their services at Samad Academy. Additionally, leaders of the initial PLC committee committed to providing protocols, resources, and assistance to each of the smaller grade and subject area PLCs for overall improvement of the school.

Findings

The teachers’ final collaborative version of the vision statement for their PLC was: “Samad Academy will be a learning community where everyone is provided the opportunity to learn and grow.” The mission statement was: “By developing teachers’ instructional skills through PLCs and providing them essential resources, student learning will be promoted.”
Researchers’ Observations and PLC Behavior Checklist

The teachers had concerns about writing the PLC vision and the mission. One teacher lamented: “This takes too much time.” Another concurred: “I think we need two to three days to finish writing the vision and mission.” A third concluded: “We do not have time.” Some teachers expressed anxiousness about aligning the PLC vision and mission to the vision and mission of the school. One teacher asked: “How can we learn strategies to teach religion in PLCs? It has to be connected to our school mission.” Another teacher commented the religious mission of the school: “Teaching religion is part of our school and it should be in every work we do.” Others wanted the PLC mission and vision statements to be utilized and put into effect immediately. One teacher suggested: “We should print and post them in the classrooms.” In support of this idea, another teacher remarked: “Peer observation will help implementing and supporting the mission [of the PLC].”

Table 3 presents the researchers’ data from their observations concerning the PLC vision and mission as noted on the Behaviors Checklist for Professional Development Day Three.
Table 3

**PLC Vision and Mission**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Engagement</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on task</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>50% 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>75% 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.*  Y=Yes, P=Partially, N=No.

During the third professional development day, the main topic was vision and mission. Group 3 and Group 4 exhibits the most support for the initiation of the professional development program. These two groups show 100% “Yes” in all areas of participation. Participants in these two groups involved themselves in the topic and goal that had been set for the day. Groups 1 and 2 show “partial” or 50% in participation due to an observed lack of enthusiasm; in all other categories they are observed as being 100% “Yes.” However, Group 1 is also deficient in commitment, with a 25% “Partial” based on the observations of the researchers. About 75% of all the groups show a solid commitment to the task at hand and the professional development initiative overall.

**Challenges Noted: Aligning School and PLC Mission and Vision Statements**

Writing the vision and mission of the PLC as general statements was difficult for the participants. They were hesitant to create directives that would be applied to teachers.
in future PLCs at the school. Even though the statements were general, and could have been more specific, the group understood the direction they needed to move in. Creating separate vision and mission statements for the smaller grade and subject area PLCs is not necessary to reaching the desired goal of improving student learning. One set of statements to be applied to the broader PLC is enough. Additionally, these statements are not intended to be carved in stone; they can and should be revisited periodically to see if they are still relevant. Teachers also expressed concern regarding the alignment of the PLC vision and mission with those of the school. This is a valid concern. Even though Samad Academy was a faith-based educational institution, the vision and mission of the school needed to include preparing students to be college and career ready within the framework of its faith identity.

**Interpretation**

There is a confluence of research presenting the importance of collectively creating a vision and mission if initiatives are to succeed. Therefore, the third professional development meeting concentrated on writing a vision and a mission statement for the PLCs. Burt Nanus (as cited in Dufour & Eaker, 1998) stated that “there is no more powerful engine driving an organization towards excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future [that is] widely shared (p. 57).” DuFour and Eaker added that mission is the purpose and reason why a school or a committee exists (p. 58).

Samad Academy’s teachers combined their thoughts and drafted their first version of the vision and mission statements. The teachers were excited to share their vision and mission statements of the professional development committee, but felt unsure of the statements’ quality and alignment to the school’s vision and mission. The group did not
feel they were given enough time to assemble their thoughts and come up with statements of deep meaning that resonated with everyone. One teacher said, “We need more time.” More time was allocated to the task upon the teachers’ demand. However, all agreed that the statements needed to be revised annually, or as needed. This initial attempt at creating vision and mission statements not only gave the PLC a direction, but was an exercise in leadership.

**Professional Development Day Four: Identifying and Monitoring Implementation of Literacy Comprehension**

The topics on the agenda for the day were identifying a set of research-based instructional strategies to increase reading comprehension, and on monitoring if and how well those new strategies were being implemented in teachers’ classrooms.

