WHY DO LEARNING COMMUNITIES DEVELOP IN SOME ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND NOT IN OTHERS? A STUDY OF SELECTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN GREATER VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

Janet Mary Lauman
M. Ed., University of British Columbia, 2004

DISSERTATION Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In the Educational Leadership Program
Faculty of Education

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Simon Fraser University
Summer 2011

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Name: Janet Mary Lauman
Degree: Doctor of Education
Title of Thesis: Why do Learning Communities Develop in Some Elementary Schools and not in Others? A Study of Selected Elementary Schools in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia.

Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. Geoff Madoc-Jones
Limited Term Senior Lecturer

Dr. Sharon Bailin
Senior Supervisor
Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

Dr. Larry Sackney
Co-Supervisor
Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

Dr. Cynthia Lewis
Internal/External Examiner
Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University

Dr. Sheila Carr-Stewart
External Examiner
Professor, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Learning Communities (LCs) in public schools has become more mainstream during the past ten years, as it holds great promise for helping to improve both student and adult learning and the learning experience generally. However, the ability of educators to sustain and maintain PLCs continues to be elusive. Most LCs last a short time and then falter.

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors encouraged LCs to be sustained or not to be sustained by school staffs. By shedding light on these factors, an understanding of this phenomenon was sought in order to assist staffs in making choices that would lead to their LCs becoming more systemic. The conceptualization used for the study was that a living systems approach to LCs, leads to enhanced learning and growth, whereas a managed system leads to status-quo learning and growth at best. School district leaders were approached in order to find schools suitable for this study; five elementary schools from the greater Vancouver area from within two school districts were chosen. The research was conducted as a case study using a mixed-method design.

The findings of this research suggested that a living systems approach to designing and maintaining LCs shows promise for achieving sustainability. Schools that were able to foster a more living systems approach to create and maintain their LC were experiencing shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive relational and structural conditions and the ability to operate within the British Columbia (BC) educational context in a healthy way. This led to enhanced learning and growth within these school communities for students and teachers alike. Unions and the provincial government were generally seen to be unhelpful for maintaining LCs. District structures and policies were generally seen as helpful.

The living systems approach to LCs fits well with 21st Century learning initiatives thinking. Empowering appropriate teacher leadership and ensuring the professional growth of teachers within the framework of a developing learning community was a major recommendation of this study.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Larry Sackney whose expertise, knowledge and guidance was instrumental in supporting me during the writing of my dissertation, from inception to completion. Thanks also go to Sharon Bailin and Geoff Madoc-Jones who offered timely support and advice during portions of my writing. A thank you also goes to Fred Renihan for helping me find district level contact people, and to the two districts that agreed to participate in the project.

To the teachers who helped to pilot the interview questions and survey questionnaires and to the teachers, principals, and the members of senior management who generously donated their time to participate in this study, your gift of time was greatly appreciated.

A special thank you to Derek Lauman and Mark Lauman for information technology support and to my family: Derek, Mark, Alison and Emily without whose continuous support this journey would not have been possible.
## Table of Contents

- Approval .................................................................................................................. ii
- ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................... iii
- Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. iv
- Table of Contents ..................................................................................................... v
- LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................. x
- LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................... xi

### Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................... 1
- The Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................... 2
- Research Questions ............................................................................................... 2
- The Researcher ....................................................................................................... 3
- Potential Significance of the Study ....................................................................... 4
- Study Parameters .................................................................................................. 5
  - Delimitations ....................................................................................................... 5
  - Limitations .......................................................................................................... 5
- Definition of Terms ............................................................................................... 6
- Organization of the Dissertation ........................................................................... 7

### Chapter 2: Literature Review .......................................................................... 8
- The History of Learning Communities .................................................................. 8
- Why Learning Communities Were Adopted by School Systems ..................... 10
- Definition and Characteristics of Learning Communities ............................ 12
- Research and Learning Communities ............................................................... 15
- Challenges ............................................................................................................ 21
  - Change ................................................................................................................ 22
  - Teacher Unions and the PLC – Thoughts of Caution ...................................... 24
  - Sustainability ...................................................................................................... 26
- New Theoretical Perspectives of Learning Communities ............................... 27
  - Mitchell and Sackney’s Ecological View .......................................................... 31
- A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework ......................................................... 33
- Summary ................................................................................................................ 36

### Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods ................................................... 37
- Rationale for the Chosen Design ......................................................................... 37
  - Purpose Statement ............................................................................................... 39
  - Research Questions ............................................................................................. 40
  - Sub-questions ...................................................................................................... 40
- Description of Methodology .............................................................................. 41
- Mixed-Methods Design ....................................................................................... 43
  - Survey Questions ............................................................................................... 43
  - Focus Group Questions ...................................................................................... 45
  - In-depth interviews ............................................................................................. 46
  - Ministry Sources ................................................................................................ 46
  - Sample Size ........................................................................................................ 47
- Data Analysis ......................................................................................................... 48
- Validity and Reliability ......................................................................................... 49
- Ethics Approval ..................................................................................................... 53
Developing Learning Communities
Chapter 5: Findings for District “B” ................................................................. 131
   Context of District B .................................................................................. 131
   Trillium Elementary .................................................................................. 133
      Survey data collected at Trillium elementary. ....................................... 134
      Interview data ........................................................................................ 138
      What factors helped LCs to develop? .................................................... 138
      What factors hindered LCs from developing? ........................................ 141
      Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs? 142
      What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have? 147
         Politics .................................................................................................. 147
         Interpersonal relations ......................................................................... 148
         Trust ..................................................................................................... 150
         Budget .................................................................................................. 152
      How does the LC become systemic? ....................................................... 152
      FSA data for Trillium elementary ............................................................ 154
      Satisfaction survey data for Trillium elementary .................................... 154
   Parkside Elementary .................................................................................. 156
      Survey data collected at Parkside elementary ....................................... 158
      Interview data ........................................................................................ 162
      What factors helped LCs to develop? .................................................... 162
      What factors hindered LCs from developing? ........................................ 165
      Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs? 167
      What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have? 171
         Politics .................................................................................................. 171
         Interpersonal relations ......................................................................... 173
         Trust ..................................................................................................... 174
         Budget .................................................................................................. 175
      How does the LC become systemic? ....................................................... 176
      FSA data for Parkside elementary ............................................................ 177
      Satisfaction survey data for Parkside elementary .................................... 178
   Summary ..................................................................................................... 180
Chapter 6: Analysis of Quantitative Data .................................................. 181
   School Survey Data ................................................................................... 181
      BC Context ............................................................................................. 181
      Shared and Supportive Leadership ......................................................... 193
      Shared Values and Vision ...................................................................... 194
      Collective Learning and Application ....................................................... 195
      Shared Personal Practice ....................................................................... 196
      Supportive Conditions – Relationships ................................................ 197
      Supportive Conditions – Structures ....................................................... 198
      Statements .............................................................................................. 199
   FSA Data and Satisfaction Survey Data .................................................... 200
      FSA Data ................................................................................................ 201
      Satisfaction Survey Data ....................................................................... 203
   Summary ..................................................................................................... 204
Chapter 7: Findings Based on Analyses of School Data ............................ 205
Developing Learning Communities

What factors helped LCs to develop? ................................................................. 205
Leadership ........................................................................................................... 205
Organizational Structures ................................................................................... 207
Capacity ............................................................................................................... 208
School Design ..................................................................................................... 209
School Goals ....................................................................................................... 210
What factors hindered LCs from developing? ...................................................... 211
Finite Time .......................................................................................................... 211
Leadership ........................................................................................................... 212
Capacity .............................................................................................................. 213
School Design ..................................................................................................... 215
School Goals ....................................................................................................... 215
Influence of Politics, Interpersonal Relations, Trust, and Budget ...................... 216
Positive Factors ................................................................................................... 216
Politics .................................................................................................................. 216
Interpersonal relations ......................................................................................... 218
Trust ..................................................................................................................... 219
Budget .................................................................................................................. 219
Negative Factors ................................................................................................ 220
Politics .................................................................................................................. 220
Interpersonal relations ......................................................................................... 221
Trust ..................................................................................................................... 222
Budget .................................................................................................................. 223
Does Improved Learning Play a Part in Maintaining LCs? ................................. 223
Teacher Learning – Positive Factors ................................................................. 224
Group power ....................................................................................................... 224
Watching peers .................................................................................................... 224
Assessment .......................................................................................................... 225
Personal growth .................................................................................................. 226
Student Learning – Positive Factors ................................................................. 226
Student achievement results ............................................................................. 226
Grouping students ............................................................................................. 227
Whole child emphasis ........................................................................................ 227
Technology ......................................................................................................... 228
Teacher and Student Learning – Negative Factors ........................................... 228
How Does the LC Become Systemic? ................................................................. 230
Culture ................................................................................................................... 230
School Framework ............................................................................................... 231
Instructional Design ............................................................................................ 232
Communication ................................................................................................... 232
Negative Factors ................................................................................................. 232
A Reconceptualization of the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework ............. 233
Summary ............................................................................................................... 235
Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications ........................................................... 236
Conclusions and Discussion ............................................................................... 236
Implications ......................................................................................................... 242
Developing Learning Communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For Theory</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Practice</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for the Ministry of Education</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for School Districts.</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Schools.</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Unions.</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For Research</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Comments</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Cover letter for District level</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: School Selection Guide</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Focus Group Questions with prompts</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Focus Group consent</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: In-depth interview questions</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: In-depth interview consent</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Staff Questionnaire and consent</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. *Theoretical and Conceptual Framework* ................................................................. 35
Figure 2. Research Design ........................................................................................................ 47
Figure 3. Statement 1 Graph ...................................................................................................... 182
Figure 4. Statement 2 Graph ...................................................................................................... 183
Figure 5. Statement 3 Graph ...................................................................................................... 184
Figure 6. Statement 4 Graph ...................................................................................................... 185
Figure 7. Statement 5 Graph ...................................................................................................... 186
Figure 8. Statement 6 Graph ...................................................................................................... 187
Figure 9. Statement 7 Graph ...................................................................................................... 188
Figure 10. Statement 8 Graph ................................................................................................... 189
Figure 11. Statement 9 Graph ................................................................................................... 190
Figure 12. Statement 10 Graph ................................................................................................. 191
Figure 13. Statement 11 Graph ................................................................................................. 192
Figure 14. Dimension: The B.C. Context Graph ................................................................. 193
Figure 15. Dimension: Shared and Supportive Leadership Graph ..................................... 194
Figure 16. Dimension: Shared Values and Vision Graph ....................................................... 195
Figure 17. Dimension: Collective Learning and Application Graph .................................... 196
Figure 18. Dimension: Shared Personal Practice Graph ....................................................... 197
Figure 19. Dimension: Supportive Conditions – Relationships Graph ............................. 198
Figure 20. Dimension: Supportive Conditions – Structures Graph .................................... 199
Figure 21. Dimension: Statements Graph ................................................................................ 200
Figure 22. *Reconceptualization of Theoretical and Conceptual Framework* ............ 234
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Learning Communities - author theory alignment.............................. 33
Table 2  Data and Question alignment.......................................................... 50
Table 3  Sunny Brook Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=18).............................. 60
Table 4  Sunny Brook Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data .................................. 82
Table 5  Sunny Brook Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses. 83
Table 6  Lakeside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=9)...................................... 86
Table 7  Lakeside Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data ....................................... 107
Table 8  Lakeside Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses.... 108
Table 9  Windy Pines Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=10)............................... 111
Table 10 Windy Pines Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data ................................... 129
Table 11 Windy Pines Elementary Satisfaction Survey-Percent Positive Responses 130
Table 12 Trillium Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=13).................................... 135
Table 13 Trillium Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data ......................................... 155
Table 14 Trillium Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses.... 156
Table 15 Parkside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=15)................................... 159
Table 16 Parkside Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data ....................................... 178
Table 17 Parkside Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses ... 179
Table 18 Statement 1 Data Analysis ............................................................... 182
Table 19 Statement 2 Data Analysis ............................................................... 183
Table 20 Statement 3 Data Analysis ............................................................... 184
Table 21 Statement 4 Data Analysis ............................................................... 185
Table 22 Statement 5 Data Analysis ............................................................... 186
Table 23 Statement 6 Data Analysis ............................................................... 187
Table 24 Statement 7 Data Analysis ............................................................... 188
Table 25 Statement 8 Data Analysis ............................................................... 189
Table 26 Statement 9 Data Analysis ............................................................... 190
Table 27 Statement 10 Data Analysis ............................................................. 191
Table 28 Statement 11 Data Analysis ............................................................. 192
Table 29 Dimension: The B.C. Context......................................................... 193
Table 30 Dimension: Shared and Supportive Leadership................................. 194
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Dimension: Shared Values and Vision</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Dimension: Collective Learning and Application</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Dimension: Shared Personal Practice</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Dimension: Supportive Conditions - Relationships</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Dimension: Supportive Conditions - Structures</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Dimension: Statements</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

The idea of a ‘Learning Community’ (LC) holds great promise in helping schools achieve their educational goals not only within the institutional setting itself, but also in coming to terms with the larger social, cultural and political context. Through the formation of LCs, schools may become more intelligently responsive to both the community and the individual student learner. Since leading educators continue to struggle with creating and maintaining LCs (Huffman & Hipp, 2010), this research was conducted in order to shed light on the factors that helped or hindered the development of LCs in elementary schools, in the hope of helping school and district leaders who wished to develop LCs.

LCs have become mainstream within school systems during the last 15 years (Hord, 2004). They are sometimes referred to as learning communities (LCs) and sometimes as professional learning communities (PLCs). LCs accepts the notion that you do not have to be a professional within the community in order to fully take part (Mitchell & Sackney, 2008). PLCs focus on the role of the professional within the learning community, but more recently have begun to take into account the effect of others within the community (Bolam, Stoll & Greenwood, 2008). Both terms (PLC and LC) will be used in this document as they are both used within the literature, somewhat interchangeably.

In many school districts LCs are “done” in order to fix perceived problems or to help district administrators move in a particular direction (Fullan, 2003). The formulaic method of building learning communities, however, has not shown staying power or effectiveness (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Yet current research (Kruse & Seashore Lewis, 2008; Halverson, 2008) seems to indicate that the development of learning communities can help enhance student and teacher learning. Furthermore, this learning is reciprocal and cyclical in nature with one having an affect on the other (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003).

There are often significant differences between schools and school districts as they respond to student needs by taking into account the particular features of each community (e.g., general economic status of the community, business partnerships,
similarity of life circumstance from one area of the community to another, budgetary constraints and design), the current life experiences of its students (e.g., poverty, wealth, ESL, current broader economic climate) and the abilities of the people who work there (e.g., board cohesiveness, strengths/weaknesses of administrative leaders, years of teacher experience). Because of this, a formulaic or generic form of a Learning Community (LC) is likely to have difficulty not only in getting started but also in maintaining itself.

However, there is another style of LC that shows promise in that it is more attuned to each particular situation. This is what Mitchell & Sackney (2009) call a “living systems” style of LC, which emerges in a more ‘grass roots’ manner. Educators, teachers and administrators at each school site choose how and what to respond to rather than being totally managed by the local school district or provincial regulations. A living systems PLC shows promise for being able to respond to the needs of each school in a thoughtful and more helpful way (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). This is because the living systems lens allows educators within a school to respond in ways that make the most sense for their particular location and context. A living systems perspective shifts the focus from just looking at distinct parts of an educational event or system to also thinking about a holistic view of education generally. This theory places learning at the centre of every decision-making activity (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

**The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors helped or hindered LCs from being developed by school staffs. The reason is that it is important to consider all possible ways of maintaining a strong, healthy and responsive education system that results in enhanced teaching and learning in our schools.

**Research Questions**

The central, overarching question addressed in this study was: What factors helped or hindered the development of LCs in selected elementary schools in Greater
Vancouver, British Columbia (BC)? From this question flowed the following sub-questions:

1. What factors helped LCs to develop in the selected elementary schools?
2. What factors hindered LCs from developing in the selected elementary schools?
3. What influences did the following factors have in helping or hindering the development of LCs in the elementary schools studied: politics, interpersonal relations, trust, and budget fluctuations?
4. To what extent was the development of LCs in the elementary schools studied helped by improved student learning or improved teacher learning?
5. Did LCs become part of the way any of these elementary schools systemically operated?

The Researcher

I have been an educator in British Columbia for more than 25 years. During this time I have had the opportunity to work in various capacities in two different school districts and in twelve different schools (all Kindergarten to grade 7 schools). Most of these schools had staffs where teachers worked in isolation, not sharing much in the way of practice. When these teachers met, it was more for social reasons than for professional reasons. One of the schools I worked in, however, was different from the rest. Its staff worked in concert to improve practice and student learning on a school-wide level. As a teacher on this staff, I observed that student and teacher learning were greatly enhanced by this practice. This staff had a number of teachers with various leadership experiences (e.g., district curriculum teacher leaders who had moved back to the classroom, district curriculum teacher leaders who had moved into administration, union leaders, teachers who had been seconded to the provincial Ministry of Education, and teachers who had been seconded to local universities to teach curriculum to future teachers). I observed this desire to work together as a staff began to fall apart when new and negatively outspoken teachers joined the staff. This change continued to accelerate as additional teachers departed and new teachers replaced them. While completing my Master’s degree in Educational Administration and Leadership (M Ed), I began to read about PLCs and how they held great promise for helping educators improve learning for all. As I read, I could
not help but reflect back on my experience at this one school. I believe this experience, mid-way through my teaching career, triggered my desire to more deeply explore what helps to create and maintain what appears to be a fragile, yet worthwhile way of being for school communities.

As a practicing principal of an elementary school (K-7) in greater Vancouver, improving student learning, student experience and student success are some of my central goals. Having a deeper understanding of learning communities and how their development can be helped or hindered is important for school principals.

**Potential Significance of the Study**

Schools are under increasing pressure to do more with fewer resources, however examination of current research indicates that the learning community approach is successful in helping school communities increase both student and teacher learning, even in such challenging times (Hord & Sommers, 2008). It seems therefore, that understanding how we can build and maintain LCs may help to increase not only teacher efficacy, through increased collegial learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008), but student life chances as well (through increased student success at school).

Although there is much research literature to support the creation and sustainment of learning communities within the school setting, many teachers find it difficult to move forward and invest time in their development (Hargreaves, 2008; Little & Horn, 2008). This has been noticed not just in Canada, but in the USA and in Britain as well (Sackney, personal communication, August, 2009). Furthermore, “leading educators continue to struggle with ways to initiate, implement and maintain learning organizations, that is, cultures that provide hope for organizational reform” (Huffman & Hipp, 2010). This study shows some of the factors that either help or hinder the creation and sustainability of learning communities, which may be helpful for those schools and districts that want to encourage the creation and maintaining of LCs.

In summary, current research suggests that developing LCs is one way of helping schools thrive. This research will assist leaders within schools to understand what factors help or hinder the creation of a sustainable LC.


**Study Parameters**

The next section outlines the limitations and delimitations of this research.

