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Final Report

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Final Report
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My research presentation “*A New Paradigm for Empowering Innovative Leadership and Learning within Today’s Diverse, Democratic Schools*” was presented at the American Educational Research Association in Chicago, Illinois, April 16-20, 2015.

B. Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between DuFour & Eaker’s (2010) professional learning community (PLC) framework and school-based change. The investigator employed a mixed method, multi-case study methodology was determined to be the most responsive for both the research questions as well as the context and focus of this exploratory study. The primary source of data collection for this study was 24 semi-structured interviews, 60+ minutes in length with each of the school principals and related key members of faculty and staff. The secondary sources of data collection included: 40+ hours of observation in PLC meetings, staff meetings, and related administrative and classroom activities in each of the three schools, a 21 question school culture questionnaire (Olivier, Bobbett, Ellett, & Ruggett’s, 1998), and related documents. The study findings showed that *support, infrastructure, and re-culturing* all played significant roles in each of the school’s evolutionary journey and that these three themes interfaced and overlapped even as their unique PLCs continued to develop and change. Furthermore, triangulated findings from the study’s key data sources concurred that changes in the following six areas had occurred since the inception of PLC’s in their schools: 1) an improvement in the school’s consistency regarding academic expectations for students, 2) an increase in the collaboration and communication amongst faculty, 3) administration and the district, 4) more opportunities to engage in shared leadership opportunities, an improvement in their professional commitment to each other, 5) the students and their own teaching and learning,

and 6) an increase in their ability to work together to create solutions to ongoing challenges in their classrooms and in the school.

C. Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between DuFour & Eaker's (2010) professional learning community (PLC) framework and school-based change. The areas the study specifically focused on included: 1) the facilitating and inhibiting factors involved in implementing and sustaining the PLC framework, 2) the impact of leadership and culture on the process, and 3) the framework's influence on the participating schools systemic renewal capabilities as they pertain to improving educational outcomes for diverse populations. The core research question was: What is the relationship between professional learning communities and school based change?

D. Significance/Need

Research suggests that today's professional educators must redesign classrooms so that innovation and improvement are built into the daily activities of educators...to adopt institutional renewal with new forms of leadership, collegiality, commitment to, and mechanisms for continuous improvement (Acess, 2000; Argyris, 1993; Burns, 1996; DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hargreaves, 1995). In order to accomplish such organizational agility schools will need to develop infrastructures, which empower their most valuable resources with opportunities and authority to develop solutions collaboratively (Weller & Weller, 1997). 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). Hord (2008) concurs claiming that creating communities of continuous inquiry and improvement requires teachers who are motivated to act, to transform their

knowledge about effective change into realistic action plans. Ultimately, preparing our next generation of democratic leaders demands school administrators and teachers who have the commitment to consistently increase their capacity for complex problem solving, innovation, resilience, and adaptability to change.

E. Process for Attainment of Objectives/Goals: Professional Enhancement

Preparing my per-service teachers to be effective teacher leaders in today's diverse, democratic classrooms is one of my core research interests and the focus of my current research proposal for this year's AERA conference. One of my core objectives for attending this particular conference is that our college is currently in the process of developing several new programs (Elementary Ed, Dyslexia, Early Childhood Spec Ed) and this is the perfect opportunity to learn from some of the best researchers in the field; information that I can in turn share with my colleagues as we work to develop our new programs. The second objective is that AERA is one of the few professional organizations that provides the opportunity for presenters to not only share their research at the conference itself, but they also provide a conference proceedings option, so our research papers are peer reviewed and published, a benefit for myself as the researcher as well as ATU, the sponsoring institution. Lastly, I am part of the Leadership for Social Justice SIG which allows me to network, glean valuable insights from my colleagues across the country through this AERA conference, which then enables me to share these discoveries with the Social Justice Commission I serve on through Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) and other related local, state and national committees.

F. Dissemination of Results

Keeping our paradigm current requires engaging in ongoing research, application and reflection and representing Arkansas Tech at international conferences such as this allows me to

share my own research findings with colleagues across the country as well as to benefit from the collective expertise of those presenting. This form of nationwide networking is invaluable as we work to develop important professional relationships that can aid in our department's development of a nationally accredited Curriculum and Instruction program for both our online and campus-based courses. I also plan to disseminate the findings from this study through the conference proceeding as I mentioned before, appropriate peer-reviewed journals as well as developing a couple of book chapters with Dr. Ibrahim and Dr. Walsh in a book on Flipped Classrooms. Furthermore, conducting ongoing research enables presentations at local and national conferences, such as this one, and increases my professional capacity to disseminate new insights with the committees on which I serve, more effectively teach and mentor the students with which I work, and perpetually look for new opportunities and ideas to engage in meaningful research on those issues which are most pressing for effectively preparing 21st century teachers for an ever changing global society.

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