**Description of Activities**

Teachers were asked to work in their small groups to research and then share effective instructional strategies that boost comprehension skills. Teachers identified five comprehension strategies and called them the High Five (see Appendix C). They agreed the most important strategy for improving student reading comprehension was vocabulary-building. Vocabulary was an area that Samad students routinely performed low on standardized achievement tests. The PLC had decided in previous professional development days that they would target and examine various reading comprehension strategies and vocabulary-building was at the top of the list. In preparation, researchers had prepared a PowerPoint presentation on strategies to improve vocabulary. In support of the presentation, the researchers handed out an article on strategies that enhance student vocabulary. In their small PLC groups, teachers read and discussed the presentation and accompanying article. Back in the whole group, “takeaways” were
displayed, shared, and discussed using post-it charts created by each of the groups. In addition to strategies focusing on vocabulary, word analysis and sentence clue strategies to enhance comprehension were also discussed.

Creating a Teacher-To-Teacher Peer Observational Tool

To monitor if and how well the new literacy teaching strategies were being implemented in classrooms, teachers suggested and took the initiative to design a teacher-to-teacher Peer Observation Tool (see Appendix B). The tool was to be strictly used by teachers only to provide constructive feedback to one another. It would not be used as a teacher evaluation instrument, nor included in the data collected by the researchers. The reason for this stipulation, which the researchers readily agreed to and supported, was that this request showed a willingness among teachers to collaborate for the greater good of their students, and by making themselves vulnerable to criticism from the peers was a major step forward toward building trust among teachers in the PLC.

Researchers’ Observations and PLC Behaviors Checklist

Because most of Samad’s students are English Language Learners (ELL), the researchers noted that within their small groups, teachers were researching and discussing literacy comprehension and vocabulary-building strategies based on ELL students’ learning needs. One group was heard to say that “drawing word into pictures will help in retaining the word and its meaning.” Another group mentioned that “repeated use is the most effective way of learning vocabulary words.” One teacher shared her experience on how she improved her own children’s vocabulary: “I do it by the repeated use of vocabulary words during dinner time with family, in addition to using them in the classroom.”
In the whole and in the smaller PLC groups, teachers discussed why and how to measure whether teachers were actually implementing the new instructional literacy strategies they were learning during the professional development days. At first, teachers were hesitant to create a tool to measure the effectiveness of newly learned strategies. Questions raised were: “Who will develop the tool?”; “How effective will it be?”; “Can we apply this tool to all grade levels?”; and “Who has the time to design this tool?” In the end, the teachers decided peer observation was so valuable they created a teacher-to-teacher Peer Observation Tool based upon what an effective lesson looks like in action.

Table 4 displays the researchers’ data from their observations concerning the tool to observe the implementation of a new strategy as noted on the Behaviors Checklist for Professional Development Day Four.

Table 4

Creating Tools to Observe the Implementation of the Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality Learning</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on Task</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y=Yes, P=Partially, N=No
The fourth Professional Development Day concentrated on identifying strategies to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary as well as classroom peer observation as a means of monitoring and helping teachers assess how well they were implementing the new strategies. Table 4 shows that teacher energy is high and all four groups aggressively participate in all of the categories on the PLC Behaviors Checklist. All categories receive 100%, except for the categories of commitment and enthusiasm.

Groups 1 and 2 are not convinced that the Samad Academy PLC would last longer than a year. One of the teachers in Group 2 said that “after you [referring to the researchers] leave, we will have no one to guide us. It’s not going to work out well without a mentor, you know.” Lack of confidence in the PLC model to improve teachers’ instructional capacity and leadership skills hindered commitment from Groups 1 and 2.

**Challenges Noted: Attendance, Time, and Conducting Peer Observations in a Timely Manner**

In professional development day four, the researchers noticed attendance was fluctuating, and teachers had voiced concern about a lack of time to do anything beyond attending the professional development days. Many said they would like to integrate the newly learned instructional strategies and participate in peer observation, but they were feeling pressed for time to make arrangements to accommodate other teachers or their own visits to different classrooms. One teacher expressed a supervisory concern: “If I go to observe other teachers, who will watch my classroom.” Providing classroom coverage for peer observation turned out to be a problem for many; especially in situations where coverage for a normal random teacher absence had to take priority over coverage for a peer observation. When this happened, teachers had to rearrange lessons and reschedule the peer observation. It was just more work.
Interpretation

For the majority of students at Samad Academy, English was their second language. Their foundation and familiarity with the English language were not strong; consequently, neither were their literacy skills and competencies strong. The teachers appreciated learning new strategies to improve literacy for ELLs, but arranging for peer observation on how well they were implementing the new strategies was a challenge. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2007) asserted that peer observation enhances teacher professionalism in a number of ways, such as increasing professional learning accountability, developing practice through implementation and reflection, and in the dissemination of best practices (p. 2).