**Delimitations**

The following are delimitations for this study:
1. This is a mixed-method study using two types of qualitative data (focus groups and in-depth interviews) and two types of quantitative data (a staff survey/questionnaire and ministry data).
2. The study is delimited to five public elementary schools located in two school districts in the Greater Vancouver area.
3. Participating schools were chosen by district administrators (purposeful sampling) in order to make sure the schools were appropriate for this study. (Appendix B)
4. Participants in the study were delimited to educators (teachers, administrators, education assistants) in each school willing to participate in the study.

**Limitations**

The Greater Vancouver area in the province of British Columbia educates the majority of British Columbia’s students. It consists of a number of school districts of varying size and make-up. Each district and each school is unique. The following are limitations for this study:

1. The quality of the relationships between participants in the focus groups held at each school may have affected the quality of the information provided at each session. For example, the trust that exists among participants may have influenced how candid participants felt they could be during discussion.
2. Because the study was conducted in only two school districts and in only five public elementary schools, the results are not generalizable. The context for each school and district is described in order to assist readers in judging whether or not the results have implications in their own context.
3. This study has the limitations imposed by the methods used. Each method (surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews) has limitations.
Definition of Terms

The following are definitions that are necessary for understanding the context of this research:

**Developing.** Stoll & Seashore Lewis (2008) define ‘developing’ within the context of the learning community as “…communities which can access, circulate and distribute knowledge and evidence as a way to achieve continuous improvement” (p. xix).

**Learning Communities (LCs).** Mitchell & Sackney (2009) define a learning community as “…a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward the mysteries, problems, and perplexities of teaching and learning” (p. 12).

**Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).** A key strategy in pursuing reform is the creation of and support for professional learning communities. To this end, Stoll & Seashore Lewis (2008) state:

In sum, the term professional learning community suggests that focus is not just on individual teachers’ learning but on (1) professional learning; (2) within the context of a cohesive group; (3) that focuses on collective knowledge, and (4) occurs within an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders. (p. 3)

**Living system.** Mitchell & Sackney (2009) define a living system as:

…the totality of patterns, connections, relationships, interactions and mutual influences that emerge among people, between people and their environments, and between people and the forces impinging on them. It is an elemental process of all living systems, including educational systems (p. 3).

**Sustainable educational systems.** Mitchell & Sackney (2009) define sustainable education systems as “…those in which the structures, programs, expectations, and practices do not interfere with but actively support people’s inherent ability to learn.” (p. 12)

**Elementary school.** In British Columbia an elementary school enrolls students in kindergarten through to grades 5, 6, or 7. Each district decides which grades an individual elementary school will enroll.


**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter One of this thesis provides an overview of the study and a statement of the research problem. Chapter Two consists of a literature review in the area of learning communities. There are six main parts to the literature review. The last part of Chapter Two presents a conceptual framework within which this research study is embedded. Chapter Three presents an explanation of the research design and methodology. Chapter Four and Five present the results and Chapter Six presents an analysis of the quantitative survey data. Chapter Seven presents an analysis of all five study sites, examining similarities and differences between the five schools studied based on the data gathered. Conclusions and implications for theory, practice and research are then made in Chapter Eight.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are six main parts to the literature review: The first part explores the literature as it pertains to the history of learning communities, the second part examines why learning communities were adopted by school systems, the third part gives a definition and the characteristics of learning communities for the purposes of this research, the fourth part provides research on professional learning communities, the fifth part describes the challenges that schools face with regard to developing and maintaining learning communities, and the sixth part describes new theories of learning communities. The last part of this chapter presents the theoretical framework within which this research study is embedded.

The History of Learning Communities

There is abundant literature available describing aspects of LCs in Great Britain, the United States and Canada. While both the United States and Great Britain have education systems similar to Canada, they also differ in many ways. In Canada there are also differences from province to province. This is because Canadian education falls under provincial rather than federal jurisdiction. For this reason, it is important to keep context in mind when examining the experiences of others and when looking to see what is working well in British Columbia. For example, the “No Child Left Behind” legislation in the USA has had a profound effect on the structure of how business is done in schools in that country. An over reliance on standardized testing has resulted in punitive measures being used against students and educators in the USA (Berliner, personal communication, July, 2008). In Canada, and in particular BC, although there is standardized testing mandated by the government, there is not an over reliance on its use and poor results are not used to penalize students and educators in BC.

The literature on learning communities is rooted in the writing of Peter Senge (1990) on learning organizations (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009; Hord, 2004). Senge (1990) defined learning organizations as “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free,
and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3). For Senge, what distinguishes learning organizations from traditional organizations is the mastery of certain basic disciplines. These are: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning. This way of looking at organizations was called a shift of mind (Senge, 1990) and elicited a flurry of activity within educational communities of practice, which subsequently morphed into the concept of ‘learning communities’. DuFour & Eaker (1998) speculate that disappointment with all reforms to date (reforms which were seen as more “factory model” in orientation), sparked the new conceptual model of the ‘professional learning community’ and that this idea came from researchers both inside and outside the field of education.

Education represents a major portion of a government’s expenditures. The adult population, having for the most part attended public schools within Canada, considers itself an appropriate and educated critic of the system. Furthermore, it is common to expect a “fix” for our societal problems by turning to the schools and mandating that they take on the task of modifying the education of those in their charge to “fix” the perceived problem. A good modern day example of this is our society’s concern with fitness levels and the rising obesity of children and of citizens generally. Often, as in this case, there is a monetary driver for these initiatives. For example, the fear of rising health care costs, coupled with an aging population, drives the government’s current school fitness initiatives (Ministry of Education website).

The PLC came about in a similar way, as some educators attempted to help address the rising public dissatisfaction with schools’ inability to prepare students for their future as leaders and workers within society (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004). The business community was looking at organizational learning through the work of Senge, and the education community was paying attention to the interest business had in Senge’s work (Hord, 2004). As a result, it was thought by increasing numbers of educators during this time that a focus on learning, rather than a focus on teaching, might “fix” the problems at hand in the field of education.
Why Learning Communities Were Adopted by School Systems

It is interesting to note that practices in the USA in the field of education often find their way north of the border, albeit with some changes to the Canadian context. Often there are other developed countries outside of North America that explore similar issues to ours as well. Educational collaboration is increasingly a global phenomenon. International conferences are held regularly on a number of topics, including learning communities. The field of education is globally interconnected and this often leads us in directions that we may not have otherwise considered (Senge, 1990; Capra, 2002).

Hord (2004) provides a brief outline of the origins of PLCs in which she identifies several sources advocating collegial support and collaboration as well as a focus on adaptability and creative problem solving. As stated, it was Senge’s work on learning organizations within the field of business that initially caused those within the field of education to take notice. Could this way of looking at systems be adapted to suit the educational system? Might this be the answer to fixing the noted difficulty with improving student results? The effect of Senge’s theory of organizational learning in business caused what Capra (2002) would call a “disturbance” in the educational field and began a paradigm shift in our perceptions of what would enhance teaching and learning in schools. In 1983, A Nation at Risk was published in the United States of America (USA). What followed was an examination of the influence of the educational work setting and culture on the educational system. Hord (2004) wrote on the connection between poor teacher training and qualifications being reported in this document. She reported that teachers who felt supported by way of networks, co-operation and expanded roles felt more efficacious and were therefore more willing to adopt new classroom behaviours and methods, and stay in the profession. She connects this thinking to the popularity of Senge’s writing at the time. According to Hord (2004):

In 1990, Peter Senge’s book The Fifth Discipline arrived in bookstores and began popping up in the boardrooms of corporate America. Senge suggested that performing for someone else’s approval—rather than learning to become more adaptable and to generate creative solutions to problems—creates the very conditions that ensure mediocre performance. Control mechanisms paralyze both employees and leaders, allowing them only to maintain their organizations as machines. (pp. 5-6)
Developing Learning Communities

Hord was not the only one thinking of systems within education. Educational structures and systems understanding have historically mirrored the structures and ways of knowing within the broader society. Our views of organizations are influenced by our views of the physical world. Mitchell and Sackney have argued that the mechanistic worldview is based on Newtonian science and the living systems worldview, is influenced by quantum perspectives (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2009). For most of the past few hundred years (with the advent of the Industrial revolution), we in the developed world have taken a much more mechanistic view not only of work, but of life generally (Capra, 1996). This is evident if we look at how schools are generally structured in our society, even today. There is a hierarchy of power and control within the system—with teachers on the bottom of the professional adult hierarchy. Since a PLC requires there to be more room for teachers to determine what the best destination and route is when determining curriculum at the school level as well as methods of implementation and delivery, real tension comes into play when teachers are mandated to do things that are counter to what they believe is best for their students. This tension also occurs if teachers do things in a way that does not meet with the approval of the hierarchical structure that is in place (government, boards, and management). We are presently seeing within our society a shift in the way we view education. Canadian philosopher Taylor (2007) would call our view the “social imaginary of the society of the time”. According to Taylor, we are so enmeshed in living within the imaginary, that as a society we cannot separate ourselves from it. He states:

Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. Such understanding is both factual and normative; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how we ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice. (p. 24)

This idea of the social imaginary leads into the next section of the literature review, in that it is the social imaginary of our time that leads us to shift our thinking patterns.
Definition and Characteristics of Learning Communities

Within the educational social imaginary of our time is embedded an understanding of what an LC is. This section defines what an LC is and its characteristics. For the purposes of this research, I draw on educators who perceive developing LCs through the lens of a living system. Current research (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2009) indicates that approaching LCs from a living systems perspective has the best chance of developing and sustaining teaching and learning. A living systems perspective allows educators to focus on meeting the needs of all learners in the school without external sources prescribing how that will be done, allowing for sustainable patterns through flexibility. Individuals have specific needs, and meeting those needs requires methods, design and implementation of curriculum, mentoring, and desired outcomes to align with the skills, abilities, interests and aptitudes of both learners and teachers. Teachers within the school will make decisions given the constraints of time, the resources available and the support given. An LC viewed through the living systems lens tries to maximize effectiveness through educators working in a collaborative community rather than in isolation.

The following definition from Mitchell & Sackney (2009) is helpful as it looks at LCs through the living systems lens. For them, an LC is “…a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward the mysteries, problems, and perplexities of teaching and learning” (p. 9). Mitchell & Sackney (2009) identify the following six characteristics as educational understandings of LCs. All of these characteristics have the goal of continuous improvement, including learning, in mind:

- LCs have shared vision, values and goals.
  - Vision, values and goals provide direction and alignment that contains compelling images of the kind of learning environment that people in the school are trying to create

- LCs have a collaborative work culture.
Developing Learning Communities

- Educators come together to discuss issues, sort out challenges, plan new learning opportunities, and discuss new instruction or curriculum ideas.

- LCs are places where collective learning and shared understanding exist.
  - Collective learning is instrumental in uncovering and critiquing mental models.

- LCs are places where there is a focus on reflective practice and experimentation (in order to improve learning).
  - Reflection and experimentation invite educators to constantly examine and question their own practices, to seek out and experiment with new methods and educational alternatives and reflect on the outcome of experiments.

- Cultivating renewal and improvement is facilitated by the presence of knowledge systems and data-based decision making.
  - Data are widely collected on student and teacher knowledge, skills, attitudes, dreams and commitments. The data are used to inform collaborative inquiry and learning.

- LCs are also communities of leaders.
  - Leadership is distributed, as it is appropriate to do so. This results in a community of responsibility. (pp.26-29)

While the six characteristics exist in varying degrees in all schools practicing as LCs, they will not look the same from school to school as it is expected that the people within the community will respond to what is needed in a way that makes the most sense to them.

These characteristics are not dissimilar to those identified by other researchers in the field. Hord and Sommers (2008), for example, list the following as characteristics of
a Professional Learning Community (PLC): shared beliefs, values and vision (the common purpose of all, no matter where they work or in what endeavor); shared and supportive leadership (power, authority, and decision making are shared and encouraged); collective learning and its application (the entire staff is focused on more effective teaching and increased student learning); supportive conditions (there are two types—logistical conditions such as physical structures, time and resources; and relational conditions such as building trust and capacity); shared personal practice (peers observing each other and helping each other to improve their practice). Hord & Sommers also indicate the importance of widening the PLC to include parents, community, and the district office and school board. Being mindful of unions is also mentioned as being an important consideration. In this regard they state,

How union contracts are negotiated and enforced can support the creation and development of professional learning communities or hinder the process. Unions have become increasingly aware of the importance of professional development and the learning of administrators and teachers and have put their interest and weight behind this issue. But any widespread advocacy for the establishment of PLCs in schools has yet to come from unions. (p. 59)

As well, implementation of a PLC in a school community requires an understanding of change processes. Hord and Sommers (2008) have identified six strategies as being important to successfully implement the changes necessary to develop a PLC. They are: articulating a shared vision; developing a plan that will engage the staff in realizing the vision; investing in and providing professional development; checking progress to determine if participants are ‘getting it’; providing assistance where and when needed; creating a context or culture for change (risk taking and trust). This last strategy is the overarching one, which will hold all the others together.

While there are many similarities in the two authors’ lists of characteristics of learning communities, for the purposes of this study the elements as listed by Hord formed the focus and framework under which the data were collected, as they fit well with the living systems lens (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). The above definition and characteristics should be kept in mind when looking at the next section, which describes research on learning communities over the past ten years.
Research and Learning Communities

During the past ten years there has been considerable research on learning communities (LCs). As a foundation for this study, it was helpful to look at what researchers have learned about LCs during this time. The following is a series of brief descriptions of the findings of researchers within the field of education and, if applicable, how their research may connect with how the LC exists as part of a wider living world system (Capra, 2002).

Some researchers look for more formulaic ways of developing learning communities. Wiliam (2007) focused on how school-based teacher learning communities can be used to create effective systems of teacher professional development. His research was designed to find out what helped improve learning for students (a common rationale for the development of a PLC). In Cleveland, Ohio, his team worked with ten of the seventy-six lowest performing schools and demonstrated improvement in all of the study schools, whereas in the other sixty-six low performing schools only half were able to show improved student learning outcomes. His recommendations were based on this research. For example,

I want to convince you that raising achievement is important; that investing in teachers is the solution; that formative assessment should be the focus of that investment; and that teacher learning communities should be the mechanism. (2007, p.1).

Wiliam explains in detail how to implement and maintain a teacher LC through regular meetings. His suggestions include delineating duration of meetings, who should participate, how big the group should be, how often the group should meet and the format of the meetings, including how many minutes to spend on each section of the meeting, and the need for assessment data. He states that it is not important for the group leader to be an expert in Assessment for Learning (AfL) even though he earlier stated that AfL or formative assessment should be the focus of the investment in teacher learning, which should be happening through these Teacher Learning Community (TLC) meetings. He goes on to state that:

…it is our experience that meetings are much less successful when there is an AfL expert in the group, since they have a tendency to monopolise the conversation, and often tell others what to do. The idea of the TLC is that each participant
comes to the meeting with their personal professional development plan, and gets the support of the group in achieving this. (p. 27)

He does, however, view the need for wide-scale implementation of AfL as the key to improving student achievement.

Hargreaves’ (2008) maintains that you cannot distill an LC down to a set of prescribed steps and actions. In this regard, Hargreaves (2008) states:

Professional Learning Communities are paradoxical. They need to focus on the process of learning as well as on measurable results, on long-term transformation as well as on immediate achievement gains, and on being persistent about improvement as well as patient in waiting for the outcome. In its essence, leadership entails working with and indeed thriving on paradox, not merely trying to eliminate or endure it. It is less of a certain science than an imprecise art. To see the development of professional learning communities, as nothing more than progression through a series of simple stages or steps, is to reduce the leadership in these communities to simple tasks of management in which groups become teams and learning is equated with test scores. By contrast, being able to grasp the paradoxical nature of PLCs, to acknowledge as well as embrace their pitfalls, and from all this to deepen the learning and raise the achievement standards of all students in the community in question, requires the commitment, courage, and capacity of true educational leadership. (p.xi)

Diversity is an attribute of a living system. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) address the issue of diversity and its usefulness within the education setting by drawing upon fifteen years of work together; in particular a large-scale study of over 250 teachers and school leaders in Canada and the USA on how schools have or have not changed over time during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Hargreaves and Fink write about the importance of complexity and cohesion when trying to maintain diversity within a system. They conclude there will be no sustainability without diversity, as a living system requires it in order to develop. Diversity requires that educational systems focus less on alignment and more on focused cohesion. That is, giving more autonomy to schools to work on personalized learning rather than scripted instruction (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). This is no small feat given our data-driven society.

In a report for the Canadian Education Association (CEA), Leithwood and Strauss (2008) wrote of the core leadership practices needed by a school leader to help a school with declining student achievement ‘turnaround’.
Among the specific leadership acts or behaviours rated as most valuable by respondents, three stand out: providing resources, building a learning community or collaborative culture in the school, and ensuring adequate amounts and types of professional development, which is one component of ‘intellectual stimulation’. (p. 6)

All of these practices require the leader to think of the school as a living system, in that a great deal of latitude is given to the leader to interpret which leadership acts and behaviours are most helpful when navigating the turnaround.

The research Leithwood and Strauss (2008) did to back up their findings was carried out in two stages. During the first stage, interview data were collected in four elementary and four secondary schools (a total of seventy-three individual interviews, as well as eight parent focus groups and eight student focus groups). During the second stage, surveys were sent to a total of 472 teachers and thirty-six administrators within eleven elementary schools and three secondary schools. When the researchers synthesized the evidence derived from the study they found eight key findings related to helping schools ‘turnaround’.

These eight claims were:

- Low-performing schools require effective leadership to turn around.
- There are core leadership practices that encompass most of what is required to successfully lead a school turnaround.
- The core leadership practices hold approximately the same value for schools improving from an acceptable level of performance as they hold for turnaround schools.
- Changes in school turnaround processes are accompanied by changes in how core leadership practices are enacted.
- Effective school turnaround leadership is narrowly distributed as school turnaround processes evolve.
- The nature and number of sources of leadership change.
- Leaders face predictable challenges in stabilizing the declining performance of schools.
- Leaders move their schools from declining performance to crisis stabilization by changing teacher attitudes and school cultures.
The notion of an ecological versus a formulaic framework for LCs is a relatively new concept. Mitchell and Sackney (2009) have researched the challenge inherent in maintaining learning communities. Their research, using 144 schools in Canada as a base, finds the sustainability of such an LC more likely possible if it is situated in an ecological framework rather than in a more formulaic framework. This perceptual shift for Mitchell & Sackney was precipitated by the conceptual work of scientist Capra (1996). When completing a comprehensive review of school reform literature, Mitchell & Sackney (2009) discovered that when educators confront the reality that reforms never last, rather than reflecting on what else might be changed, they simply did more of the same and were surprised when they got the same results. They did not have the capacity to change their way of doing things. By contrast, when observing people in high-capacity schools (schools that had as principles: deep respect, collective responsibility, experimentation, valuing of diversity, and positive role modeling) it was noticed that educators “were actively engaged in the process of building people, commitments, and schools in ways that put real, authentic learning at the centre of every decision, plan, function, initiative, and structure (p. 192)” not because it was mandated but because they wanted “an environment in which everyone could flourish, grow and learn” (p. 192).

