

Faculty Research Grant
Final Report
Arkansas Tech University

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A. Work entitled: “Transforming Diverse Classrooms” – Final report for the presentation at the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI) Global Summit on Childhood was held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, April 10 – 13, 2014.

B. Research Problem

Fullan (1993) suggests that educators must, “redesign the workplace so that innovation and improvement are built into the daily activities of teachers...and [adopt] institutional renewal with new forms of leadership, collegiality, commitment to, and mechanisms for continuous improvement” (p. 353). In order to accomplish such organizational agility schools and collaboration educational institutions will need to develop infrastructures, which empower their most valuable resource [teachers and administrators] with opportunities and authority to develop solutions collaboratively (Weller & Weller, 1997). Such a colossal undertaking demands educators who are not only visionary, but have the courage to increase their capacity for complex problem solving, resilience and ultimately their adaptability to change. According to Sirotnik (2001), “Educators ‘must’ become their own change agents and active and critical consumers of their own and others’ knowledge in the context of their own practices and the changing of these practices” (p. 107).

C. Research Procedure

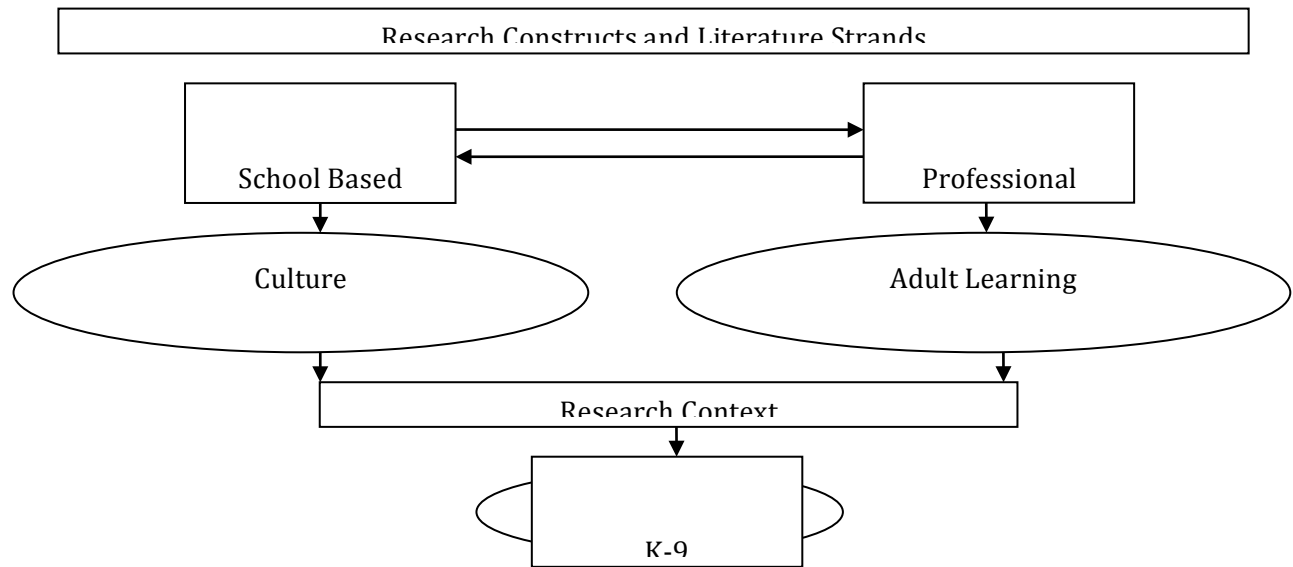
The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change. Through investigating how each of the participating schools manage these two processes this study will be able to explore how PLCs, leadership, culture and change interface to influence this relationship. Research questions incorporating various elements

of DuFour and Eaker's (2008) theory of professional learning communities were used to guide this study. The central question for this study is: What is the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change? Sub-questions include:

1. What is the role of leadership in the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change?
2. What is the role of school culture in the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change?
3. What is the role of group dynamics in the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change and how are they managed?
4. Research Design Correlating Questions with Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources
What is the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change?	Interviews, observations, historical documents and questionnaire
What is the role of leadership in the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change?	Interviews, observations, historical documents, and questionnaire
What is the role of school culture in the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change?	Interviews, historical documents and questionnaire
What is the role of group dynamics in the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change, and how are they managed?	Interviews and observations

Using a mixed methods case study methodology I used a purposive sample of three independent cases (K-9) within a large rural school system in the southwest region of the United States. Data collection included 24 semi-structures interviews with administrators and faculty, multiple site based observations, a school-wide questionnaire with 100+ participants and relevant historical documents.