Working in their small PLC groups, the Samad Academy teachers discovered how helpful it was to collaborate and expressed a desire to do so more often. Teachers reported taking away new teaching strategies they could use the very next day. Observing and critiquing one another’s implementation of these new strategies, however, was a necessary second step to cement them into a teacher’s instructional repertoire. This second step was a stumbling point in the Samad Academy PLC initiative. Administration had agreed to support peer observation as a component of establishing a PLC-led teacher professional development model at Samad. This commitment meant allocating part of two scarce resources—teachers and time—to the success of the initiative, especially at a small, faith-based school like Samad. Offered in good faith by the administration, support for peer observation had to give way to other more pressing priorities, like having a teacher in every classroom every day. Richards and Lockhart (1992) argued that peer observation has both immediate and long-term benefits (p. 5). Drago-Severson (2009)
touted peer observation as being essential to teacher professional development and teacher leadership (p. 29). The problem for many schools, both large and small, is finding an economically feasible way to institute it.

**Professional Development Day Five: Reflection on Implementation of Strategies and Peer Observations**

The agenda for day five of the PLC professional development sequence included a discussion on the implementation of new literacy vocabulary-building and comprehension instructional strategies, an introduction to culturally responsive instruction, and feedback on peer observation.

**Description of Activities**

In the whole group, teachers shared how they implemented a vocabulary-building strategy learned at the last professional development day. As a result, many mentioned that how focusing on vocabulary had positively impacted comprehension; their students were able to answer accurately at least 70% of comprehension questions after the lesson. Based on feedback from their peer observations, teachers suggested that they all read an article together and then model strategies before the whole PLC, simulating a “experience it before you teach it” technique, followed by a question and answer session.

As a prompt for further discussion and practice in using their own comprehension strategies, teachers were given an article to read on lynching in the U.S. The article was intentionally chosen by the researchers because the concept of lynching and its history in the U.S. were new to most of the foreign-born teachers employed at Samad Academy. To better comprehend the article, a certain amount of background knowledge and vocabulary were needed. In the discussion following, teachers shared their reactions and understandings of what they had just read. They also shared and discussed their own
thinking processes and comprehension skills used to comprehend the article. The teachers were then asked to reflect upon the experience and thought processes they used to comprehend the article on lynching and compare it to their students’ comprehension process when they are presented with new concepts and information. Formative evaluation requires a cycle of action followed by reflection and action again, only this second time, better thought through and better informed action. The teachers were encouraged to write personal journals on their implementation of the new instructional strategies.

**Researchers’ Observations and Behaviors Checklist**

After reading the article about lynching, teachers were asked: “What were you thinking and how were you processing this information?” The idea was to encourage them to think about how students’ process all the new information that is bombarded on them each day. In response, one teacher shared: “This article brought chills to my body. If students read this article, they will never forget what ‘lynching’ means.” Another teacher announced: “These kinds of articles give us a reason to explain to our students the importance of religion and [the] goodness it brings to earth.”

Following the discussion of the lynching article, the researchers made a presentation about culturally responsive instruction, referencing an approach presented by Wisniewski et al. (2012). The researchers then distributed the article, “Culturally Responsive Teaching Matters!” by Elizabeth B. Kozleski (2010). While homogenous in faith, Samad Academy had a wide variety of races, ethnic, and national cultures represented at the school. Sometimes cultures clash; but more often at Samad, the wide range of racial, ethnic, and nation-of-origin differences among students sitting before
them presents a real but somewhat hidden-in-plain-sight instructional challenge for teachers. Given the increased focus on teacher professional development to improve instruction and student learning, the researchers thought it was important and a good time to introduce the concept and practice of culturally responsive instruction so the teachers were at least aware of the concept.

Prior to this day five presentation, many of the teachers at Samad had never heard the term “culturally responsive instruction.” The teachers were most excited about this presentation, and appreciated the researcher’s introducing them to this new knowledge. In addition to this article, the researchers also presented some culturally responsive teaching strategies to enhance student understanding. Everyone attentively listened and took notes.

Table 5 presents the researchers’ data from their observations concerning reflection on instructional strategies and peer observation as noted on the Behaviors Checklist for Professional Development Day Five.
Table 5

*Reflection on Instructional Strategies and Peer Observation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y P N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality/Engagement</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time/On task</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>75% 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagial Learning</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>X X X</td>
<td>75% 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Y=Yes, P=Partially, N=No

Table 5 indicates that all four groups evidence 100% in all categories except for the categories of attendance and commitment. In Group 3, one teacher was absent, and Group 1 showed a degree of lack of commitment. However, commitment in the other three groups indicates a significant increase when compared to the previous professional development days. Likewise, increases in More Equity of Voice, Consensus, Time on task, Enthusiasm, and Collegial Learning are also apparent. Attendance is still fluctuating, but not by much; one teacher could have been missing due to a valid reason. As previously mentioned, commitment was not fully attained by all groups.