Sophistication (rather than mechanization), sustainability, paying attention to context and nurturing social capital are four descriptors used by Stoll and Seashore Lewis that fit well with a living systems lens. Stoll and Seashore Lewis (2008) have researched school change, improving capacity building, and professional learning communities. They explored a number of questions that remain current today. After reviewing the research on professional learning communities, Stoll and Seashore Lewis (2008) proposed a number of important questions that need to be addressed in order to move our understanding of learning communities forward:

1. How are professional learning communities currently defined? Although the authors state that there is no one universal definition for a PLC, the following criteria sum up what their research found. “The term ‘professional learning community’ suggests that focus is not just on individual teachers’ learning but on: professional learning; within the context of a cohesive group; that focuses on
collective knowledge and occurs within the ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders.” (p. 3)

2. Do existing definitions capture the full extent of PLCs? The authors speak of the desirability of developing a more inclusive definition of a PLC–by adding all stakeholders–those within the schoolhouse as well as those without. A caution to this thought of inclusion, according to the authors, is to ensure enhanced student learning is not diluted by this addition of others to the PLC.

3. Does existing knowledge lead us to deep understanding of how to develop PLCs? The authors caution against using “simplistic solutions or recipes”. Instead, they encourage “more sophisticated processes and tools” by going deeper–“…not well intentioned but mechanistic tools, but more sophisticated processes and tools based on research”. (p. 6)

4. Does the existing knowledge base draw sufficient attention to the challenges of PLCs and how they might be addressed? Two of the challenges that still need attention, according to the authors are: the nurturing of social capital and sustainability.

5. Does existing research pay sufficient attention to varying national contexts? The authors note that the English speaking world and, in particular the USA, have had the opportunity to share similarities and differences, especially through ICSEI (the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement) (pp.3-9).

In their chapter conclusion they state:

We see professional learning communities as an integral part of today’s educational world–a world of greater connections–and planned this volume as a step in the direction of more divergent thinking. We therefore choose to include issues ranging from ‘who belongs’ in PLCs, to how to stimulate them in authentic rather than technocratic ways, to how to create meaningful connections within large, unwieldy networks of people who can meet face to face relatively rarely. We also probe the nuances of what is discussed in professional learning communities, and how it is discussed, because until we know how people work together in these unfamiliar contexts, it is hard to make recommendations about how to expand them. Getting deeper into the subtleties of translating the rhetoric of professional learning communities into reality is also going to be critical to ensuring effective professional learning communities in a complex and changing world, as is really getting to grips with serious challenges that have the potential to derail the whole process. (pp. 9-10)
As with any new initiative or new way of doing things, there are those who are quite happy to carry on as they always have, and are therefore resistant to any change as well as challenging of potential benefits. This is especially true if the change seems to be initiated from outside (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

It is collegial learning within a shared culture of support that creates PLCs and it is the principal maintaining focus on staff learning that leads to student learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Hord & Sommers posit that teachers who function at higher cognitive levels produce students who function at higher cognitive levels. Furthermore, if school conversations are organized around learning, “this sends a message to everyone that the driving vision for what we do is learning” (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 29).

Data from a meta-analyses of studies done at the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) demonstrate that there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003) supporting Hord & Sommers contention above. In developing a leadership framework, researchers Waters et al. began with a meta-analysis of nearly all available studies on the effects of leadership since the early 1970s. From the 5000 available studies, seventy were chosen based on their design, controls, data analysis and rigor. These seventy studies involved 2,894 schools, approximately 1.1 million students and 14,000 teachers. In addition to the actual studies, the McREL team integrated quantitative research, theoretical insights and personal professional wisdom about effective leadership when looking to define a framework for balanced leadership (Waters et al., 2003). Resulting from this research, Waters et al. specifically delineate school and teacher practices that influence student achievement. They are:

- Guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Challenging goals and effective feedback
- Parent and community involvement
- Safe and orderly environment
- Collegiality and professionalism
- Instructional strategies
- Classroom management
- Classroom curriculum design (p. 6)
Walters et al. (2003) further found that the way in which practices are enacted within the school can have a dramatic effect on student learning. To this end they state:

School and classroom practices account for 20 percent of the variance in student achievement. This translates mathematically into 72 percent of students passing a standardized assessment that only 50 percent of students are expected to pass. In other words, focusing on the most effective or most needed practices can change a school’s passing rate from 50 to 72 percent. Accordingly, the message for leaders is that in order to have positive impact on student achievement, they need to not only focus improvement efforts on these key school and classroom practices, but also accurately understand the magnitude of change implied by these efforts. (p. 6)

The collaborative nature of an LC is connected to school improvement and to student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). In their study of forty-seven elementary schools in an urban district, teachers were surveyed to ascertain the amount of teacher collaboration in which they engaged. These responses were then compared with student achievement scores at each school. The results showed there was a connection between teacher collaboration and student achievement. In fact,

Teacher collaboration was found to have a statistically significant effect on student achievement on standardized math and science tests. More precisely, schools with one standard deviation increase in teacher collaboration showed a 0.7-0.8 standard deviation in fourth grade test scores. This holds true even when student characteristics (race, gender, socio-economic status) and school context (school size, prior student achievement) were taken into account. (p. 55)

Maintaining the focus on learning can be challenging for a positional leader like the principal if they do not have the assistance and buy in from the rest of their staff. Although challenging, it appears that a focus on collegial learning can have a positive impact on student learning.

Challenges

This next section describes some of the many challenges educators face when creating and maintaining PLCs. The first section describes change, the second section provides information about teacher unions, and the third section covers sustainability.
Change

Change is an inevitable part of life, and our ability to cope successfully with change can have great impact on both our ability to continue to grow positively and on our ability to remain resilient. This is true of educational systems as well. The creation and maintenance of an LC is challenging, and because the LC is meant to deal with change in a healthy way, it is helpful to look at what writers within the field of educational change have to say about it. How does change impact upon an educational community’s ability to develop? In this regard, Hargreaves (2002) writes of the reasons that educational change often fails, citing: unrealistic or unclear goals, change perpetrators having low credibility, change that is too complex and overwhelming, shaming of teachers, inept implementation, limited resources and limited in-service training. Most alarming is the cumulative effect this can have on teachers over their careers and the school communities to which they belong as evidenced by the following comment by Hargreaves (2002):

It is for these reasons that change over time in education is a predictable failure (Sarason, 1990), a serial killer of initiative and enthusiasm over the duration of teachers’ careers. As a result, many writers and reformers have begun to worry and write about not just how to effect snapshots of change at any particular point, but how to sustain them, keep them going, make them last. The sustainability of educational change has, in this sense, become one of the key priorities in the field. (p. 190)

According to Hargreaves (2005), educational change is both a moral and a political struggle, not just a strategic one. Educational change is generally multi-faceted and is subject to pressures from both inside and outside the system. In fact it is the social and political dimensions of change that cause desired changes to flounder most (Hargreaves, 2005). Hargreaves (2008) also speaks of the importance of not allowing legislative/district-based directives to overshadow the importance of the people within the LC in making rich decisions based on the many factors they have in front of them, including intuition about what the data being examined is telling them. He is very clear that learning must come before testing and achievement and that the learning needs to be broad—not just focused on literacy and numeracy.
In *Change Wars*, Hargreaves (2008) summarizes the three main styles of change theory used during the last fifty years in education and then points towards a “fourth way”– a way that engages a much broader segment of the population in helping schools to grow and improve. He states:

The Fourth Way is not about letting a thousand flowers bloom or micromanaging everything in detail. It does not exalt the market or extol the virtues of an all-controlling state. Neither is it a way to retain top-down autocratic control over narrowly defined goals and targets with the assistance of technocratic surveillance and effervescent interactions. The Fourth Way, rather, is a democratic and sustainable path to improvement that builds from the bottom and steers from the top. Through high quality teachers committed to and capable of creating deep and broad teaching and learning, it builds powerful, responsible, and lively professional communities in a largely self-regulating profession where teachers set high standards and shared targets and improve by learning through networks form evidence and with each other. (p. 40)

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) do caution that collaborative cultures are not always connected to learning and achievement. If teachers spend their time “planning staff social activities, developing student behavior codes, or swapping test-prep strategies, they become just another distraction from the core task of teaching” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 92). Instead, Hargreaves points to Finland’s professional teaching cultures of trust, cooperation, and responsibility, and to the lateral learning networks of sharing across schools as a good example to follow.

Hall & Hord (2006) explore the change process in organizational and educational settings. They contend:

Change success depends less on whether the source of the change is internal or external and significantly more on the degree to which the culture of the organization is open and ready to consider what is currently being done and is continually examining ways to improve. The ideal condition is to have a *professional learning community (PLC)*. (p. 1)

Current literature described in this study points towards a “shift of mind”. Hall and Hord, as well as current leaders in education, are looking at the LC through the lens of “change” and more recently, how that change occurs within the natural (living systems) world.
Teacher Unions and the PLC – Thoughts of Caution

The role of the teachers’ union is to represent the needs of its members above all, as long as the members are upholding the law and the teachers’ code of ethics. If learning communities offer promise to help improve both teacher and student learning, why are there indications that schools generally seem to find it challenging to create and maintain such a community? In examining the general PLC literature I did not find much opposition to the formation of PLCs, or much to explain why PCLs are not developing in some cases.

The British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) is known to be a powerful political body in the province. Its members are not shy about finding ways to circumvent or neutralize government initiatives with which they do not agree (BCTF website). In light of this, comments of opposition towards the formation of PLCs coming from teacher union members are worth considering. I drew upon the writing of Joseph Tarnoczi, an educator in Alberta, and Charlie Naylor, a senior researcher for the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF), both unionized teachers, to help explain the teachers’ point of view regarding the PLC. In a BCTF research report, Naylor (2007) complains of the recipe-book approach touted by Dufour et al. (2005). He further posits that Dufour et al. are saying that teachers should use more self-discipline in order to overcome the three challenges that prevent PLCs from becoming reality: developing and applying shared knowledge, maintaining the hard work of change and transforming school culture. Naylor (2007) further states:

This kind of lecturing on community-building is not likely to generate wide support among teachers, and the hectoring tone contrasts with the same authors’ encouraging messages of collaboration and mutual support. Such a contrast reflects the problematic dichotomy of the literature on professional learning communities: That the positive messages of collaboration are tempered with prescription and control. Telling teachers to “demonstrate the discipline” implies a controlling view of community that perhaps is not shared among many teachers, who might wish for a flatter and more egalitarian form of collegial discourse. (pp. 2-3).

The above quote is an excellent illustration of why a PLC structured upon the old paradigm of “school as a factory” does not work well in today’s society. Although the ideas are sound and the methods are well intended, they no longer fit with the context of
Developing Learning Communities

today’s society—a society that is much less likely to accept authority if people do not personally believe the authority to be legitimate or personally authentic (Taylor, 2004). If schools are defaulting to a recipe-driven method of developing and maintaining a PLC, perhaps this is why they are not developing. This argument fits well with the writings of Mitchell & Sackney (2009). The control needed in a recipe-driven system is elusive at best to those being charged to hold and exercise the control. Teachers have been adept for decades at simply closing their doors and carrying on as they always have—unless, as Capra (2002) says, they choose to respond to the ‘disturbances’ in their environment.

In the conclusion to Tarnoczi’s (2006) paper, he makes a number of statements that show he is not convinced that building and maintaining a PLC is not simply a structure meant to control teachers, much like his BC colleague Naylor (above) states in his writing.

Although professional learning communities stress the creation of collaborative communities, the communities do little more than provide social pressure to normalize management’s intentions. All in all, professional learning communities appear to have a lot more to do with managing teachers and protecting the status-quo than with inducing educational creativity. If professional learning community discourse is a management technology, it is a sinister one. As Bratton et al. conclude, “the discourse of workplace learning as a mechanism of control may represent an unprecedented level of penetration by the relations of ruling into the lifeworld of human communities…” (166). It is only through critical reflection on foundational assumptions that teachers will expose and mitigate the forms of oppression and control embedded in professional learning community discourse. (p 21)

This shows a disturbing lack of trust between teacher and management. The perception on the part of the teacher is that if the teachers do not give the desired opinions and answers, management will resort to directives. Could this be a result of the tension that exists between the hierarchical reality of the system and the desire of those in the system to move towards a more living systems approach? And if this is the case, is there any way to ameliorate its effects? Fortunately, not all teachers feel this way (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Although it was difficult to find educators who had researched and put their thoughts in writing, as Naylor and Tarnoczi did, as an educator with over 25 years of experience, I have heard these types of thoughts expressed in variation by some staff members in almost every school where I have worked. Since governments and boards of
Developing Learning Communities

education do have expectations and normative ways of measuring compliance with those expectations, we will continue to see the above sentiments being voiced unless we change how we do business (Harris, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan 2009). Although we may talk about community and collaboration, much of what we must pay attention to is mandated from those who are above within the hierarchy and does not come from what truly “is disturbing us” (Capra, 2002) within the actual schoolhouse. If this is the case, it is no wonder that teachers feel that they are really being controlled rather than being invited into the role of making changes that make sense for their students’ learning.

**Sustainability**

The thoughts of Tarnoczi (2006) and Naylor (2007) give insight into why new ways of improving education often fail. If those who are expected to implement the new initiatives (teachers) feel they are being coerced, directed or controlled, as if they are having “something done to them”, they are likely to find ways to subvert implementation. Education is full of programs, activities and processes that simply fade away due to teachers choosing not to continue with them. This is not because these programs or methods were ill conceived or poorly designed or even that they are particularly disliked. (Renihan, 2008, personal communication) Often a great deal of expertise, money and time go into the development and implementation of such initiatives. As Mitchell & Sackney (2009) point out, a focus on compliance does not necessarily foster learning, and is why we see teachers not implementing programs or methods they believe will not help their students. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that our economic climate and our societal obsession with gathering data act in opposition to the nurturance of a PLC.

Unfortunately, as Fullan (2005) points out, school improvement does not have a history of long-term success, and our research certainly confirms this pattern. In our studies, we have found some schools that have been able to generate but not sustain improvement, others that have been unsuccessful in both aspects, and a precious few that have been able to build improvement principles, strategies, and systems that have lasted for quite some time. We are aware of the fragility of these latter schools over the long term. Giles and Hargreaves (2006), for example, point out that some of their research schools with a long history of success as learning communities have started to succumb to pressures from external curricular expectations and accountability measures, internal personnel and leadership changes, intensified workloads, and resource depletion and are starting to revert to traditional norms and operating structures. (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. 14)
Building human capacity is an attribute linked closely with sustainability, as without the capacity to continue to improve it is unlikely that there will be sustainability. Stoll, Fink and Earl (2000) write of the importance of providing time to educators in order to build capacity from the inside. They list the following nine elements as important to building and maintaining internal capacity: believing in success; making connections; attending to motivation; understanding and experiencing emotions; engaging in community; inquiring; creating; practicing (new ideas); finding time. Further to this:

The paradox of learning organizations and communities in education is that they are being advocated most strongly just at the point when standardized reform movements legislate the content and micromanage the process of learning to such a degree that there is little scope for teachers to learn in what little time is left over. Professional learning communities are postmodern organizational forms struggling to survive in a modernistic, micromanaged, and politicized educational world. Where standardized reform practices continue to tighten their grip, as is now the case in North America, the future for schools as learning organizations and professional learning communities that will develop the creativity and flexibility needed in the new knowledge economy does not look promising. (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006, p.153)

In fact, government-driven accountability and transparency policies make individual school improvement plans and standardized government test results of individual schools more easily examinable. A bone of contention for many educators is the government’s ineffective explanation to the public of their valid interpretation and use. Also worth considering is whether principals believe they have enough autonomy to help guide their schools in the direction that makes sense and supports student learning. Is the principal of the school subverting the authenticity and the nurturing of an LC if they must ensure their goals align with those of the district and province?

**New Theoretical Perspectives of Learning Communities**

In recent years there has been a paradigm shift by some researchers when examining learning communities: a shift from a more recipe-driven way of looking at learning communities to a more living systems (or ecological) way of looking at learning
Developing Learning Communities

Communities. The work of Fritjof Capra is often cited when looking at learning communities in this light.


Wenger defines a community of practice as characterized by three features: mutual engagement of its members, a joint enterprise, and, over time a shared repertoire of routines, tacit rules of conduct, and knowledge. In terms of our conceptual framework, we see that the mutual engagement refers to the dynamics of a self-generating network of communications, the joint enterprise to the shared purpose and meaning, and the shared repertoire to the resulting coordination of behaviour and creation of shared knowledge (p. 107).

Capra furthermore notes that within any community, there “…is a cluster of interconnected communities of practice” (p 109) and these networks need to be sophisticated and developed to be able to respond creatively to changes, to differing circumstances and even to evolve. He goes on to say that “…an organization’s aliveness resides in its communities of practice” (p.109). In other words, it is this connectedness, this aliveness that gives organizations like schools the ability to make sense of what is happening in the broader society, to interpret any disturbances that come into the school as a result, and to respond to them in a way that makes sense for their school’s context and for the students entrusted to their care.

The following by Briggs and Peat (1999) supports the idea of considering how schools are embedded within the society in which they exist. They believe we are undergoing a cultural perception shift that will radically transform the way we think and behave as a society. Schools, being part of the greater society, will also be impacted by this cultural perception shift. The shift about which they are talking is the shift away from a more mechanistic way of viewing the world and its systems and towards viewing the world and its systems through chaotic wholeness. They contend,

Although chaos theory returns us to an ancient understanding that the universe is whole, it also brings very new insights to bear on this idea. These new insights have emerged in part from the fact that the new perspective of wholeness is being born out of a mechanistic perspective that is the antithesis of wholeness. This mechanistic perspective is the one we have known for the last several hundred years. In its day, that perspective was born from another kind of holism that existed in the Middle Ages. The cultural perception shifts we’re referring to here were mind-shaking events. They tremendously transformed the way people
thought and behaved. Looking at these shifts in a little detail will perhaps help us glimpse the kinds of revolutionary effects that could take place if we fully engaged the radically new holistic perception that chaos offers us. (pp. 147-148)

As noted earlier, this perspective (the mechanistic perspective being the antithesis of wholeness) appears within the works of modern day educators (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, 2009) as well as within the works of people outside the field of education (Wheatley, 2006).

The paradigm shift and understanding of a system as a connected, adaptive, responsive, mutually engaged community, should not be unexpected. According to Taylor (2004), we should expect those who hold privileged places in society to begin the process of change by way of their questioning and their conversation. In the field of education, these would be the people in academia and the people who hold the most power within the system itself—elected officials, boards, and senior management.

Technology allows this communication to happen at an ever-increasing speed and with an ever-increasing number of people. Taylor (2004) gives examples and an explanation of the change phenomenon as seen through the social imaginary.

The new practice, with the implicit understanding it generates, can be the basis for modifications of theory, which in turn can inflect practice, and so on.