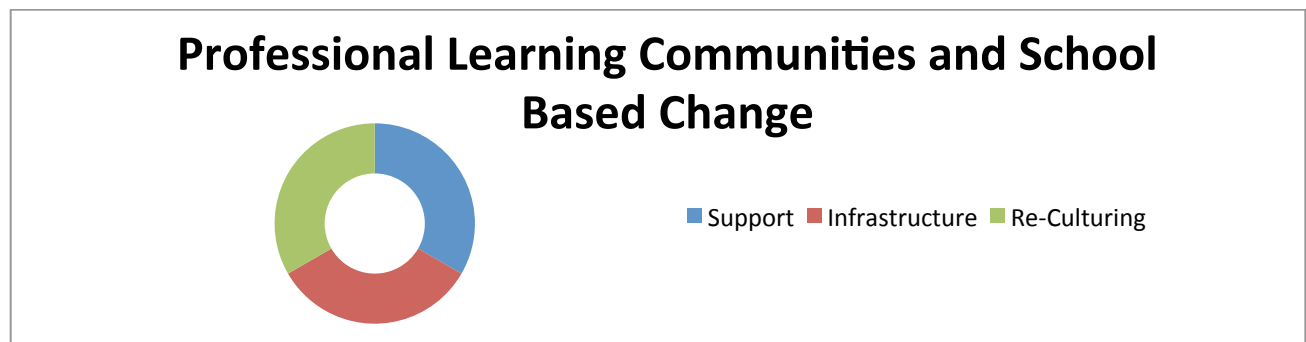


D. Summary of Findings

The objective of this multi case study was to explore the individual ‘journey’ of three separate school’s ‘processes and outcomes,’ analyzing their thoughts and experiences regarding professional learning communities and school based change (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The study findings showed that support, infrastructure, and re-culturing all played significant roles in each of the school’s PLC evolutionary journey and that these three themes interfaced and overlapped even as their PLCs continued to develop and change.

Findings from the study’s four data sources (interviews, observations, questionnaire and documents) concurred that changes in the following areas had occurred since the inception of PLC’s: an improvement in the school’s consistency regarding academic expectations for students, an increase in the collaboration and communication amongst faculty, administration and the district, more opportunities to engage in shared leadership opportunities, an improvement in their professional commitment to each other, the students and their own teaching and learning, and an increase in their ability to work together to create solutions to ongoing challenges in their

classrooms and in the school. As the staff developer from School 1 summarized so eloquently, each of these three school's journey began with a 'disquiet with the status quo' and while each school's journey has been different, study participants concur that each has indeed experienced effective changes in their schools.



Support

- Instructional Learning Leader
- Accessible and Supportive

Infrastructure

- Collegial Teaching and Learning
- Shared Leadership

Re-Culturing

- Shared Professional Commitment
- Shift in Focus

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

Study results indicated that in order for PLC's to continually evolve and consistently adapt there must be a learning leader who is supportive and accessible, one who provides multiple opportunities for shared leadership and responsibility, one who embeds collegial teaching and learning into their teacher's daily work schedules, and one who fosters shared professional commitment amongst the members of his or her professional learning community. A framework for creating this new teacher leadership and learning paradigm, which emerged from my study's

findings, included: 1) leadership which focuses on improving learning outcomes through mastering the 5 C's (*challenge, capture, convert, communicate and culture*), and 2) learning that focuses on a generative framework which 'enhances individuals' capacity to create by empowering them to continually question current assumptions and consistently transfer tacit knowledge into proposing new, creative ways of thinking and doing.