**Challenges Noted: A Multitude of Languages and Cultural Diversity**

Students and teachers from Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, Palestine, and other Arabian Peninsulas constituted 100% of the student and teacher population.
Encouragement and support at home for both teachers and students to use and practice their English was minimal. A major challenge Samad Academy faced at the time of this study, and most likely into the near future, was having to hire teachers who were English-as-a-second language learners themselves (ESL) teaching students who were a vast majority ESL.

**Interpretation**

When teachers discussed the strategies they used in the classroom and the impact of their peer observations, the researchers noted that most of teachers were not only observant, they were also cordial. They complimented one another on integrating the new literacy teaching strategies into their lessons. One teacher complimented another: “You did so well that it felt like you have been using this strategy from a long time.” Another teacher exclaimed: “Flawless, simply flawless.” While at this early phase in the growth of the PLC it might seem like a conflict-avoiding mutual patting of each other on the back, in fact, it showed that trusting, caring, and intimate relationships had taken root. These qualities of relationship are all necessary for an effective, well-functioning PLC. Teacher participants formed alliances, not only with their peer observation mates, but also with the teachers in their smaller grade and subject area PLCs. Communal relationships and interactions were beginning to arise from the ground-up. According to Drago-Severson (2009), when teachers conduct peer observations, they build collegial relationship (p. 73); it is important to develop the trust and implement new practices when working collaboratively together (p. 277).
Professional Development Day Six: Feedback from Peer Observation, New Strategies for Spelling, Lesson Planning, Assessment, and Future of the PLC

The researchers had planned to use much of this last PLC professional development day discussing the teachers’ experiences with observing one another and the future of the PLC. However, there remained a host of other new and ongoing topics to discuss, such as the implementation of new comprehension strategies and peer observation, an introduction to new spelling instructional strategies, designing lesson plans using the new strategies, teacher-made assessments, and the future of the PLC.

Description of Activities

In discussing the literacy comprehension strategies roll out in front of the whole PLC, both the observed and the observers expressed joy and satisfaction with the experience. One teacher remarked, “I wish I can do this every week. I learn more when I see how others teach.” Another teacher offered: “I saw how well Mrs. S. took care of discipline issues while implementing the new strategies. I can only do one thing at a time!” The whole PLC laughed. When implementing the new strategies, teachers came across one major problem, the language barrier. Upon hearing this, most teachers agreed by nodding or by making remarks such as, “I agree”; “That’s how I feel”; and “Yes, it’s an issue.” Most Samad students were new to the U.S. and were second language learners. As a result, the learning curve for most students was steep.

While some teachers admitted to having a difficult time assessing student reactions to the new strategies using the Peer Observation Tool, they clearly enjoyed working together in the peer observations because they seldom had the chance to do so. One teacher inquired: “Can I observe Ms. A.? I am sure I will learn a lot from her [Ms. A].” The teachers had a good experience with both observing and being observed.
The second item on the day six agenda was a PowerPoint presentation by the researchers on new, more effective spelling strategies. Teachers of the younger students seemed to be the most enthusiastic about this presentation. One teacher laughingly said, “This will help me improve my spelling too.” Knowing smiles appeared and giggles emanated from many in the PLC.

Third on the agenda was how to design a lesson plan using the newly acquired instructional strategies. Teachers were given time to work alone to create a lesson plan using the new spelling strategies they had learned. Upon returning to the whole group, teachers shared their newly created designs and the kinds of activities they would use to incorporate these new strategies. One teacher declared: “Word puzzles work best! Students think they are playing but in reality, they are learning the spelling.” Another exclaimed happily: “I already use these strategies. They really work!”

Switching gears, the researchers invited teachers to think about and discuss the purpose and value of teacher-made assessments versus standardized assessments. The researchers began by cautioning teachers that the results of their newly acquired and implemented literacy strategies would not appear in higher standardized test scores for students over night; only persistent work over time would show progress.