What I’m calling the long march is a process whereby new practices, or modifications of old ones, either developed through improvisation among certain groups and strata of the population (e.g., the public sphere among educated elites in the eighteenth century, trade unions among workers in the nineteenth); or else were launched by elites in such a way as to recruit a larger and larger base (e.g., the Jacobian organization of the section of Paris). Alternatively, in the course of their slow development and ramification, a set of practices gradually changed their meaning for people, and hence helped to constitute a new social imaginary (the “economy”). The result of all these cases was a profound transformation of the social imaginary in Western societies, and thus of the world in which we live (p. 30).

Taylor’s explanation above still rings true in the changes we see happening within society today. There is an increased demand for consumer satisfaction (parent and child being the primary consumers, as well as society generally and future employers). There is a strong electronic communication presence in everyday life, including life in the schoolhouse, and a more interconnected world society. These changes indicate that we are in the midst of another shift in the way we view ourselves, and our social imaginary.
Developing Learning Communities

Educational systems, being an embedded part of our society, will undoubtedly also be affected by this shift as these ‘disturbances’ from within the society will affect the society generally, and in ways that we can only guess. LCs that are permitted to function as ‘living systems’ will be fully engaged in determining appropriate reactions to societal changes, as illustrated by the following quote from Capra (2002):

A living network responds to disturbances with structural changes, and it chooses both which disturbances to notice and how to respond. What people notice depends on who they are as individuals, and on the cultural characteristics of their communities of practice. A message will get through to them not only because of its volume or frequency, but because it is meaningful to them (pp. 111-112)

This tension between the existing mechanistic educational system and the promise of the living system is important to keep in mind when considering why learning communities do or do not develop. The animosity that machine-like organizations engender is widespread according to Capra (2002). In this vein he states:

When we look at the contrast between the two metaphors – machine versus living being – it is evident why a management style guided by the machine metaphor will have problems with organizational change. The need to have all changes designed by management and imposed upon the organization tends to generate bureaucratic rigidity. There is no room for flexible adaptations, learning and evolution in the machine metaphor, and it is clear that organizations managed in strictly mechanistic ways cannot survive in today’s complex, knowledge-oriented and rapidly changing business environment. (pp. 104-105)

In his book *The Web of Life* (1996), Capra gives a definition of living systems that is helpful for informing this literature review.

I shall argue that the key to a comprehensive theory of living systems lies in the synthesis of those two very different approaches, the study of substance (or structure) and the study of form (or pattern). In the study of structure we measure and weigh things. Patterns, however, cannot be measured or weighed; they must be mapped. To understand a pattern we must map a configuration of relationships. In other words, structure involves quantities, while pattern involves qualities.

The study of pattern is crucial to the understanding of living systems because systemic properties, as we have seen, arise from a configuration of ordered relationships. Systemic properties are properties of a pattern. What is destroyed when a living organism is dissected is its pattern. The components are still there, but the configuration of relationships among them—the pattern—is destroyed, and thus the organism dies. (p. 81)
With the above points in mind, PLCs can be viewed as living systems—as per Capra’s definition. The structures or components of the system are the facilities, resources, and people. The pattern or systematic properties of the system are the relationships, methods and programs. The implications for educators or others in higher levels of the system that dictate new programs, methods, or change to the system below them is that the intervention risks destroying the efficacy of the existing system. This is why it is not particularly helpful to mandate wide-sweeping reforms without giving the people who must do the implementing the flexibility to adapt the changes to fit their context. This is also the view Mitchell and Sackney (2009) put forward when arguing for the need to view learning communities through an ecological (living systems) lens.

**Mitchell and Sackney’s Ecological View**

The theoretical framework for this dissertation comes from the work of Mitchell and Sackney (2009) who have spent the last two decades exploring school learning communities and their complexities. Initially, they attempted to develop a model that would form deep connectedness between the disparate parts of the LC but found this focus did not enable them to get at the root of the action behind the contents of the capacity being built. When differentiating the core premises and guiding principles of managed and living systems they stated:

> We came to understand that a managed system is structured to handle simplified problems and simplistic solutions, but this approach fails to address the inherent complexity, interconnectedness, and generativity of living systems. (2009, p.11)

They then looked at the activities and processes that built the needed capacity within learning communities. This was done using Capra’s understanding of the importance of distinguishing between holism and deep ecology as a framework. In this frame, the holistic perspective looks at all the parts that go together to make the whole, whereas the ecological perspective also considers the natural and social environment into which the whole is placed. Capacity for Mitchell & Sackney takes into account personal, interpersonal and organizational capacity as it is their contention that “the three sets of capacity are mutually influencing and mutually reinforcing and that a learning community is unlikely to emerge unless capacity is built in all three domains” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. 31).
Translating the ecological perspective into the educational setting using Capra’s (1996) lens means that all that has come before (history), in terms of actions and interactions, as well as “mutual influences, interconnections, reciprocal relationships and the consequential effects they have had on the lives of students, educators, and other members of the school and community” have an influence and an impact (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, pp. ix-x). Looking at improving education through the ecological perspective had the effect of causing a paradigm shift for Mitchell and Sackney (2009) and “moved them from the what of learning communities to how, why and to what effect considerations” of learning communities. (p. x) The following illustrates their stance:

Deep ecology serves as the philosophical foundation of our theory of learning communities. This philosophy is rooted in an appreciation of the totality of patterns, relationships, actions, interactions, and mutual influences that emerge among and between people and the natural and constructed environments in which they live. It is supported by discoveries in the physical world, wherein the theories of quantum physics, nonlinear dynamics, and biological self-regeneration (among others) show that all human life and human activity is intimately connected, and that it is deeply affected by and affecting all aspects of the world. (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. xi)

In fact, Mitchell & Sackney (2009) challenge educators to “build a school that is more energizing and life-enhancing (2009, p. 14)” by willingly interrogating constructs currently in place, in order to ascertain whether or not they bring the life-giving energy and vitality necessary for sustained learning.

Table 1 summarizes some of the major authors cited in this literature review and how their theory fits with either the living systems lens or mechanistic systems lens. The first column lists educator researchers who value the PLC and see it existing best within a more managed system. The centre column lists educator researchers who also value the PLC and see it developing best within a more ecological or living systems model. The third column lists researchers outside the field of education who also value learning communities based on a living systems lens. The fundamental beliefs of these researchers, in regard to learning communities, is worth noting, as the pull of these two views upon the education system has the propensity to impact the success of LCs in our schools today.
A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The elements within the research review chapter were chosen to connect with and support Mitchell & Sackney’s concept of living systems in education and the promise it holds for creating sustainable learning communities. Mitchell & Sackney (2009) posit that “the learning community is failing to live up to its promise of energized learning and revitalized teaching not because of a flaw in the concept but because of a deep, structural defect in the system in which schools are immersed” (p. 1).

Of interest and connected to Mitchell & Sackney’s concept of living systems, there has recently been a groundswell of interest in what is being called “21st century learning”. Initially spearheaded by the thinking of John Abbott (1999), twenty-first century skills are generally believed to encompass learning processes that assist in the development of the following attributes in learners:

- critical thinking and problem solving
- collaboration across networks and leading by influence
- agility and adaptability
- initiative and entrepreneurialism
- effective oral and written communication
- accessing and analyzing information
Developing Learning Communities

- curiosity and imagination (Sizer, T. & Faust Sizer N., 2009, p. 6)

These attributes fit well with the root metaphors and operating principles cited by Mitchell & Sackney (2009) to describe the living system in action.

The premise for this study is that most schools presently exist as managed systems (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009) which generally operate within the boundaries of: bureaucracy, hierarchy, formulaic thinking, recipe driven structures, standardized practice and the search for best practice. On the other hand, a school that operates within a living systems framework operates within the spirit of: collaboration, mutuality, divergent thinking and inter-relationships. If these two differing types of systems are viewed through the attributes commonly associated with healthy learning communities (shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, shared personal practice and supportive conditions) as stated by Olivier, Hipp & Huffman (2008), the premise is that the living systems approach, rather than the managed systems approach, will lead to sustainability and enhanced learning. Figure 1 shows the framework for this research.

The top row of the figure describes the living systems lens. Organizations as living systems are places of collaboration, mutuality, divergent thinking, and inter-relationships (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Furthermore, there are practices within the British Columbia (BC) context that support the living system perspective. Schools as learning communities are characterized by a sense of shared and supportive leadership, shared beliefs, values and vision, collective learning, shared practice and supportive conditions (Hord & Sommers, 2008). It is the premise that this intentionally collaborative spirit, rooted in a living systems perspective, leads to enhanced learning and growth and to further support of the learning community, hence the arrow connecting back to the learning communities rectangle.

The bottom row of the figure describes the managed system. Organizations as managed systems are places of bureaucracy, hierarchy, formulaic thinking, recipe-driven processes, and standardized practice. Although learning communities as managed systems still value leadership, vision, mission and values, learning, and supportive conditions (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), it is important to note that because there are no
Developing Learning Communities

Group communicative descriptors associated with each action, a more solitary and isolated action for each person in the LC is implied. There are practices within the BC context that support the managed system. The premise is that this way of operating begets status-quo learning and growth as a result.

Figure 1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework
Summary

This literature review chapter began by describing work done outside of the field of education (Senge’s learning organizations work) as this is considered to be the root of learning communities’ research. Why learning communities were adopted by the school system was then probed. Next, common understandings of learning communities were explored, as were challenges to creating and maintaining them. Research conducted during the past ten years related to this study was also examined. Finally, new perspectives of learning communities were described, leading to the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. The above-described literature was chosen because it describes where PLCs came from, what we have learned about their helpfulness and what we are currently exploring in terms of what hinders them. This is helpful for situating the context of this research within a background and framework that can explore the question being asked. The next chapter outlines the research design for this study as well as the methods that were used to acquire data.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

This chapter provides a rationale for the chosen methodology and outlines the purpose and the questions that were used to guide the research. The methodology and data analyses are then described, as well as the validity and reliability for the study.

Rationale for the Chosen Design

Before choosing a methodology for this research, each type of research commonly used in the field of education was considered to ascertain which method was the most appropriate. The primary nature of the research question being explored was the filter through which each methodological process was considered.

The two broadest types of research used today stem from historically positivist and post-positivist beliefs around the epistemological understandings and assumptions of educational research (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). These are more commonly called quantitative and qualitative research.

Positivist research is grounded in the assumption that features of the social environment constitute an independent reality across time and settings. Positivist researchers develop knowledge by collecting numerical data on observable behaviours of samples and then subjecting these data to numerical analysis. Postpositive research is grounded in the assumption that features of the social environment are constructed as interpretations by individuals and that these interpretations tend to be transitory and situational. Postpositivist researchers develop knowledge by collecting primarily verbal data through the intensive study of cases and then subjecting these data to analytic induction. (Gall, Borg. Gall, 1996, p. 28)

Schools and school systems by their nature are social places that are subject to the thoughts and direction taken by the individuals within the institution or system. The context in which these people find themselves impacts the decisions that are made. For this reason, much educational research tends to be qualitative in nature (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

Qualitative research, however, can be conducted within a number of traditions (biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study) that use elements particular to their tradition of qualitative research (Lichtman, 2011; Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005; Cresswell, 1998). These traditions can then be further subdivided or if
desired, combined. In turn, the aforementioned traditions of research are suited to the following:

1. **biography** – The study of individuals and their experiences as told to the researcher or found in archival documents.
2. **phenomenology** – The meanings of lived experiences conveyed by several individuals about a concept or phenomenon are conveyed.
3. **grounded theory** – A theory developed to aid understanding of a phenomena.
4. **ethnography** – A description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system.
5. **case study** – An exploration of a bounded system or case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Lichtman, 2011).

When ascertaining understandings of ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions in a bounded system, such as a school, a case study is generally preferred.

Case studies are the preferred qualitative method when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are asked, when the researcher has little or no control over events, when a holistic understanding of a problem is required, and when there is a contemporary focus within a real-life context (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005, p. 221)

Given the aforementioned descriptors, a case study approach seemed most suited to exploring the questions asked in this dissertation. Case studies can further be divided into three types: intrinsic case studies, instrumental case studies and collective case studies (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005, pp. 221-222). Of the three, the collective case study fits best with this dissertation. Collective case studies contain more than one instrumental case as a way of understanding the issue. This study examined five schools to get a better understanding of learning communities.

Of interest to the researcher, when designing the methodology for this research, is the notion that in case study research it is now common for researchers to collect both qualitative and quantitative data (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009; Lichtman, 2011). One of the benefits listed for multi-methods of data collection is that it provides the opportunity to look for corroboration in the results from different methods (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). deMarrais and Lapan further state that by using multi-methods of data collection there is
a greater opportunity for triangulation through both convergent and divergent data. In addition, using multi-methods of data collection provides opportunity for completeness, depth, breadth, and elaboration of data that is more likely to lead to confirmation or completeness (pp. 278-279).

The chosen methodology for this research was the case study approach using a mixed-method of data collection. Because each school is bounded by the operations within its own building, it makes sense to look at each school as its own case and then explore whether there are any similarities between the schools studied. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) illustrate why this is a suitable method: “A good case study brings a phenomenon to life for readers and helps them understand its meaning” (p. 543). There are many instances where schools are not able to maintain an LC (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Because of this, it would be very instructive to find out from learning communities that are being sustained what it is that gives them the ability to do so. It seems most likely that a case study approach “brings a phenomenon to life” is the best choice for exploring whether or not a living systems view of an LC holds promise for the sustaining of a system such as a learning community. In view of the above, the following statement by Gall et al. (1996) is instructive:

In a case study whose purpose is description, the researcher attempts to depict a phenomenon and conceptualize it. A good depiction will provide what is called thick description of the phenomenon, that is, statements that re-create a situation and as much of its context as possible, accompanied by the meanings and intentions inherent in that situation. The term thick description originated in anthropology to refer to a complete, literal description of a cultural phenomenon, but is now used in qualitative research generally. (Gall et al., 1996, p. 549)

To guide the research a purpose statement was needed. The following outlines the purpose of this study.

**Purpose Statement**

According to Cresswell (2002), qualitative researchers’ questions are open-ended and general so as to allow participants to share their views about the problem being studied. He further states that the inquirer keeps the direction for a study open to best learn from participants.

In short, qualitative research questions emerge during a study and are not specifically set before the inquiry as in quantitative research….. In addition, both
qualitative purpose statements and research questions start with a single idea that the researcher wants to explore (p. 146).

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to explore why learning communities develop in some elementary schools while not in others. Cresswell (2002) writes of the importance of setting a single idea or a phenomenon to explore when he states: “A central component of both the purpose statement and the research questions in qualitative research is the central phenomenon” (p. 146). He further goes on to define the central phenomenon as “an issue or a process explored in qualitative research” (p. 146). Using the above, the purpose statement for this study was as follows:

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to explore the phenomenon of why learning communities develop in some Greater Vancouver elementary schools, while not in others.

**Research Questions**

The researcher begins with a central question: the overarching question being asked in the study (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005). It should be the most general question that can be asked. For purposes of this study the central question is: What factors helped or hindered the development of LCs in selected elementary schools in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia?

**Sub-questions.** From the above question flow the following sub questions:

1. What factors helped LCs to develop in the elementary schools studied?
2. What factors hindered LCs from developing in the elementary schools studied?
3. What influences did the following factors have in helping or hindering the development of LCs in the elementary schools studied: politics, interpersonal relations, trust, and budget fluctuations?
4. To what extent was the development of LCs in the elementary schools studied helped by improved student learning or improved teacher learning?
5. Did LCs become part of the way any of these elementary schools systemically operated?
Description of Methodology

This research was conducted as a case study using a mixed-methods or multi-methods design. There are some key characteristics of mixed-methods designs researchers should pay attention to (Shutz, Chambless & DeCuir, 2004; Mertens, 2005; Cresswell, 2002). First, there needs to be a justification by the researcher as to why both kinds of data are being collected. Second, it is important to decide whether or not the quantitative or the qualitative data will take priority. Third, a choice needs to be made regarding the sequencing of the collection of the quantitative and qualitative data. Fourth, the analysis of the data needs to be shaped by the mixed-methods design (this will be described in the section entitled Mixed-Methods Design) and fifth, a visual figure should display the procedures of the design (this visual appears later in this chapter).

Regarding the second characteristic above, for purposes of this study, the qualitative data took precedence. The quantitative data was used to inform the qualitative data by giving the researcher interesting issues to explore during the interviews. The quantitative data also affirmed that the qualitative data represented the thoughts of the general school community. The rationale for this was as follows: a living system by its very nature is complex and messy. Because of this, in a living system, numbers alone often do not have the capacity to adequately convey what is happening within the system. Therefore, it made sense for the qualitative data to form the basis of the data analysis with the quantitative data providing indications of where probing during the collection of the qualitative data needed to take place.

Regarding the third characteristic above, before any research began, I enlisted the assistance of someone within each of the chosen districts to help me identify sites that were appropriate to my research (Appendix B). These people are called gatekeepers (Krathwohl, 2009). In this regard, Cresswell (2002) states,

For qualitative research, permissions are needed at many levels to access a site. Because of the in-depth nature of extensive and multiple interviews with participants, it might be helpful for you to identify and make use of a gatekeeper. A gatekeeper is an individual who has an official or unofficial role at the site, provides entrance to a site, helps researchers locate people, and assists in the identification of places to study. (p. 192)
Although it was my intent to have sites chosen for me that were functioning well as learning communities, to find out why this was so at each site, it was also important to consider why it was that some sites did not seem able to maintain an LC. It was my intention to reach answers to these questions through my focus group sessions. There were staffs that had some new members join within the past few years. These new members were well situated to inform me about the differences between their new sites and their previous sites. Proceeding with the research in schools that were not functioning as learning communities would most likely have had a negative impact on those schools and therefore, this would not have been an ethical way to proceed. This may have had an effect on the quality of information from sites that were not able to maintain learning communities.

Researchers (Lichtman, 2011; Lapan & Quartaroli; Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005) write of the differences between random sampling (for quantitative studies) and purposeful sampling (for qualitative studies). For this study, it was through purposeful sampling that I was able to find the sites that I needed (sites with a developing LC) to examine the specific phenomenon described in this study. Patten (2009) offers the following insights in regard to purposeful sampling.

Purposive sampling is widely used by qualitative researchers. To select a purposive sample, a researcher must first identify a research topic of interest and then seek individuals who are likely to have relevant information. This is sometimes described as seeking individuals who will be rich sources of information. In other words, qualitative researchers make subjective judgments regarding the individuals to select based on the likelihood that they will be able to provide the needed information. (p. 149)

Furthermore, Lichtman (2011), Lapan & Quartaroli (2009), Cottrell & McKenzie (2005) note different variations of purposeful sampling. The purpose of this study was to explore what caused learning communities to develop in some schools. Because of this, extreme case sampling, a variation of purposeful sampling, most closely matched with this particular study. Cresswell (2002) offers the following advantages of using extreme case sampling.

Sometimes you are more interested in learning about a case that is particularly troublesome or enlightening, or a case that is noticeable for its success or its failure (Patton, 1990). Extreme case sampling is a form of purposeful sampling in which the researcher studies an outlier case or one that displays extreme
Developing Learning Communities

characteristics. Researchers identify these cases by locating persons or organizations that have been cited for achievements or that have distinguished themselves through their problems. (p. 196)

To gather data for a study, an overall design for gathering the data was needed. This next section describes the design used.

**Mixed-Methods Design**

This section looks at each part of the mixed-methods design in turn to delineate what each part of the research played in the whole research design. Holding focus group sessions and one-on-one interview sessions was used to provide enough data for a thick description of the phenomenon (Gall et al., 1996). This is desirable as it is this thick description that brings to life the real-life situation in each context for the reader. It was helpful to determine if the responses given by participants during the interview and focus group sessions truly represented the thoughts and beliefs of the school staff as a whole. By surveying all of the available staff at each site (with a questionnaire), quantitative data was used to inform the collection of the qualitative data and to check if there was alignment between the two differing types of data, thus improving reliability. Greene and Caracelli (1997, cited in Cresswell, 2002) advise the following in regard to mixed-methods research design.

Mixed method research is a good design to use if you seek to build on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data. It may help to provide a complete picture of a research problem. For example, to assess both outcomes of a study (i.e., quantitative) as well as the process (i.e., qualitative) helps to develop a “complex” picture of social phenomenon (p.7).

The next section of this research looks at the survey portion of the mixed-methods design.

**Survey Questions**

All adults who actively participated in the LC within each chosen school (teaching staff, CUPE [unionized support] staff) were surveyed (Appendix G) through an online or paper questionnaire (whichever format was most comfortable for the person completing the survey). The collection of the quantitative data was designed to help
amplify and quantify the findings identified in the qualitative analysis (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993) as well as to give the researcher an idea of where probing was required when conducting the focus group and in-depth interview sessions. The following considerations were taken into account in designing the survey for this study (Cresswell, 2002). Step one: Decide if a survey is the best design to use. (The rationale for using a survey in this study has been described above.) Step two: Identify the research questions or hypotheses. It is important that the researcher is able to “describe the characteristics or trends of a population of people” (p. 421). For purposes of this study, the intent of the survey was to seek out the characteristics and the trends (attitudes, beliefs, goals) of thinking within each school population. Step three: Identify the population, the sampling frame, and the sample. For purposes of this study, the survey was available to all staff working within the LC, which allowed me to see if the subsequent focus group responses and the individual responses were in alignment. Elementary schools are relatively small in terms of numbers of staff, so it was prudent to allow all to participate, rather than randomly choosing people to participate. Step four: Determine the survey design and data collection procedure. For purposes of this study an electronic questionnaire was used so the data could be more easily analyzed. This was done through the SFU server (using my student web space), which also had the ability to track the number of responses from each site. This data was then aggregated in a spreadsheet for analysis. Step five: Develop or locate an instrument. For purposes of this study, the survey drew upon the work of Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (2008), whose survey seeks to assess whether or not a school community sees itself as an LC. Questions from the 2008 survey listed above, as well as questions meant to elicit responses to the main questions and sub-questions of this study, were included in the survey.

In the Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman instrument, participants are asked to indicate their level of agreement with fifty-two statements categorized around the following headings: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions-relationships, and supportive conditions-structures. The next section looks at the focus group portion of the mixed-methods design.
Focus Group Questions

Following the identification of school sites at the district level, I elicited the assistance of the principal or the PLC teacher leader at each site to help set up a focus group session (Appendix C). The characteristics of a good focus group consist of the following:

It is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is relaxed, comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in their discussion. (Kreuger, cited in Gall et al., 1996 p. 308)

For this study, because some of the schools did not have large staffs, a group of four to six staff was preferred. This allowed everyone to speak and also allowed for sharing of ideas. At these meetings, questions were posed to generate group discussion. Rich and detailed comments about feelings, beliefs, ideals, thoughts and actions taken within the community (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993) were elicited so the social phenomenon of learning communities from the school employee’s perspective could be more fully understood. The focus group session was held at each school before the in-depth interview and after the survey portions of the study. This group discussion gave me a general sense of what the staff’s thoughts were in regard to the research and a cultural context in which to analyze the in-depth interviews. “Researchers are finding that the interactions among the participants stimulate them to state feelings, perceptions and beliefs that they would not express if interviewed individually” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 308). The questions listed in appendix C were meant to be open-ended so participants felt free to comment on what was most important to them, as well as commenting on the expressed thoughts of others within the focus group. The session was held during a lunch hour, so that food (pizza) and conversation could be shared in a friendly and relaxed setting. This helped participants feel comfortable about sharing their thoughts with the group. The next section of this research will look at the in-depth interview portion of the mixed-methods design.
In-depth interviews

Two staff members at each of the five schools were interviewed (Appendix E) to ask specific questions related to their LC. These people were also chosen in consultation with the principal or PLC teacher leader at the school. It was intended that they be key informants (Gall et al., 2006), as this allowed me to “collect data from individuals who have special knowledge or perceptions that would not otherwise be available to the researcher.” (p. 306) These interviews allowed for individuals to speak without the influence of co-participants in the study. Therefore, these participants were not participants in the focus group sessions. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The following justifies my choice.

The advantage of this type of interviewing is that the predetermined close-ended responses can net useful information to support theories and concepts in the literature. The open-ended responses, on the other hand, can allow the participant to provide personal experiences that may be outside or beyond those identified in the close-ended options (Cresswell, 2002. p. 205).

To minimize the possibility of bias (Gall et al., 2006), a predetermined set of questions was asked, using the same wording and prompts. These questions and prompts are listed in appendix E. A quiet, comfortable space in the school was sought for conducting the interviews and the first few minutes of the interviews were spent on background type questions (see appendix E) to establish a rapport with the participants.

Ministry Sources

Satisfaction surveys on the BC Ministry of Education website were accessed to see if there was any linkage between data collected by the surveys and interviews at the study sites with the ministry data (satisfaction surveys). Three years worth of data were examined for each school site. Individual school data were also compared to district average data. Satisfaction surveys ask students if they believe their learning is improving in areas like reading and math–areas of focus typical for schools operating as learning communities interested in improving student achievement. Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results were also examined to see if academic performance was affected by the presence of a professional LC and if student perceptions on the satisfaction surveys aligned with the test results from the FSA.
The following figure shows at a glance the procedures of the design of this study.

![Research Design diagram]

**Figure 2.** Research Design

**Sample Size**

The number of sites and people sampled varies from one study to the next. In this study, five school sites were sampled to give the opportunity for similarities to be noted if there were any, while still allowing the interviewer to get an in-depth picture at each site. Cresswell (2002) states why the number of sites used in research is an important consideration.
It is typical in qualitative research, however, to only study a few individuals or a few cases. This is because the overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site. Although no set guide exists for how many participants or sites to use, typical guidelines are to: examine 3-5 cases in a case study (Cresswell, 2002, p. 197).

The setting of this study was the greater Vancouver area of British Columbia – specifically two school districts that lie south of the Fraser River.

**Data Analysis**

As stated, data were collected from four main sources (focus groups, in-depth interviews, staff surveys, ministry of education [satisfaction survey results and FSA test results] data) as well as from any artifacts (e.g., school codes of conduct, mission statements, newsletters) available at each site. Once the data were gathered, I began to look for patterns. How were the data the same from school to school and how were they different? Were the factors that encouraged learning communities to develop the same from school to school? Were some factors more important than others? What factors were identified that had a negative influence on learning communities, preventing them from developing? Did the survey data align with the information found in the in-depth interviews and focus group sessions? Initial survey data were analyzed for means, standard deviations and ranges for each of the dimensions. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the various measures for the five schools. Rank order and mean standard deviations were also calculated, using a .05 level of significance. The findings from the survey data were used to amplify and expand the findings from the qualitative research.

When evaluating survey research, assuming that respondents and non-respondents are similar, if the response rate is less than 50%, the results will not be as reliable (Mertens, 2005; Cresswell, 2002). The following was done in order to encourage a high participation rate at each school. Each principal/PLC leader was given a box with survey envelopes to be given out to members of the staff. Each envelope contained a page of directions which included the informed consent (see page one of appendix G), a personal URL if an online survey was preferred and directions to see the Principal/PLC teacher.
leader if a paper survey was preferred (see pages 2-5 of appendix G). To the front of each envelope was taped a chocolate bar as a small thank you for the gift of time from the person being surveyed.

The data recorded from the focus groups and in-depth interviews were transcribed so the data could be coded for themes and categories. Qualitative researchers generally read through their data several times, looking for themes, categories, similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences. Researchers code the text (looking for the above listed descriptors) as they read through in order to help ascertain what the themes and categories may be (Mertens, 2005; Krathwohl, 2009; Cresswell, 2002). This process of data analysis (axial or focused coding) continues in an iterative process so that similar items can continue to be grouped together (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009). “Unquestionably, there is not one single way to analyze qualitative data—it is an eclectic process in which you try to make sense of the information” (Cresswell, 2002, p. 258).

For researchers, triangulation of data is a common way of ensuring that the research results of a case study are more reliable and trustworthy. Lapan and Quartaroli (2009) offer the following rationale for using triangulation of data.

Triangulation of data collection methods and data sources, is where at least two types of observation are used (such as questionnaires and interviews), and at least two sources are used (for example, students and teachers). This triangulation offers more complex, overlapping descriptions of the case and makes the report more trustworthy as well (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009, p. 177).

I examined both the qualitative and the quantitative data as a whole to see if there were similar themes emerging from both sets of data. By triangulating the qualitative and quantitative data collected, there was an overlapping of data and therefore a more trustworthy result. Table 2 shows at a glance, which data provided information to answer each of the questions being asked in this research.

**Validity and Reliability**

This next section describes what action was taken to assure validity and reliability of the research. “Validity has often been thought to be a more important issue than
Developing Learning Communities

Table 2

Data and Question alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Staff questionnaire (question numbers)</th>
<th>Focus Group (question numbers)</th>
<th>In-depth Interview (question numbers)</th>
<th>Ministry Data (FSA &amp; Satisfaction surveys)</th>
<th>School based artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What factors helped LCs to develop in the selected elementary schools?</td>
<td>1-51 inclusive</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>1, 3, 7</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors hindered LCs from developing in the selected elementary schools?</td>
<td>1-51 inclusive</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>2, 5, 6, 7</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What influences do the following play in helping or hindering the development of LCs: union politics, interpersonal relations, trust, budget fluctuations?</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 26, 29, 33, 34, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 3, 4, 8</td>
<td>Satisfaction surveys – align with PLC embeddedness?</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is the learning community developed by improved student learning or improved teacher learning?</td>
<td>5, 6, 7, 18, 19, 20, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 42</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
<td>7, 9, 10</td>
<td>FSA – at expected level of achievement?</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did LCs become part of the way school communities operated?</td>
<td>1, 14, 15, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 43, 44, 45, 46, 50, 51</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>4, 6</td>
<td>Satisfaction surveys – align with PLC embeddedness?</td>
<td>School/Dist Plans, Websites, Newsletters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

reliability. If an instrument does not measure what it is supposed to, then it does not matter if it is reliable” (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005, p. 298). Triangulation is one of the most frequently used validation strategies in mixed-methods research (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009; Shutz et. al., 2004). In this study, triangulation occurred by using the data from surveys, the ministry, interviews and focus groups. In addressing triangulation, Cresswell (2002) states:

Qualitative inquirers triangulate among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study. Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g. a principal and a student), types of data (e.g. observational field notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g.
Developing Learning Communities

documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research. The inquirer examines each information source and finds evidence to support a theme. This ensures that the study will be accurate because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible. (p. 280)

The types of triangulation employed in this study involved using varying personnel such as teachers and administrators. As well, varying approaches to data collection were employed such as: surveys, interviews and ministry data.

The survey used for this research was based on the Olivier, Hipp & Huffman (2008) Survey. For purposes of this research, some of the items were removed from some of the sections to create a survey of a reasonable length (see Appendix G). The following is a list of the sections in the original survey. In brackets beside each section listed is a description of the items removed:

- Shared and Supportive Leadership (removed 4 of the 11 attributes. Numbers 1, 2, 6 and 7)
- Shared Values and Vision (removed 3 of the 9 attributes. Numbers 12, 13 and 16)
- Collective Learning and Application (removed 3 of the 10 attributes. Numbers 22, 26 and 28)
- Shared Personal Practice (removed 2 of the 7 attributes. Numbers 33 and 35)
- Supportive Conditions-Relationships (removed 0 of the 5 attributes.)
- Supportive Conditions – Structures (removed 0 of the 4 attributes.)
- Statements (removed 1 of the 6 attributes. Number 52)

To ensure the instrument was valid, the researchers conducted the following analyses:

Our most recent analyses of this diagnostic tool has confirmed internal consistency resulting in the following Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients for factored subscales (n=1209): Shared and Supportive Leadership (.94); Shared Values and Vision (.92); Collective Learning and Application (.91); Shared Personal Practice (.87); Supportive Conditions-Relationships (.82); Supportive Conditions-Structures (.88); and a one-factor solution (.97). This latest analysis also provided an opportunity to review descriptive statistics for each item. Mean scores for the measure resulted in a high of 3.27 6 within the Collective Learning
and Application dimension (School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning) to a low of 2.74 within the Shared Personal Practice dimension (The staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices). (Olivier, 2009, pp.5-6)

Because the instrument had high internal consistency, items were removed that were very similar to other items. This was done to reduce the length of the survey. Gall et al. (2006) contend that good scales have at least five items per dimension. In the Olivier, Hipp and Huffman survey, many of the scales had more than ten items per dimension. Therefore, reducing the number of items does not reduce the instrument’s internal consistency (Gall et al., 2006).

Added to this adapted assessment tool were statements designed to assess the BC context. The school survey was then piloted with five greater Vancouver area teachers for clarity and completeness. These same teachers also examined the focus group and the in-depth interview questions for clarity and for completeness. Furthermore, these teachers were also asked if there were any additional questions that should be included. According to Gall et al. (2006) this kind of piloting is recommended:

You should carry out a thorough pretest of the questionnaire before using it in your study. The pretest should include a sample of individuals from the population from which you plan to draw your respondents. Also, the pretest form of the questionnaire should provide space for respondents to make criticisms and recommendations for improving the questionnaire (p. 298).

Researchers do not always agree upon the best method of data collection. This lack of agreement can have a direct impact on the perceived validity and reliability of data gathered. The following point illustrates why it is important to triangulate data:

Case study researchers do not agree in their assumptions about the nature of reality and scientific inquiry. Their different assumptions lead them to hold different views about how to conceptualize and assess the validity and reliability of case study findings. (Gall et al. 2006, p. 571)

Gall et al. (2006) further list the kinds of validity that many researchers consider when doing case study research: construct validity, internal validity and external validity. The focus group and in-depth interview questions are based on the dimensions of the Olivier et al. (2008) survey. In terms of construct validity, Gall et al. (2006) state, “Construct validity is the extent to which a measure used in a case study correctly
Developing Learning Communities

operationalizes the concepts being studied” (p.571). There was direct alignment between the three instruments being used to gather data, so triangulation of data was possible and helped to ensure construct validity (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009). Internal validity “is the extent to which the researcher has demonstrated a causal relationship between X and Y; by showing that other plausible factors could not have caused Y” (Gall et al., 2006, p. 571). Triangulation of data between participants at the various sites helped to address this. External validity “is the extent to which the findings of a case study can be generalized to similar cases.” (Gall et al., 2006, p. 572) It was not the intent of this study to be generalizable.

Gall et al. (2006) state that reliability is “the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher.” (p. 572) They also state that one way this can be addressed is by ensuring contextual completeness. In this light, they recommend:

…the following contextual features for researchers to consider when interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon they investigate: history, physical setting, and environment; number of participants; activities; schedules and temporal order of events; division of labor; routines and variations from them; significant events and their origins and consequences; members’ perceptions and meanings; social rules and basic patterns of order. (p. 573)

In my research, contextual completeness was ensured by keeping the same research procedure and incentives at each site, having people within the school schedule the meetings and choose the participants, as well as by describing the context of each site so that the reader can decide whether or not the findings at the site may be helpful. The next section of this research explains the process of attaining ethics approval in order to begin collecting data.

Ethics Approval

Prior to beginning the research, ethics approval was sought from the school districts and from Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics. Documentation showing this process can be found in Appendices A and B. Approval to do research was sought from district-based management in three greater Vancouver school districts in February of 2010. Two of the three districts gave approval in February of 2010, pending
ethics approval from SFU. Documents were submitted to the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) at SFU in February of 2010. Approval from ORE was received in March of 2010.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of learning communities in elementary schools. In particular, what factors encouraged LCs to be maintained or not be maintained by school staffs. Five greater Vancouver schools were used for data collection. The data collected consisted of qualitative data from focus group sessions and in-depth interviews at each school site. Quantitative data was collected at each school site in the form of an electronic or paper survey. This quantitative data was used to inform the data collected from the focus group sessions and the in-depth interview sessions, as well as to indicate where probing questions were needed during the focus group and in-depth interview sessions. Quantitative ministry of education data was also examined to ascertain whether it supports the school-site data gathered. The work of interviewing and data gathering at school sites took place in the spring of 2010.
Chapter 4: Findings for District “A”

As stated in Chapter one, the purpose of this study was to determine what factors encouraged LCs to be maintained or not be maintained by school staffs. Five schools in two districts were examined. This chapter describes the participants in one of the districts in this study, delineating: how they were chosen, the demographics of the participant district, and the knowledge level of the participants chosen for the study. There are five main sections in the Results for District “A” chapter. The first describes the participants in the study, the second section describes the context of District A; the third through fifth sections describe the findings from the three schools within District A. For each school in the third through fifth sections, the context of the school is given, followed by the quantitative survey data, and then the qualitative focus group and in-depth interview data. Ministry data for each school is given at the end of that school’s section.

Participants

Approval to do research was sought from district-based management in three greater Vancouver school districts in February of 2010. This was done by contacting a member of district management within each district after emailing them a description of the study. The email included an indication of the time commitment and nature of information being sought (see Appendices A and B), and a copy of the instruments to be used to collect the data (see Appendices C, E and G). Two of the three districts gave approval in February of 2010. Within those two districts, a number of schools were suggested as being appropriate for the purposes of this research. Five schools within the two districts were then approached. Principals and Professional Learning Community (PLC) teacher leaders were emailed the selection documents prior to contact by telephone (Appendices A and B). During follow-up telephone conversations all five schools agreed to participate. As well, during the follow-up telephone conversations, the schools were informed of the three types of data to be collected (survey, focus group, in-depth interview), and the rationale for the order of the collection. Survey and interview dates and times were then chosen that would work well for the school. The principal and/or teacher leader in each school were asked to choose appropriate participants for both the
focus groups and the in-depth interviews, as they were in a position to know who the best informants were. For purposes of this research, all people interviewed and referenced are referred to as participants, regardless of what type of interview they were part of.