A way to assess student learning more immediately is through teacher-made assessments used either after a lesson or series of lessons on a concept or skill. The researchers stressed that these assessments are for the teacher’s use only, to help her or him continually monitor student learning and understanding and reteach if need be. These day-to-day teacher-made classroom assessments are not intended to be part of a teacher’s annual performance review or shared with administrators; although, if mutually
agreed upon beforehand, they may be. Rather, teacher-made assessments are to be used as a “dip stick” tool for both the teacher and the student to regularly gauge how well both are doing.

**Findings**

Spelling at Samad has been done traditionally where the teacher reads aloud the word and students repeat the word and practice writing it five to 10 times. To change this practice, teachers decided to teach spelling words from the texts students read, not in isolation. Teachers expressed great interest in further exploring different assessment methods. They also showed and expressed an immense interest in learning more about effective ways of self-examining newly learned and implemented teaching strategies.

Since this was the last professional development day, teachers were encouraged to design student-centered activities in their lessons plans. They were gently urged to analyze their own growth in order to increase student learning and to continue to observe each other and provide each other feedback. Teachers were also strongly encouraged to reflect on their instructional skills to ensure quality education.

**Researchers’ Observations and PLC Behavior Checklist**

In their smaller PLC groups, teachers discussed how they “make tests” and design assessments for their classrooms. One teacher said, “My tests are mostly multiple-choice questions. It’s easy to grade you know.” Another teacher remarked: “I add a few essays to all my tests; it helps me assess their understanding.” One interesting comment overhead by researchers was from a teacher who said, “I don’t use paper/pencil tests to evaluate their progress; [I use] all of their projects as a source of assessment.” Teachers reported using a variety of classroom-based methods and tools to assess ongoing student
progress. Back in the whole group discussion of assessment, the researchers stressed how important it was to promptly give students feedback, and to keenly observe and note every student’s progress.

Despite the growing enthusiasm exhibited by the teachers for directing their own professional learning, the final discussion on the sixth and final day of the PLC-led professional development sequence was, for the researchers, the saddest of all. Teachers were concerned about the future of their jobs. This sentiment was felt by many; one teacher acknowledged this by saying, “I don’t think any of us are coming back next year.” This sentiment expressed publicly did not bode well for the future sustainability of teacher-led professional development at Samad Academy.

Table 6 shows the researchers’ data from their observations concerning this final day’s participatory behaviors as noted on the Behaviors Checklist for Professional Development Day Six.

Table 6

Wrapping Up, Moving Forward, and Reflecting on the Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality Learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on Task</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>75% 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Y=Yes, P=Partially, N=No
Table 6 shows that all four Groups received 100% in all categories except for the commitment category. Only Group 1 showed resistance to the idea of commitment. In this last professional development day, it was obvious that teacher retention was a problem at Samad Academy. Many teachers were leaving by choice and others were let go at the end of the school year. A teacher from Group 1 said, “I told you so” referring to the PLC’s unsure existence. Over the period of six months, the researcher had observed a steady improvement in teachers’ attitudes and behaviors within the PLC and toward teacher-led professional development; however, due to looming teacher attrition, the sustainability of the PLCs was in jeopardy.

That being said, data from the PLC Behaviors Checklist and the researchers’ notes indicated improvement in all four group’s attitudes and eagerness to learn and implement the new instructional strategies. A sign of an effective PLC, the teachers demonstrated and began to develop trust in each other’s judgments by accepting constructive criticism from their colleagues in the peer observations. Teachers actively embraced the new school-wide literacy approaches with full autonomy for their implementation. They effectively took ownership of the initiative. A recurring concern collectively voiced by the teachers, however, was the lack of time to become more deeply engaged in the work of the PLCs. Nevertheless, even with limited time, the researchers observed and noted that most of the teachers were energized by the opportunity and prospect of taking control of their own professional learning. At this point in time, the researchers concluded, initiating a professional learning community at Samad Academy had changed the culture of the school in a positive way, especially in the area of “collegial learning.”
Challenges Noted: Job Insecurity—An Impediment to PLC Sustainability

While they enjoyed the PLC experience of working collaboratively with their colleagues this year, many of the teachers were anxious that their contracts might not be renewed for the next year. Teachers were worried and concerned about not having a job. Teacher retention seemed to be a huge problem at Samad Academy that could continue into the future. According to Schlechty (2001) high teacher turnover contributes to toxic school culture (p. 148). Constant turnover inhibits the seeding, commitment, and long-term development needed for the benefits of fully functioning professional learning community to take hold and be felt.