Survey participants in each school were, for the most part, teachers of varying experiential backgrounds. School principals were invited to participate in the survey, as were Teacher Assistants/School Education Assistants (TAs/SEAs), where the principal or PLC teacher leader felt it appropriate. Only one school chose to have TAs fill out surveys; the teacher PLC leader felt it was appropriate to keep these surveys separate from the rest, as there were portions that the TAs were not able to comment on due to their limited participation in the school’s PLC. All five schools indicated they would like to include their TAs/SEAs in more of their PLC planning meetings, but there was not enough funding to pay for their release time. For this reason, most schools felt it would not be appropriate for TAs/SEAs to participate in the survey. Each principal or PLC leader was given a box with survey envelopes to be given out to members of the staff (see Appendix G). The survey participation rate was high at all schools (ranging from 67% to 100%).

Two districts participated in this research, each of which was given a pseudonym in order to ensure their anonymity. Before presenting the results obtained from each school, general information for each district is given to explain the context in which the schools are situated. The next section of this chapter will present the results from one of the school districts that participated in this research.

**Context of District A**

District A was a relatively large geographic area for a Greater Vancouver school district, consisting of 48 schools spread out over 360 square kilometers. The district had restructured within the last ten years to an elementary (grades kindergarten-five), middle (grades six-eight) and secondary (grades nine-twelve) model for instructional organization and delivery. This was a district that continued to experience growth in its student population, an anomaly for school districts in British Columbia. The school district represented a diverse and multi-cultural community of learners. The following
quote from the district’s web site describes the general make-up of the student body in District A:

Approximately 73% of the District’s students primary spoken language is English, followed by 19% Punjabi and 2% Korean. Furthermore, data released by the Ministry of Education in January 2008 reports that 9.5% of the District’s learners are Aboriginal; 9.1% are Special Needs (sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, behaviour disabilities and gifted); 9.9% ESL; 6% French Immersion. (District “A” Website, Fast Facts)

In District A there was an effort on the part of the district management team to provide planned opportunities for PLC teacher leaders to come together regularly throughout the year to discuss issues of interest to those who were facilitating the PLC in the school. This was the third year for this district-based initiative. These district-based meetings were run by a team of district-based teacher leaders, who worked collaboratively with the district-based administrators charged with enhancing instruction. In this district it was a teacher, working in partnership with the principal of the school, who facilitated each school’s PLC. Even though the district was facing budgetary restrictions, the elected school board had taken an interest in the PLC initiative and had continued to provide release time as a line item in the budget. According to people at both the district and school levels, the interest in developing PLCs was evident in many elementary schools, but had not yet gained much momentum or interest in many middle or secondary schools.

Each of the participating schools in District A was given a pseudonym to ensure its anonymity. The next three sections of this chapter will explain the findings from each of the schools in District A, in relation to the research questions being asked. Each school section will begin with a description of the school so that the reader can place the data results in context.

**Sunny Brook Elementary**

Sunny Brook Elementary school was located in a suburban neighbourhood close to the commercial center of District A. Homes that surrounded the area were single-family homes and apartment buildings. The school drew students from many socio-economic backgrounds and was identified as a greater-needs school based on the fact that in the 2008-2009 school year 32% of Kindergarten students fell in the lowest 10th
percentile for physical health and well-being, the 4th lowest in the district (Sunny Brook School Plan, 2008).

The school was a one-storey building consisting of many hallways of varying length, connected together in a zigzag fashion with a few classrooms off of each hallway. The school was well maintained and had a modern playground for student use. Technology was available for student use in the iMac lab, which had 33 computers, and a projector. Each classroom had four networked computers for instructional purposes. The school had a population of 385 students in 16 divisions. Aboriginal students made up 12% of the school’s student population and 28% of the school’s student population had English as their Second Language (ESL). There was a district learning and assessment centre based at the school that offered specialized assistance to students in the Sunny Brook family of schools. Staff at the school consisted of: one principal, one vice-principal, 16 regular classroom teachers, one learning assistance teacher, one ESL teacher, one 0.4 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) music teacher, one 0.4 FTE teacher-librarian, one 0.2 FTE counsellor and four TAs (Sunny Brook School Profile, 2010).

PLCs took the form of teacher teams, which worked together on common goals. These teams were made up of teachers who taught one of two grades (e.g., teachers of grades one and two made up one team). Each team decided at the beginning of the school year what its area of focus would be. The team then decided essential student outcomes for this focus area. Weekly meetings were held to assess progress and to make further plans. At the end of the school year the team assessed how well its plans for the year had progressed.

All participating teachers completed the survey used in this study (Appendix G), which represented a 100% return rate. Data were examined for any inconsistencies or trends so that they could be explored during the interview and focus group portions of the data gathering.

**Survey data collected at Sunny Brook.** Table 3 shows the data collected from the survey. Any ‘not applicable’ responses or questions not answered have been included together in the fourth column, labeled NA (not applicable). For most of the survey statements the respondents were in agreement (they either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement).
The first group of statement responses that do not follow this agreement pattern are statements 2 (related to provincial policies), 3 (related to district policies) and 4 (related to union policies) in the BC Context section. In looking at the three statements (2, 3, and 4) together, the data indicates that district level policies are seen as the most helpful of the three.

The responses to statement 7, related to technology, were also split. While 10 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, there were eight who disagreed with the statement. Statement 10 (relating to community reputation) in this dimension also had some answers of note. Although most respondents agreed with the statement, there were four respondents who either thought the question was not applicable or they did not answer it. On a four-point scale the overall mean for this dimension (The BC Context) was 3.02, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.61 for statement 7 (related to technology) to a high of 3.28 for statement 10 (related to school reputation).

In the Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension the overall mean was 3.25, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.17 for statement 15 (related to distributed leadership) to a high of 3.44 for statement 13 (a proactive principal). For the Shared Values and Vision dimension, the overall mean was 3.21, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.17 for statement 19 (a shared staff vision focused on student learning) to a high of 3.28 for statement 20 (decision making alignment with school vision).

In the Collective Learning and Application dimension there was one statement where the pattern of agreement was not as strong as the others within the dimension, statement 30 (collaborative staff analysis to assess effectiveness). There were four respondents who disagreed with statement 30, while fourteen people agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. For the Collective Learning and Applications dimension the overall mean was 3.11, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.94 for statement 30 to a high of 3.28 for statement 25 (staff members working together).

In the Shared Personal Practice dimension there were two questions that did not fit the pattern of agreement, questions 32 (to do with observing peers) and 33 (providing feedback to peers). For the Shared Personal Practice dimension the overall mean was 2.86, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.35 for statement 32 to a high of 3.17 for
statement 35 (sharing results of practice). This data shows that the shared personal practice dimension had the lowest mean of the eight at Sunny Brook.

Table 3

*Sunny Brook Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=18)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>S.A.</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>N.A.</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>St.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The BC Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community) at this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our PLC positively affects student learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our PLC positively affects adult learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. This school is a desirable place to work in our district.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parents see this school as a good place.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The community speaks favourably about this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This school handles challenges in a healthy way.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.46</td>
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<td><strong>Average - BC Context dimension</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values and Vision</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Decisions are made in alignment with school’s values and vision.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared Values and Vision dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Sunny Brook Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=18)* (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Learning and Application</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills,</td>
<td>5 13 0 0 0 3.28 0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to</td>
<td>4 14 0 0 0 3.22 0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>address diverse student needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for</td>
<td>4 13 1 0 0 3.17 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collective learning through open dialogue.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for</td>
<td>3 14 1 0 0 3.11 0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together</td>
<td>2 14 2 0 0 3.00 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and apply new knowledge to solve problems.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to</td>
<td>3 11 4 0 0 2.94 0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to</td>
<td>3 13 2 0 0 3.06 0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve teaching and learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Collective Learning and Application dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.11 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Personal Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and</td>
<td>1 4 12 0 1 2.35 0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offer encouragement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to</td>
<td>1 8 6 0 3 2.67 0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructional practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and</td>
<td>3 14 1 0 0 3.11 0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve instructional practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply</td>
<td>3 15 0 0 0 3.17 0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning and share the results of their practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall</td>
<td>2 13 3 0 0 2.94 0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Shared Personal Practice dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.17 0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are</td>
<td>6 12 0 0 0 3.33 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>built on trust and respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.</td>
<td>5 13 0 0 0 3.28 0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in</td>
<td>3 11 3 0 1 3.00 0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort</td>
<td>2 13 1 0 2 3.06 0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to embed change into the culture of the school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful</td>
<td>5 12 0 0 1 3.29 0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Supportive Conditions Relationships dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.20 0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Sunny Brook Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=18)  (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>S.A.</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>N.A.</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>St.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average – Supportive Conditions Structures dimension</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Statements</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>49. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Average - Statements dimension</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* S.A. = Strongly Agree; A. = Agree; D. = Disagree; S.D. = Strongly Disagree; N.A. = No Answer or Not Applicable; M. = Mean; St.D. = Standard Deviation

In the *Supportive Conditions - Relationships* section, the overall mean was 3.20 with the mean ranging from a low of 3.00 for statement 39 (regular celebration of achievement) to a high of 3.33 for statement 37 (caring relationships exist). Meanwhile, in the *Supportive Conditions - Structures* section, the overall mean was 3.36 with the mean ranging from a low of 3.06 for statement 46 (use of resource people) to a high of 3.59 for statements 42 (time provided) and 43 (school scheduling), meaning this dimension had the highest mean of the eight at Sunny Brook. Lastly, in the *Statements* section the overall mean was 3.21 with the mean ranging from a low of 3.06 for statement 50 (to do with communication systems) to a high of 3.39 for statement 48 (to do with proximity of colleagues).

**Interview data.** The focus groups were conducted in two of the school’s classrooms during a regularly scheduled PLC meeting time at the school. These classrooms offered a relatively quiet meeting place, as the students were elsewhere in the
Developing Learning Communities

building at the time. Three teachers representing various grade levels participated in each of the two focus group interviews.

Two in-depth interviews were conducted; one in the staffroom, and one in a conference room, both relatively quiet locations. One participant had been at Sunny Brook for ten of her twelve teaching years and the other had been at Sunny Brook for six of her ten teaching years. Both participants were currently working as specialists within the school. One was currently the learning assistance teacher and the other worked with needy children from the Sunny Brook family of schools for a set period of time in the Learning and Assessment Centre program. The teacher who was presently the learning assistance teacher at Sunny Brook was able to offer insights about the complexity of helping to facilitate a PLC in a school, and the other teacher, who was previously the PLC facilitator, was able to offer insight into the start-up of a PLC and the challenges that brings.

What factors helped LCs to develop? The staff interviewed believed that there were a number of factors that helped to develop and encourage their LC. Two of the reasons given by staff were 1) that there were structures in place at the school that allowed for meeting during the workday, and 2) that the clientele was considered to be more needy. According to a focus group participant,

I have friends that say they’ve worked in inner city schools versus average schools, and it is very different because in an average school you can just chugalug along on your own and you don’t need a lot of help. I’ve been at “School A” and at “School B”, both of which have totally different students, and it was very isolating. I’ve also been at “School C” and “School D”, as well as here and I would say definitely there is more collaboration in the schools where you have a really tough clientele as opposed to a regular clientele. That’s why I would stay here, even though every year we think, ‘Oh my gosh, can the kids get any more difficult or crazy?’ It is so tough. But the value of having the people that we work with is way more valuable than the challenges we face. (FG1 16)

\[1\] FG1 refers to Focus Group 1; 16 refers to the page number of the transcript
Because the clientele at the school were needy, participants indicated that the personnel and structure were key to the success of the PLC. Participants believed that they needed to be willing to share with one another and there needed to be time for this to happen during the school day. A member of the focus group stated:

As far as strength goes, I think we’re all very comfortable with each other, and just don’t have a problem asking for help, and sharing our honest feelings about things. That helps a lot. I don’t know that that exists everywhere. I’ve been at six or seven different schools in the district, and definitely it does not. I also think it’s personnel, and I also think that, we don’t have the toughest clientele, but we do have some challenging kids here and part of survival is asking, ‘What should I do?’ There’s no way you could function by yourself. (FG1 15)

The participants at Sunny Brook also believed it was important that the teacher leader and the school principal work as a team, with the teachers driving the activity of the PLC, and the principal supporting the efforts of the teachers. The following focus group quote illustrates this.

I just think it’s important that people know how key administration is. If we wouldn’t have had that support and we wouldn’t have had the time built into our schedule, it wouldn’t have been possible. And the direction (is also important). So it’s not going to go over well at that school, if the principal’s not on board. I don’t know what you do then. There are some strong staff members that would carry on and probably do a fine job in spite of the person at the top; it just makes it easier for us. (It sounds almost symbiotic, from what you’re saying. Do you think PLCs have a better chance of getting a foothold if they’re more teacher-driven initially, or administrator-driven initially, or does it have to be a real pairing to go forth?) I think teacher-driven; administrator-supported. The topic that you choose has to be all teacher-driven, but the structure of it has to be done by administration. And I think it has been here. (FG1 36)

The district structures that had been put in place were also seen as central to the success of the PLC initiative. The following quote from a participant is illustrative of
Developing Learning Communities

how this district structure was initially used at Sunny Brook and how it evolved over the past three years.

They, the district created this position. We were invited to apply if we wanted to be the student achievement facilitator, and then the way we ran it the first year was across all the grades. People volunteered. We did not have it built into our day at the time, collaborative time, but our Principal was very good about creating release time for us and you know, with TOC (Teacher On Call) coverage, giving me a budget to ply them with cookies and coffee after school, anything to support their voluntary participation. And that managed to hook a few people. People then had a chance to understand the process before they were expected to, so it felt like a decision they made on their own. After a lot of thought we realized if we really wanted to make it effective, it’s too difficult to find something common from K to 5. (IDI2 9)

One participant believed it was important for staff to be able to figure things out as they went along, to make the PLC their own, rather than prescriptively following the district model. The following participant quote is illustrative of this concept.

You can want to work on Math, but in terms of a PLC, working on one goal area or one formative assessment or something, it was a little bit difficult with that many grades. So I said, if we want to keep the momentum going, we need to build the time into the day, and offer it to everybody. But you know, again, take it slow and let them figure out the process. It was just in baby steps. I don’t think you can swoop in and say ‘here goes’. (IDI2 9)

In addition, the above participant felt it was important for the PLC teacher leader and the principal to work together to make sure that teachers were getting the information they needed in a timely way, in order to move forward. When asked if everyone was expected to participate in the second year of implementation, during the time built into the school day for collaborative purposes, the following was the reply.

We spent a lot of time in collaborative groups at that time, not necessarily working on a PLC goal. It was a combination of the administration and myself

2 IDI2 refers to In-depth Interview 2; 9 refers to the page number of the transcript
teaching them, I guess, about what PLCs are. And not expecting them to use a Pro-D day, not expecting them to go to after school workshops, but building the time into the day to explain the process and to talk about common formative assessments and essential learning outcomes and all of those kinds of things, and get teachers talking in their grade groups about how that might impact research for the following year. So again, we followed the whole district model and the SMART goals and all of those things, but it didn’t matter to me that’s 100% what the district wanted. To me it was more about building the culture in the school first before we said yeah now do research, analyze data and use all those big scary things. So I think the second year was an important second step, but we weren’t going at the district pace I don’t think. But we could say we had every staff member beginning to participate rather than keeping it voluntary. So I think it worked for our school at the time under the leadership we had. That’s for sure. (IDI2 9-10)

**What factors hindered LCs from developing?** There were a number of factors that the participants believed could prevent or discourage learning communities from developing. These largely had to do with the personnel in place at the school and the resources made available. While the participants found that working collaboratively was helpful for them, they recognized that not all teachers found this to be so, and if these teachers made up a large portion of the staff it would be difficult to get a PLC started, much less maintain one. There were some teachers who continued to see the PLC as an extra burden rather than a lightening of the load. A focus group member explained it this way.

If it’s not working, I think you are very closed-minded, and you’re not very communicative or willing to share. And I do think that there are still some people who want to be on their own little island teaching, and they’re quite comfortable doing it that way. It is what they’re used to and they feel safe doing that and they’ve done the same thing for fifteen years and sometimes they don’t want to have to do something a different way. (FG1 28)
Another factor that participants at Sunny Brook believed could discourage the development and maintaining of their PLC was staff changes. Participants felt that staff changes had the propensity to keep the PLC from developing the depth needed to move forward and to examine important issues. The participants believed that this would be the case because time was needed each year for staff to get to know one another and to develop trust. As well, if the PLC group was expected to choose a different topic each year, there was not enough time to move below the surface of the issues with the topic chosen. This had the propensity to lead to teacher burnout. The following statement from a focus group participant describes this issue.

Every year it’s been something new. I’ve had a new topic three years, so you get something going and get new teachers, the end of the year comes, and then you have to do something all over again starting in September. It’s kind of frustrating. Like it takes more than one year to develop some consistency. If we don’t use what we’ve done this year for next year it’ll sort of be lost; what’s the point. I feel like we’re getting our feet wet and the fact is, I don’t know if I’m going to be here next year. I have no idea, so we could have a totally new teacher in here, right? And we could have a new principal who’s going to look at things a little bit differently and you know, have their own agenda, which they’re totally entitled to do, that’s part of their job, and then I could just see another year of starting all over on something else, and it’s like starting all these projects out of house, and like two thirds or three quarters finished and then just leaving them. I just find it frustrating. I feel like we’ve done a lot this year. We’ve got a lot of stuff going, but I don’t feel like we’ve actually been able to really use it yet. And it’s frustrating for me knowing that I may not be here, I don’t get to see how it all works. (FG2 21-22)

Some participants believed that the concept of using a PLC structure in the school was a fad that would pass if they waited long enough. Because they had been part of failed initiatives in the past, they were reticent to put in the effort required. They viewed the PLC more as extra work, rather than as a reflective part of practice. The following participant quote explains this point of view.
Developing Learning Communities

There are some people on the staff who feel this is another new district thing that’s going to come and go, and you know, you hear a lot of, ‘oh I remember the days of whatever program they cite, and how long did that last, so we’ll just wait till the pendulum swings the other way’. (IDI2 5)

According to participants, a prescriptive PLC would not have had the flexible structure needed to respond to the needs of the students within the school. One of the participants believed that it would be more helpful if school-developed goals, rather than ministry-mandated prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs), drove what the school did. The following quote describes her thoughts.

Then it seems more responsive to the clientele in this school, which may be different than the other end of town, where there’s no diversity or they’re upper middle class, and we’re not. So I think this could actually be a more dynamic process and more relevant than filling in a formula every year that we don’t actually follow through on. People don’t often say that our loud very often. But really, how much does that change what I do in my classroom. (IDI2 5)

**Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs?**

This section examines data that indicates whether or not improved teacher learning and/or student learning played a part in creating and maintaining a PLC. Whether or not teachers believed they were learning what they needed was examined first, followed by looking at whether or not the initiatives put in place had improved student learning.

Participants believed the opportunity to have teachers attend ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) conferences related to developing PLCs, was instrumental in their own learning. The following statement by one of the participants, explains this well.

Our principals over the years have provided training for a lot of the staff. They’ve paid for staff to go to the ASCD sessions, assessment summits, the leadership summits, you know where DuFour, Marzano, Eaker were speaking. First it started one primary, one intermediate, then a different primary and intermediate, for the first three or four summits that came up. He sent some to Victoria,
Richmond, here, there, you know, and that was very powerful. So a lot of people had their ‘aha’ moment, like this is where we’re heading. I think that was very powerful and very smart to try to get people on board. And the people that were sent out on training predominantly were people that have been here for a long time. Not people that were filling in for a leave for somebody and so those people still exist on staff. And I think we forget about that sometimes, but that’s been very powerful. (IDI1 11-12)

Participants also believed that they continued to learn from each other and very much valued this opportunity. They wished there were more opportunities for them to see one another teach, as they found this to be a very powerful learning tool for themselves. The following from a focus group participant explains this thinking:

One thing our group did last year, which I thought was quite worthwhile, for me anyways, we took each other into our rooms and walked through our days, what we do during the reading part–that we were focused on and it opened my eyes because there were three extremely different teaching styles. But the bottom line was, they (students) all learned to read. Whereas, I don’t want to confess my sins, but I was a little judgmental about one little aspect of something going on in the school and it made me realize, hey, you know what? That’s working for that person so who am I to think that this is bad or that’s worse. It was an eye-opener. And I think teachers would benefit a lot from going and viewing other teachers. I have always said that, for Pro-D days, it would be nice to go watch someone else because we always learn from somebody else. (FG1 13-14)

Participants expressed that when teachers learn from each other, teacher confidence goes up. Because of the collaborative nature of the PLC in place at the school, participants felt they were not alone; they could share both their issues and their successes to do what was best. The following comment from one of the participants explains why this is so:

For the most part teachers are feeling greater success because they are able to work collaboratively with others, because they are able to share strategies, their confidence level is on the rise, which then makes you feel more successful as a
Developing Learning Communities

teacher. You’re able to put the strategies in place and not just leave them. You go back the next week and talk about what happened, you know, did it work, did it not work, maybe I tried it the wrong way, and that’s been really, really powerful and it has built quite a bit of efficacy and success. (IDI1 19)

Participants reported that they used technology to help them with their PLC plans as well. Not only did they use technology when creating student work and student assessments, they also used the Internet to expand teaching strategies and materials to be used in the classroom. The following comment from a participant shows this.

Technology, well I do know that the groups that work on goals, they do go on-line and search for instructional strategies and whatever area they’re working on, whatever skill they’d like to improve on. I guess the use of SuccessMaker, the computer program in math, for the math group looking for math games on-line. I know the PLCs have been using some of the Ten–Frame math games that are available on-line as a result of looking for Common Formative Assessments. (IDI1 17)

There were a number of factors that the participants believed discouraged teacher learning; many related to the challenge of change. When participants felt that they were being asked to give up some of their favourite units or when they felt a lot of work was required to do things in a different way, they were not always convinced that the time and energy were worth the effort. When asked to comment on Assessment for Learning (AfL), one of the participants offered the following insight:

I think that’s a new concept and it’s been a little bit of a hard sell, because, and this is just my opinion, I don’t want to sound like I’m sitting in judgment because there’s lots that I can learn to do differently, but it’s very hard to change a practice when you have been doing something the same way for a very long time; especially if it works for you. If you as a teacher feel comfortable with it, and I think it’s been hard to change the focus off of what the teachers feel good about to what the students need. And Assessment for Learning is student-centred, not teacher-centred. (IDI2 2)
The same participant continued to comment about assessment of students and her concern regarding how well teachers really understood assessment practices. It was her belief that it was through the PLC that a depth of understanding with regard to assessment practices could be developed. She stated,

I’ve been out of school for a while now but when I graduated I knew NOTHING absolutely NOTHING compared to what I know now and I know there’s still more to learn. In terms of instructional strategies and particularly assessment, I do not think that anybody knows enough about assessment – designing assessment, interpreting assessment, results, you know, anything. And I think that really hinders the whole process if you don’t. On one level you understand Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning, but what do you do with that information, and how do you use that to plan your lessons? It is not well understood. And grading practices in intermediate and above, I think they discriminate against a lot of kids. They’re not an accurate reflection of learning and I really think professional development could help that. I don’t know, I just think it’s kids that can fit the mould; they shine and kids that don’t fit the mould look like failures. Last year I had one teacher come to me and say ‘this just feels so out of whack, do you think I have too many As?’ and I’m thinking ‘What do you mean too many?’ If they earned it, if they demonstrate a mastery of the outcome, why wouldn’t it be an A? So I think assessment and understanding assessment and marking practices really is a roadblock. (IDI2 7-8)

For participants, wanting what was best for their students drove them to continue with their PLC work. Because their PLCs were systemic, in that all PLCs were working within the same subject area, there was more articulation from grade to grade. Participants saw this as a strength as stated by the following participant.

They want to talk to the grades before and above them to see what we are doing that’s preparing kids. And I think there’s a lot more concrete evidence now with the common formative assessments to say that the items you had starred (a focus for the teacher PLC group) you’re going to make sure your kids have before you start the next outcome or start the next unit. So in math, then you would know that ‘little Duncan’ still doesn’t have place value. That’s an essential outcome; he
still can’t read numbers to a thousand. So what strategies have you tried so you can share that with the learning assistance teacher, the parents, the classroom teacher, and the teacher in the next year. (IDI1 20)

One participant also felt that the PLC had the ability to adjust instructional practices to emerging needs in a more timely and intelligent way because of its very nature. She had the following to say on this topic.

I think a PLC is the exact formula for responding to emerging needs; to be immediately responsive. Just using goals means you wait until the end of the year to assess, causing you to put something in place for the following year. I think the PLC has the potential to be that immediate adjustment or intervention if it’s necessary. But I think that requires a few things. It requires that everybody that’s within the school is already well informed about what a PLC is. You know, the district has had this initiative for a couple of years now, but it took a lot of educating first, without the most smoothly functioning working groups, because we were learning as we went. I think it would be a very dynamic process after it’s been established for a little longer. (IDI1 6-7)

Participants felt that the time spent in their PLC groups was valuable, in that developing common formative assessments meant it was less likely that individual students would be left to struggle. They were also cognizant of the fact that meeting during the day meant less face-to-face time with these students, which was of concern to some as voiced by the following participant during a focus group session:

It’s a mixed blessing. I really, really feel that my students benefit in one way. But I’ve got many students who I would be happier teaching right now (rather than having PLC meeting time), because they need more time with you. There’s just so many things now that take away our time from actually teaching that I find it quite concerning. And these are all good things, it’s just working it all into the day. (FG2 5)

**What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have?**

This section examines in turn the influence that politics, interpersonal relations, trust and
budget have on an LC. These factors were looked at from both a positive and a negative perspective, to ascertain what helped the LC to develop and what did not.

**Politics.** Participants believed that because time was given to them for their PLC initiatives during the school day, issues with the local union in regard to directing teachers’ time were avoided. When asked about the impact of the union on their PLC initiatives one participant responded as follows:

At our school it has very little impact, in fact, I know we have two local union executives at our school and they said that our school is an exception in our district because there’s only maybe a handful of schools that provide the in-school collaboration time. So as long as it’s time that is given to teachers to work during school hours, there haven’t been any problems with our local union here. I know they look at it as added teacher work, but I think more and more people are starting to look at it as reflective practice for helping their teaching skills. That it’s not meant to be pitting one teacher against the other, saying my strategy is better than yours. It’s meant to be a time where you can share. I know that we have one new teacher on staff this year and they REALLY enjoy the collaboration time because they can connect with the same grade group peers and they can learn from them when they’re just starting out. So that’s been really powerful and I would be quite disappointed actually if our union did have a problem with the way that we were doing things here because I feel it’s done very democratically. (IDI1 4)

Participants also believed that without some kind of direction it was likely that the most urgent issue present would take precedence, even though it may have been less helpful in the long run. Participants believed that this balance between autonomy and their PLC initiatives, for the most part, struck a fairly even balance. As stated by one member of the focus group,

I think for me, part of the direction that we’ve been given has been helpful because it’s forced me to really look at what we’re doing in math. And I find that if I don’t have that direction, and that sort of ‘you are doing this’, often that PLC time might just kind of drift off into planning something else that has to be done right now. (FG2 2)
Of concern to some of the participants interviewed was the lack of cohesiveness they saw between the various levels of governance: from the ministry, to the district, to the school, to the classroom, to the individual child. It was felt that the ministry-mandated goals were not necessarily what was most needed by the students, and they commented that at some schools teachers felt pressure to have their students performing at a certain level regardless of the student’s starting point and life challenges. As well, they expressed the desire to see educators from the school board office at the school more often, participating in teaching students. As one focus group participant expressed,

Thankfully, we are not yet being judged by our students’ achievement, that keeps getting talked about at the provincial level, and I think that’s why we can afford to say ‘well forget it, we’re going to ignore those expectations because we know they’ve gone from here to here’. The jump they’ve made is big, but it would be a whole other story if we were being compared to provincial expectations. And I’ve been at other schools where the principal has put a lot of pressure on. ‘You better get those grade ones reading at level sixteen or...’ you know? At the beginning of May at one school I was at previously, we saw that there was going to be a lot of them that weren’t going to be there and there was a tremendous amount of pressure on me and I had to come up with a plan. How are you going to fix these kids by June basically? And I don’t feel we have that here. (FG1 20)

Having a reluctant teacher as part of your PLC was a possible negative factor according to some participants. The rationale was, this negativity could cause the PLC to focus more on teacher needs rather than on student needs. One focus group participant stated,

So sometimes you can get a reluctant participant if your focus is not meeting the needs of that person. And that can throw a real kink into the whole works. Then you’re focusing a lot of your time trying to bring that person in and it takes away from the PLC. (So do you feel it’s worthwhile then to insist that people participate if they are feeling that way?) Yes, because I think sometimes people who are reluctant to participate, they come across as arrogant, but really they are quite insecure. So hopefully you can change that insecurity. This might open up a forum for them to hear us say ‘this isn’t working in my room’. I think it’s good
for them to be drawn out. They don’t have to pretend to be perfect anymore. As soon as you start allowing some people to not participate, then it all starts to unravel. (FG1 22)

**Interpersonal relations.** Participants generally believed it was their ability to share ideas and projects, as well as their respect for each other’s strengths and weaknesses that led them to have powerful PLC groups. As one participant described,

> We respect each other’s strengths and weaknesses. And I think we also know that we can do our little crabbing and then get on to the things that we need to. So, having those kinds of relationships, getting to know the people you’re working with, makes it smooth. And being a very giving staff, we often share ideas, and share projects. And it’s not like that everywhere. To be honest, one thing I found in the previous school I was at was that there was more competition. (FG 12-13)

According to participants, having PLC conversations not only helped teachers to feel less isolated, it also helped teachers to feel ownership of the entire student body. One participant described what it was like to be part of a PLC for the first time.

> I felt I learned more in those discussions with my colleagues than I learned in university. I challenged my thoughts on things more than any time that I had been teaching. I was exposed to professional dialogue for the first time, because you don’t have a professional dialogue in university. This was the first time where just a real dialogue was happening, and I felt like everything I learned was going to help me be a better teacher and so I felt instantly more successful. I also wanted my first three years of classes back and I wanted to do it over. Back then what did I know? I knew nothing. (IDI2 12)

Having a leader that shares their enthusiasm, vision and purpose was seen as positive in terms of interpersonal relations that support the PLC. Taking time to celebrate successes was also viewed positively. As one participant stated,

> I’d like to talk about leadership. That’s one of the strengths at our school and I don’t think I’ve touched on that much. We’ve been very fortunate to have a very strong leader who had this vision. He attended quite a few of the workshops and
had the ability to share the enthusiasm and purpose of the PLC movement. He made it seem not top-down by attending all the meetings and learning alongside everyone else. (IDI 11 15)

While the participants believed their interpersonal relationships were generally positive and conducive to the formation and maintaining of their PLCs, they also had some insights as to what interpersonal factors may have made the PLC culture more difficult. One of the participants stated that not all people are team players, while another stated that some people could be somewhat egocentric and selfish. Depending on who the other members of the PLC were, they may or may not have been able to draw these people in. As one member of the focus group put it,

I mean it’s not easy, even if you have that in the back of your mind (that the person is really insecure), those people are never easy to approach; easy to talk to. Well I will say one thing, they’re not team players. I wouldn’t classify someone like that as a team player. But I do think a setting like this (Sunny Brook), although they might be reluctant at first, will eventually bring them around. I think they will be drawn into it. But again, you’ve got to have the right people; you’ve got to have people that can be self-effacing. So I’m sure all of this depends on whom you’re dealing with. (FG1 29)

There were some participants who felt that mandatory participation in a PLC was not the best way to go. As stated by one focus group member,

The downside of having PLC time built into our day is it’s not voluntary; it’s mandatory, because the prep time is built in. So there’s good in that, which is wonderful if you’re going to do it, to have the time built in, but it is mandatory and we receive maybe more direction on what we should, or feel we should be doing than we did when this was not built into the timetable. (FG2 1)

Also related to mandatory participation was the issue of authority. One participant felt that some teachers just have real difficulty with authority. While explaining her perception of this she stated,
Developing Learning Communities

I do feel as though the few with their backs up kind of come along if the things we are working on are their ideas. But you’re still going to have the opinionated strong people who like to do their own thing. Some of them do not do well with authority; being told this is what we’re doing today. Some of them still think that that hour’s time a week should their own time to work on improving student learning in their own way. If it’s something specific that we give them to do, they will not necessarily put their best effort into it. They’ll just want to get it done, because they can’t see the value in it. (IDI1 8)

**Trust.** The trust level amongst the staff interviewed was generally high. They believed that everyone was working together at their school for the betterment of the students in attendance. They described themselves as open, friendly and welcoming. They trusted one another enough to see the power of sharing all the students amongst themselves, rather than feeling responsible for only the class to which they were assigned. The following quote from a participant shows this perception.

I feel like I have a lot more of a shared ownership (of student learning). The classroom teachers, I think, are starting to realize that the kids in their class are not just their children, they are the school’s children and everybody is working together to improve instruction for those kids. And we’ve been working really hard on the shared ownership because there have been a few who, like in any school, like to close their doors and do their own thing, and pull out their special units, whether or not they are good for kids. And I think the concept of shared ownership of the students has been quite powerful. (IDI1 6)

Participants also spoke of the necessity of teachers in a PLC trusting one another enough to be vulnerable; believing and accepting that there was no one teacher who knew everything. It was during the act of openness that true growth and empowerment took place within the PLC groups as stated by one participant.

I think overcoming reputations and overcoming their own insecurities and just being open and honest with each other, I’ve noticed quite a bit more of that. The openness and willingness to say ‘I’m really struggling with these four kids in this area. What do I do?’ I think that strength has really started to show in some of
the groups that I have been sitting in on. It’s overcoming that vulnerability. Being able to reflect on yourself and sharing that ‘I might not be so good at teaching this particular strand of whatever curriculum’. (IDI1 8)

Working as a PLC also had the potential to cause people to be distrustful of each other. Some of the Sunny Brook participants felt that if the change to using PLCs had been driven purely from above, trust would have been eroded and as a result buy-in for the PLC initiative would have been eroded as well. In addition, there were members of the staff who commented that any kind of a change was hard, required some measure of vulnerability and had the potential to be unsuccessful. The following participant quote illustrates these sentiments.

It has been difficult, not without rewards, but it’s been a difficult process to change the culture of the school. Even though many people that nod and agree that this change needed to come. Change is very difficult, and you risk a lot with your colleagues the more you share, because you risk a perceived judgment. That being said, I think there are some groups that have embraced it fully, and others that are quite resistant, and it has the potential to derail the good work that they could do if those combinations of personalities at that grade level aren’t as cohesive as other grade levels. You end up with naysayers that speak up at staff meetings, or complain, or phone the union, which is too bad. (IDI2 4-5)

**Budget.** The participants were grateful for the time that was provided during the school day. They recognized this was a cost item without which it would have been difficult to continue on with their PLC initiatives. That the trustees continued to support this initiative with funding spoke volumes to participants.

Our trustees have supported the PLC movement, which is pretty huge. We couldn’t do it without the funding that’s available through the district-based literacy grants. The trustees also allow us to have the funding that is necessary for school facilitators to be out of the school for the half-day district-based meetings, to be working on the PLC initiative. (IDI1 18)
The half-day district meetings were considered to be ‘PLC time’ for the school facilitator, as this was when she could talk to colleagues who were also trying to lead PLC initiatives in their schools.

Technology was seen as having the propensity to be both a positive and a negative factor for teachers working in their PLCs. On the one hand, it was seen as a tool that could help participants find on-line resources and communicate with others; on the other hand, technology required continuous funding to keep the system up and running and to purchase new equipment to avoid obsolescence. The following quote from a participant explains these points.

I really think it’s dependent on the individual teachers. I worked for SFU for a couple of years as a mentor in the TLITE (Teaching and Learning in an Information Technological Environment) program, which is all about integrating technology, and I think some people thought they were going to change the world with it. I just think of it as another tool in my tool kit. It’s a bit hard to keep up with some of the technology that’s out there, and you just find something that works and then it’s obsolete, or not funded or breaks down. So it’s good, but it has its limitations. (IDI2 10)

One other limiting budgetary factor indicated by participants was that maintaining a PLC in a smaller school was more difficult because a small school would have both a smaller budget and fewer people resources to draw upon. As stated by one participant,

I think smaller schools are at a disadvantage, because they don’t have specialists like we do, (physical education, music, library) to have the kids involved in a learning activity to free up teachers. So they’re definitely at a disadvantage because they don’t have the budget; they don’t have the schedule. (IDI2 8)

**How does the LC become systemic?** This section examines ways that may help the LC to become systemic. To this end, it was helpful to examine the life system in place at Sunny Brook to see if there were lessons to be learned.

Continuing to provide funding for teacher release time was a systemic way of ensuring continued teacher participation. Participants echoed this sentiment. There were a number of structures in place at the school that also helped to ensure the continued
growth of the PLCs. As stated by one participant, one of these was the focus on essential learning outcomes.

I think what we’ve been doing here, and I don’t think that our model’s the best model by any means, but I think what we’ve been doing here is providing them (teachers) with the avenue necessary to reflect on student learning, because if we just said ‘here’s your hour, look at student learning share strategies’, I don’t think it would be this powerful. We’ve been pushing them into the selection of Essential Outcomes, coming up with assessments for each Outcome. I think it’s made them take a different look at things and a look at their own practices without us having to tell them to do that. The framework has helped. (IDI1 23)

However, getting to this point required great moral courage on the part of the principal and the teacher leader, as this was a change in the school’s culture that was not welcomed with open arms. The following growing pains are worth considering when leaders are looking to systemically change the way a school does business.