Interpretation

Ingersoll (2001) noted that in many schools, teachers choose to leave due to a lack of administrative support (p. 522). That did not seem to be the case at Samad, where the principal was supportive of the PLC from the beginning. Teachers left Samad not because of a lack of leadership support, or a weakening of their belief and commitment to the vision and mission of the school, but because of feeling stuck in a constant cycle of financial insecurity and worry about the future of their jobs. Uncertain or late-arriving yearly enrollment projections combined with a dearth of stable, reliable, long-term funding sources play a significant role in teacher retention, a not uncommon situation many faith-based schools find themselves in each year. These schools have to be fiscally prudent; as a result, teaching contracts are oftentimes not renewed at the end of the school year. Those teachers have little choice but to start looking for jobs elsewhere. Thus, the teacher revolving door cycle is financially ingrained and repeats itself year after year.
SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Two conceptual frameworks guided the introduction and implementation of PLCs at Samad Academy: (a) the importance and need for “team structures that nurture adult development” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 91) and (b) the characteristics of effective PLCs (DuFour et al., 2016). A third framework applied to the study was formative evaluation, defined by Patton (2008) as “collecting data for a specific period of time, usually during the start-up or pilot phase of a project, to improve implementation, solve unanticipated problems, and make sure that participants are progressing toward desired outcomes” (p. 118).

Patton (2008) distinguished the difference between formative and summative evaluation around purpose. The purpose of a summative evaluation is to make a judgment on the effectiveness of a project or initiative that has been in place for a while; the purpose of a formative evaluation is not so much about judging but rather monitoring the progress of a project or initiative in “making things better” (p. 116).

We wholeheartedly agree with Patton’s distinction, but Patton also noted that sometimes the two approaches blend, allowing initial judgments to be made in formative evaluations. We will proceed to render our judgment on the introduction and implementation of PLCs at Samad Academy. The primary research question of this study is addressed first, followed by the three related secondary research questions. Recommendations for taking the PLC initiative to the next step are then discussed.
Judgment

Primary Research Question

The primary research question that guided this study was: *Through the introduction and implementation of a professional learning community (PLC), how can Samad Academy develop and implement job-embedded, sustainable professional learning for teachers resulting in increased student achievement?*

Most teachers enthusiastically embraced the notion of having a professional learning community. It was a new and exciting concept and, for the most part, they eagerly participated in the six PLC professional development days. The PLC model posed a radical shift in school culture, “the way we do things around here” at Samad. Power and authority were being upended with teachers assuming more responsibility for their own professional learning. Leadership for change would now come both from the top-down and the bottom-up. While most teachers thought this was a good thing, many did not fully understand the level of commitment at the individual, large group, and smaller grade/subject area levels that a PLC requires. Talking about change is one thing; changing one’s behavior is another. Hesitancy in the face of change, especially radical change, is to be expected. For example, the teachers were unsure and uncertain about processes and procedures needed to achieve higher levels of student learning. They lacked the “big picture” systems perspective and approach to leading district or school-wide initiatives. However, engaging in grade/subject area PLC meetings and the PLC professional development day activities did help them brainstorm, synthesize, and discuss ideas and options for future professional development days. They were gradually taking ownership of their own professional development. A major impediment, however, was
the lack of time. Finding and setting aside time within the regular school day or week for small and large PLC groupings to meet need to be addressed in order for the PLC to take a firm hold within the culture of the school. To ensure the future and sustainability of the PLC model, teachers proposed that guidelines and expectations for participation be created, and that all future in-service professional development days be job-embedded.

Secondary Research Question One

The first research subquestion that flowed from this study’s primary question was: To what extent are teachers taking ownership for creating and planning a workable professional development plan?

In order to initiate any major change in an organization, a sense of urgency must be created. If we are doing fine, why change? In this case, the researchers asked the teachers in small groups and later in the whole group to examine the school’s latest IOWA achievement test scores. Using these data, the researchers asked the teachers to discuss “What are we doing well?” and “Where do we need to do better?” These low scores encouraged teachers to reevaluate their practices and helped them to understand the committee’s power to change practices for the betterment of the students. Teachers were given complete freedom to voice their ideas and perspectives on planning professional development days. Their suggestions to start professional development days with strategies to improve students’ basic skills were honored. Caine and Caine (2010) asserted that honoring teachers’ opinions and voices eliminates their chances of working in isolation. Once this happens, teachers begin taking ownership of initiatives (p. 101). Samad Academy leadership encouraged teachers to take ownership of planning their professional development days.
Teachers were uncertain about how to develop an effective plan for professional development. To guide the professional development committee to work at full potential, a path was needed to be followed to achieve productive results. Therefore, a vision and a mission statement were essential for this committee. Teachers were allotted time to collectively create the statements. This empowered teachers to visualize a direction for the school, goals for teachers, and increased student learning.

**Secondary Research Question Two**

The next research subquestion that flowed from this study’s primary question was: *How can it be ensured teachers are learning and applying the new instructional strategies that are being imparted at the workshops?*

Teachers expressed their thoughts in their personal journals about how effectively they were implementing the newly learned strategies. Their individual analysis was shared with the PLC for suggestions and constructive feedback. Investigation on the strategies being implemented in the classroom ensured three practices: self-reflection, internalization, and group discussions.

Small group PLC discussions gradually helped teachers to build up enough trust to invite colleagues into their classrooms to observe them implementing one of the new literacy teaching strategies. The teachers collectively decided that a graphic tool, much like the ones they used with students, be utilized to better focus the observation. Thus the teacher-to-teacher Peer Observation Tool was created (see Appendix B). The tool allowed the observer to hone in on specific aspects of the strategy, how effectively it was being implemented, and how it was being received by students. There was also a place for the observer’s comments.
Peer observations built bonds of trust between teachers and provided the opportunity to safely dialogue about strengthening their practices. The fear of being evaluated by the administrators was not present because a sense of job security is maintained when evaluation is only among peers and would not be shared with administrators.

Originating ground-up from the smaller PLCs and extending into the larger PLC, Samad teachers quickly assumed ownership and took control of their professional growth by implementing peer classroom observation. Teachers realized that peer observation was much more than a way to ensure teachers were implementing the new literacy strategies with fidelity; it was an essential first step in the creation of a true PLC where teachers’ individually acquired “professional capital” that could be openly shared, distributed, and applied for the benefit of all, teachers and students alike.

Secondary Research Question Three

The third research subquestion that flowed from this study’s primary question was: Are the students showing progress in school and on state assessments?

Because student learning is the ultimate goal of any professional development, it is imperative to measure the professional development’s impact on students’ progress and achievement. Unfortunately, Samad’s teachers were not trained well in this area for two reasons: a lack of time and no strategies were provided to design effective measurable assessments. Teachers started discussing how to make their teacher-made tests more valuable. Ideas were freely floating during professional development committee meetings, and teachers started questioning present methods for improvement. Additionally, due to delay in receiving the 2014 IOWA results’ report the 2013 and the
2014 IOWA scores were not examined by the teachers; these scores were to be compared and contrasted before the end of the school year.

Overall, the PLCs and the professional development it provided was successful. All teachers expressed satisfaction and joy in learning from and collaborating with colleagues. But time restraints created undue stress. Teachers gained practical knowledge; however, they needed more time to internalize and practice their learned skills.

**Recommendations**

Samad Academy recognized an urgent need for K–12 literacy improvement. In response, the school initiated a PLC designed to improve both adult and student learning schoolwide. Like many small, cash-strapped faith-based schools, Samad Academy had trouble finding and providing affordable high-quality professional development for its teachers. It has now been opened to the idea that using a PLC to build instructional and leadership capacity from within can be an inexpensive yet effective means of providing long-term, job-embedded, sustainable professional development. That being said, teachers and administrators need to understand that initiating PLC-led professional development requires time and effort to take hold and become the “new normal” over time. The following are recommendations to take the Samad Academy PLC to the next level.

1. Design an allotted time in the master schedule for the teachers to collaborate.
2. Prepare teachers and staff for a new reform at least a year prior to its implementation.
3. Design differentiated student centered activities to meet the needs of all students.

4. Build teachers’ capacity by providing training around various methods of writing effective assessments.

5. Support and provide resources to ensure effective PLCs.

6. Work on retaining teachers for the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

Any new initiative can be expected to have unforeseen flaws and imperfections, either in design or implementation or both. A PLC always remains a work in progress. To come into being and to stay fresh and alive, teacher reflection and feedback in a recurring loop is essential for growth. The teachers at Samad Academy have been exposed to and experienced a radically different approach to professional development than they had been used to. They have now experienced a bottom-up, teacher-led process that requires commitment, critical thinking, data-based decision making, collaboration, and creativity. It will be hard to go back.
REFERENCES


http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=4702899&S=R&D=tfh&EbscoContent=dGJyMNXb4kSeprU4y9fwOLCmr1Cep69Sr6u4TK%2BWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGss06wr7JQuePfgeyx44Dt6f1A
### APPENDIX A

**PLC Behaviors Checklist**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>All 4 groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPNO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity of Voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time On task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher’s Notes:
APPENDIX B

Peer Observation Tool

Teacher Name: ____________________________
Observe ____________________________

Grade: __________ Subject: ______________ Date ____________________________

What strategy was the teacher using? Observed Strategy:
______________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was the used strategy clearly Explained/ understood?</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can you observe that the teacher was using the strategy discussed in the PLC?</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were students’ reactions to the implemented strategy?</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Were students confused or did they understand the content presented?</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support your statement by examples.</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What suggestions can be given to the teacher for improving the implementation of the strategy?</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is there anything else that you would like to share with the classroom teacher? Please use the back
APPENDIX C

High Five!

Strategy 1: Activating Background Knowledge (survey)

- Personal experiences
- History indications
- Research on the topic
- Connection to real life
- Purpose

Strategy 2: Questioning (questions)

- How, why, what, where . . .
- What is the problem, what is the solution, what happened in the story?
- How did the character develop through the story?

Strategy 3: Analyzing the Text (read)

- Make sure to differentiate text to student’s reading level and English proficiency
- Interrelated ideas
- Key words
- Headings/subheadings
- Vocabulary/cue words
- Graphs/charts/images/maps/timelines/figures
- Genre type/narrative/persuasive/sequential

Strategy 4: Creating Mental Images

- Creating visual image: Drawings/pictures/art work
- Preview: movies/captions/documentaries/reports
- Model to students and give them chance to discuss and talk

Strategy 5: Summarizing

- Main ideas and details
- Sequence of events
- Use graphic organizers
6 Essential Characteristics of a PLC
(adapted from Learning by Doing)

1. Shared mission, vision, values, goals
Educators in a PLC benefit from clarity regarding their shared purpose, a common understanding of the school they are trying to create, collective communities to help move the school in the desired direction, and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) goals to mark their progress.

2. Collaborative teams focused on learning
In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in collaborative teams to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable. The structure of the school is aligned to ensure teams are provided the time and support essential to adult learning. “Collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.”

3. Collective inquiry
Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each team’s decision-making process.

4. Action orientation and experimentation
Members of a PLC constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas. They learn by doing.

5. Commitment to Continuous improvement
Not content with the status quo, members of a PLC constantly seek better ways to achieve mutual goals and accomplish their fundamental purpose of learning for all. All teams engage in an ongoing cycle of:
• Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning
• Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
• Implementing the strategies and ideas
• Analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
• Applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

6. Results orientation
Educators in a PLC assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice. “The success of the PLC concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.” —Richard Dufour
Developing Norms

Comments to the Facilitator: This activity will enable a group to develop a set of operating norms or ground rules. In existing groups, anonymity will help ensure that everyone is able to express their ideas freely. For this reason, it is essential to provide pens or pencils or to ask that everyone use the same type of writing implement.

Supplies: Index cards, pens or pencils, poster paper, display board, tape, tacks

Time: Two hours

Directions

1. Explain to the group that effective groups generally have a set of norms that govern individual behavior, facilitate the work of the group, and enable the group to accomplish its task.

2. Provide examples of norms.

3. Recommend to the group that it establish a set of norms:
   - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
   - To increase productivity and effectiveness; and
   - To facilitate the achievement of its goals.

4. Give five index cards and the same kind of writing tool to each person in the group.

5. Ask each person to reflect on and record behaviors they consider ideal behaviors for a group. Ask them to write one idea on each of their cards. Time: 10 minutes.

6. Shuffle all the cards together. Every effort should be made to provide anonymity for individuals, especially if the group has worked together before.

7. Turn cards face up and read each card aloud. Allow time for the group members to discuss each idea. Tape or tack each card to a display board so that all group members can see it. As each card is read aloud, ask the group to determine if it is similar to another idea that already has been expressed. Cards with similar ideas should be grouped together.

8. When all of the cards have been sorted, ask the group to write the norm suggested by each group of cards. Have one group member record these new norms on a large sheet of paper.

9. Review the proposed norms with the group. Determine whether the group can support the norms before the group adopts them.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When Establishing Norms, Consider:</th>
<th>Proposed Norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When do we meet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will we set a beginning and ending time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will we start and end on time?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How will we encourage listening?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How will we discourage interrupting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidentiality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will the meetings be open?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will what we say in the meeting be held in confidence?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What can be said after the meeting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision Making</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How will we make decisions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are we an advisory or a decision-making body?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will we reach decisions by consensus?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How will we deal with conflicts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How will we encourage everyone’s participation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will we have an attendance policy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do we expect from members?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are there requirements for participation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>