You know, it was really tough. The principal and I presented at one of those facilitator meetings and we were very honest. We said we thought they (teachers) were coming for us. They were going to attack. They were in attack mode. I didn’t think we’d survive. It was pretty rough because I was giving them a page that said ‘Wednesday, October 7th and here’s your plan’, and that’s what they had to work on for the hour. And they didn’t like that. It was taking away their autonomy. But the school stood its ground and said ‘we’re giving you the time. This is what we’re working on as a staff. It’s not like your group’s working on it and nobody else is. Everybody’s working on this together. We need this; this is necessary to go with the next step, which is coming up with the Formative Assessments’. And so, lots of tears, people saying these Wednesdays are the days I don’t want to be here. It was challenging. It was hard. It made them (teachers) reflect on what they do. All of a sudden that particular unit they didn’t care for was in an ‘essential outcome’ and the unit that they DID love wasn’t an ‘essential outcome’. But they had to reflect on their practice. It was very difficult. It was very stressful for everybody. I’ve really enjoyed it, but it’s been very hard. But again, it depends on how far you go with it as a school. (IDI1 24-25)
Trying to systemically develop a new initiative such as a PLC with a large group of people requires considerable give and take, as well as trust and patience. It is not for the faint-hearted. Participants also believed that it would be helpful to lessen the frustration of feeling like you were starting over each year. Participants needed to feel that they had the time to develop the depth in one focus area before they moved onto the next focus area. As stated by one focus group participant, it was crucial for there to be people who were trained to lead PLC groups, as without them there would be no focus. “I think you need good administration and good leaders, people who are trained to run these groups properly.” (FG 30)

**FSA data for Sunny Brook elementary.** Table 4 provides provincial *Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)* data collected in February of 2008, 2009 and 2010. The data shows student acquisition of academic skills in the key areas of reading, writing and numeracy. It was included in this study because academic success and growth of students closely fits with the goals of successful PLCs. The data has been collected from grade four students who attended the school in the years listed above. Students are generally expected to participate in these government-mandated tests unless they are excused by the school principal for specific reasons, such as: cognitive ability of the student that would make the test meaningless, lack of English proficiency that would make the test meaningless at the time of writing (beginner ESL student), or extenuating circumstances. Rates of participation were generally high at Sunny Brook during the years 2008, 2009, and 2010, ranging from 93-97% for each sub-test (reading, writing, mathematics).

Although the school results are generally lower in each of the academic areas than the district results in two of the three years, it is interesting to note that they are higher than the provincial results in all three years.
Developing Learning Communities

Table 4

*Sunny Brook Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Four</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
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<td>472</td>
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<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Reading and Numeracy – Average FSA scaled score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

For Writing – Average FSA score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

*Satisfaction survey data for Sunny Brook elementary.* Table 5 consists of provincial government collected satisfaction survey data for the school years 2007/08, and 2009/10. It is not known why no data were collected in 2008/09. Not all of the data collected in the survey are presented here, as not all of the data are relevant to this study. The data shown below focuses on academic and social perceptions, and was included in this study as these data closely fit with successful PLCs.

The data were collected from grade four students who attended the school during the years listed above. Response rates were high (2007/08-93%; 2009/10-95%). Parent response numbers were too small to be of any significance. Therefore they were not included. District A and provincial average results for grade four were also included. Of interest is that almost all questions show an increase in satisfaction at the school level, whereas almost all questions show a decrease in satisfaction at the district and provincial level.

---

Table 5

*Sunny Brook Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92/92</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>91/87</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>87/78</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>78/81</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>90/90</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>86/84</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8/11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91/89</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62/65</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive responses are considered responses of “many times” or “all the time”.

**Lakeside Elementary**

This section begins with a description of Lakeside Elementary. Following the school’s description, data are presented for each question posed in this study.

Lakeside Elementary school was located in a suburban neighbourhood in the midst of the commercial center of District A. Homes that surrounded the area were single-family homes and apartment buildings, some of which were subsidized living accommodations. The school drew from many socio-economic backgrounds and there were many families considered to be needy and vulnerable at this school site. However, the school also enrolled students from families that would be considered to be middle class. The following from the *Lakeside School Plan* shows what this school is like.

Lakeside is classed as an ‘inner-city school’. Many of our families struggle to provide the basics: the school provides lunches to more than 60 students a day, has a breakfast program, has started a small ‘free’ afterschool program for our most vulnerable children. We partner with neighbouring churches, a senior home, Big Brothers/Big Sisters Organization, “Alpha” Collegiate Grade 12 ISP students, Child and Youth Mental Health, and the district Aboriginal Learning Centre to increase the number of positive relationships our children have with caring adults. (Lakeside School Plan, 2009-2010)

The school was located in a one-storey building consisting of a number of long hallways connected together, with classrooms off of each hallway. The school was well maintained and had a modern playground for student use. The school had a population of 340 students in 15 divisions (classes). Lakeside also had a StrongStart program (a parent participation drop in center for pre-school aged children, paid for by the provincial government). Staff at the school consisted of: one principal, 18 regular classroom teachers (three job shares), one learning support teacher, one physical education teacher, one teacher-librarian, one counsellor, one technology teacher and seven TAs.

PLCs took the form of teacher teams who worked together on common goals. These teams were made up of grade-alike teachers. (e.g., teachers of grade four made up one team). The PLC teacher leader at the school helped groups plan for topics of discussion at each PLC meeting. The team then decided essential student outcomes for this focus area. Weekly meetings were held to assess progress and to make further plans. At the end of the school year, the team assessed the extent to which its goals were achieved. The principal at the school spent extra time teaching to provide release time above and beyond what the district was able to provide.

The members of the staff participating in PLCs at the school were given the opportunity to fill out the staff survey (Appendix G) two weeks prior to any interviews being conducted. The PLC teacher leader at the school made the surveys available to the staff. These data were collected from the school one week prior to conducting the interviews. Ten of the fifteen participating teachers completed the survey, which represented a 67% return rate. Data were examined for any inconsistencies or trends, so they could be explored during the interview and focus group portions of the data gathering.
Survey data collected at Lakeside elementary. Table 6 shows the data collected from the Lakeside elementary survey. Any ‘not applicable’ responses or questions not answered have been included together in the fourth column, labeled NA (not applicable). For most of the questions asked, the respondents were in agreement with the statement (either strongly agree or agree).

The first statement that does not follow this agreement pattern is statement 4 (Union policies) in the BC Context dimension. For this statement, there were four people who either thought the statement was not applicable or they did not answer it. There were also three respondents who disagreed with the statement (either disagreed or strongly disagreed). Only two of the people surveyed agreed with the statement. On a four-point scale, the overall mean for this dimension (the BC Context) was 3.27 with the mean ranging from a low of 2.20 for statement 4 (union policies) to a high of 3.78 for statement 1 (a strong PLC is at the school).

In the Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension the overall mean was 3.37, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.22 for statements 12 (staff accessibility to information), 16 (decision-making practices) and 17 (shared responsibility and accountability) to a high of 3.78 for statement 13 (proactive principal). While in the Shared Values and Vision dimension the overall mean was 3.21, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.22 for statement 23 (creating high expectations) to a high of 3.56 for statement 20 (decision-making alignment). Meanwhile, in the Collective Learning and Application dimension, the overall mean was 3.60, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.44 for statement 30 (collaborative analysis of data) to a high of 3.67 for statements 26 (addressing diverse student needs) and 27 (open dialogue). The collective learning and application dimension had the highest mean of the eight measured at Lakeside.

In the Shared Personal Practice section there were two statements where the pattern of agreement was not evident, statements 32 (observing peers) and 33 (providing feedback to peers). For statement 32, four people disagreed with the statement, and one person did not think the statement was applicable, or did not answer the question. Four people surveyed agreed with the statement. For question 33, two respondents disagreed with the statement and two respondents thought the statement was either not applicable or they did not answer the question. Five people agreed with the statement.
## Table 6

*Lakeside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>S.A.</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>N.A.</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>St.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The BC Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community) at this school.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our PLC positively affects student learning.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our PLC positively affects adult learning.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. This school is a desirable place to work in our district.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parents see this school as a good place.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The community speaks favourably about this school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This school handles challenges in a healthy way.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - BC Context dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values and Vision</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Decisions are made in alignment with school’s values and vision.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared Values and Vision dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Lakeside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Learning and Application</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills,</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - Collective Learning and Application dimension</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Personal Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall student</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average - Shared Personal Practice dimension</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average – Supportive Conditions Relationships dimension</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

*Lakeside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>S.A.</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>D.</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.</td>
<td>8 1 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.</td>
<td>7 2 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.</td>
<td>3 6 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.</td>
<td>3 6 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Supportive Conditions Structures dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>S.A.</td>
<td>A.</td>
<td>D.</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.</td>
<td>4 5 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.</td>
<td>0 7 2 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.</td>
<td>1 8 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.</td>
<td>1 8 0 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.</td>
<td>1 7 1 0 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Statements dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. S.A. = Strongly Agree; A. = Agree; D. = Disagree; S.D. = Strongly Disagree; N.A. = No Answer or Not Applicable; M. = Mean; St.D. = Standard Deviation*

In the *Shared Personal Practice* dimension the overall mean was 3.10, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.50 for statement 32 (observing peers) to a high of 3.44 for statement 35 (sharing results of practice).

For the *Supportive Conditions - Relationships* dimension, the overall mean was 3.42 with the mean ranging from a low of 3.22 for statement 38 (culture of trust and respect) to a high of 3.56 for statement 37 (caring relationships). While in the *Supportive Conditions - Structures* dimension, the overall mean was 3.56 with the mean ranging from a low of 3.33 for statements 44 (fiscal resources) and 45 (technology availability) to a high of 3.89 for statement 42 (time provided). Lastly, in the *Statements* dimension, the overall mean was 3.00 with the mean ranging from a low of 2.78 for statement 47 (clean, inviting facility) to a high of 3.11 for statements 48 (proximity of peers) and 49 (communication). The statements dimension had the lowest mean of the eight measured for Lakeside.
**Interview data.** The focus group was conducted in the school’s library during a lunch break. Five teachers representing various grade levels participated in the focus group interview. The library offered a relatively quiet meeting place. Prior to the focus group interview with the schoolteachers, the principal of the school shared insights about the impact of the PLC on the school.

Two in-depth interviews were conducted in the staffroom, a relatively quiet location. One participant had been at Lakeside for eleven of her thirteen teaching years and the other had been at Lakeside for two of her twenty-four teaching years. Both participants were currently teaching children in the primary years. The teacher who had been at Lakeside for eleven years was able to offer insights about the long-term development of the Lakeside community and the experienced teacher, who had recently joined the Lakeside staff, was able to comment on the differences and similarities between her former and current school. The teacher of twenty-four years also had the experience of teaching in a district other than District A for her first four years.

**What factors helped LCs to develop?** Because this was a school with children who were needier, participants felt that there was a greater need for the teachers to work together, both to support each other and to tap into each other’s expertise when trying to help students within their classes. Participants at this school also believed that, because all teachers enrolling a class were expected to participate in a grade level PLC, the PLC continued to help staff more easily accomplish the goals they set for themselves. Connected to this, the following illustrates from the principal’s point of view, why a PLC is valued at Lakeside.

A PLC can do so many things, and is able to accomplish so many goals. To me it is vital, and I can’t see us ever not doing this anymore. The PLC helps people work together using data and sometimes that is uncomfortable, but it is what we need to do. It’s a little bit nicer to give data and feedback to a group so they are able to work through some of those things. (P 1-2)

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5 P refers to Principal; and 1+2 refers to the page numbers of the transcript
Participants also believed the structure in place in the school, and in the district, helped to provide the time and expertise needed to help the PLC exist and continue to grow. The principal and the PLC teacher leader worked closely together, and according to participants, this was important to the success within the school. The following quote from a participant explains this perspective.

The principal and the PLC leader working very closely together to help us move forward is very important to the success of our PLC here at Lakeside. They’re very much on the same page. And I appreciate that they can see how to get the information that’s important rather than just coming back and saying the district says ‘thou shalt’. You know, we’ve been in the business long enough to know that decisions that come from the top down don’t always work on the front line and you have to kind of figure out how to address it. Is this a thing we can do? Maybe if we all did this part that might accommodate it. That’s another thing they’re very good about. (IDI2 4)

In addition to the support noted in the school, there was recognition that without the support provided by the district, beginning and maintaining a PLC, although not impossible, would be that much more difficult. The following rationale from a principal participant expresses this well.

Our director of instruction is full speed ahead, four to the floor. She gets things done. Which is great. Her work and her work with her helping teachers has been a really important piece. It gives our PLC teacher leader that Wednesday morning to be able to go and have that ongoing training and ongoing connection with curriculum centre, so that’s been huge. All of their helping teachers are trained, so if I need someone to come and help us start banging out learning targets, which is what we’re working on right now, then I can call up and say, ‘hey, can someone come down and give us a little bit of a presentation or share with us at a workshop and help us get started on making learning targets for reading comprehension’. (P 5-6)

District A’s decision to have teachers as the leaders of their school-based PLCs worked very much in their favour. Participants saw this venture as more empowering for
them and, as a result, they were more likely to participate. The following from the principal shows agreement with this point of view.

So to have it more teacher-driven and not to have me as the PLC leader or PLC facilitator is probably the best thing that could have happened. Even teachers that were, you know, kind of reluctant in the beginning, who thought, ‘Oh, this is another stupid thing’, they watched carefully, and I had one teacher say ‘I think they should just take this money and put it into learning services, our district is ridiculous’, and then she kind of said her piece. And then she just watched for the first year, and she participated, but not wholeheartedly. By the end of the year she was whole-heartedly participating, and she was one of the teachers that had really invested in it, because she saw the difference for her kids, and it wasn’t me trying to make her see. (P 6)

**What factors hindered LCs from developing?** The participants felt quite strongly that it was important to have at least one other colleague teaching at the same grade. They felt that it would be much more difficult to begin and maintain a PLC without this support. The following quote from a focus group participant sheds light on this.

On a different note, I’ve worked in two rural schools where there’s one grade or less there, or one class or less than one class for each grade, and both schools have tried to facilitate or have PLCs, and it’s been very difficult, just because of the low number of staff. And you can’t collaborate to the same extent when you’re not teaching the same things in the same level, so that’s another obstacle to overcome, if you’re in a smaller school, so PLCs do better if there’s at least two people with the same grade in that school or the same subject if it’s higher grades. (FG 14)

Another factor that participants thought would adversely affect their PLC was the combined or split class. Depending on how the PLC groups were organized within the school, it was possible that one teacher should attend two PLC groups (one for each grade enrolled in his/her class). This could possibly overwhelm the affected teacher, especially
if sound methods of communication were not evident. The following remarks spoken by a participant during the focus group explains this point of view.

Trying to be part of two PLCs is really difficult, especially with little, younger kids. It’s just time constraints. You can’t be in two places at once, and sometimes you might like to really have discussion around both grades about certain things. So what do you do? How do you decide? So I mean, we’re really lucky that we all have open communication and I can pop into my other grade’s PLC or after school or at lunch time and just say ‘What did you guys talk about’ or they’re good at just putting stuff in my mailbox, or they give you a copy. But it’s hard to be away from the discussion and then implement it in the classroom, and then it’s hard to implement two PLCs worth of data into one classroom. Splits are definitely a hardship when it comes to PLCs. (FG 8)

Forcing people to participate in a PLC was also seen as something that discouraged the development and maintaining of the PLC. Participants were cognizant of the fact that, although you can require people to belong, you cannot force enthusiasm and buy-in. They need to be authentic. The following participant quote explains the importance of authenticity.

It makes it very difficult when you’re so into it and see the benefits of it and have really taken this and then you have some other pockets that just don’t see the value in it and so they don’t give their heart and soul, and it’s difficult…and that frustrates me. I know that frustrates some of the other people who are on board. You’re either in or you’re not. You know, it’s either an all or nothing type of attitude that’s out there and I think people are just too burdened with everything, you know. It just seems like one more thing to be added on the plate. And if you really look at a PLC, it’s not. I don’t feel it is. I feel it’s very workable, it’s very doable, and for me, it’s just been something that is win-win. (IDI1 5-6)

Participants did note that colleagues who were hesitant at first could be persuaded to join in if they could see the benefits for their students and themselves. In regard to this, a participant said,
I think the walls were, just were, you know. You chink at them brick by brick by brick, and they started falling, and I mean I think once you have that initial “aha” moment, then it’s easier to break them down. (IDI 6)

**Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs?**

This section examines data that indicate whether or not improved teacher learning and/or student learning played a part in creating and maintaining a PLC. The participants at Lakeside felt they were much more focused on Assessment for Learning (AfL) when participating in a PLC and this in turn helped them to be stronger teachers, both in terms of being more reflective and learning from each other. The following explains this point,

I find it helpful planning together. When you look at the data and the weakness, and then how are we going to address this, and having four heads coming up with ideas is so much more effective. I get a lot from that discussion time. (FG 4)

Participants began the process of forming PLC groups as a way to improve student learning at Lakeside. Now into their third year of implementation, participants were beginning to see more clearly where they wanted their students to go educationally. In terms of AfL they saw a positive impact on the kind of student learning that was taking place. The following thoughts from a focus group participant explain this point of view.

I think that when we started PLCs we were so focused on wanting students to improve, that we kept on looking at that end goal for the first, I would say, two years; even up to last year. And then this year I think we’re all starting to realize that we need to back it up a bit. In order to get the kids to where we want them to go, we need to really step back, look at that initial data, look at what we’re really teaching, look at the learning outcomes and how they’re connected to the data starting from the very beginning, and I think that is making us a lot more clear about where we’re heading because we can spout an ILO (Intended Learning Outcome) at the beginning of a lesson but the kids have no idea what that means, but if they have a clear ‘I need to be able to do THIS’ I think they’re more invested, at least some of them. So using assessment for learning, and targets, we’re all getting good at what does it look like. (FG 3-4)
As well, participants at Lakeside saw that there was a difference between planning together and working together in a PLC, with the latter requiring discussion, and teacher leading, following, and learning happening for the benefit of student learning. As a participant stated,

At my other (former) school, one of the things they started doing was freeing up a certain amount of TOC (Teacher on Call) funding, and each class got a certain portion, and you decided in your grade group what day you wanted to use that, and everybody could meet on that day. So they did a team planning kind of thing. A PLC is more directed; it’s more prescriptive. This is what we’re working on, this is what we want to do. (Do you think that’s better, to be more prescriptive?)

It’s difficult to say yes to that because I really feel that (our PLC leader) has done just such a wonderful job, and I don’t, I’m not saying that because you’re recording me, but I, I really believe that. But I know at my other school, it was great to sit down and do planning together. Here, we don’t plan together. We’re talking assessment and learning targets and learning outcomes. We don’t necessarily plan. (IDI2 10)

In summing up with the above participant, I asked, “So in listening to you, your old school was more about planning in a curricular area. This school is more about Assessment for Learning, with the focus on helping to improve student learning and helping teachers to pinpoint where they need to go next to improve student learning. And in your opinion this is a more effective way to run things, rather than just using the time for planning. Is this correct?” The participant replied,

Yes, even though I really liked having that time, because of the nature of the kids that we get, when the next person gets them they know that there’s certain things that have been addressed and have been met, or have been addressed and are still being worked on, so this way is better. We have common main targets or learning outcomes – the essential learning outcomes that we address at each grade level. (IDI2 10)

Furthermore, new teachers were given the opportunity to work with their experienced colleagues in a very collective way that helped to take away some of the
pressure regarding whether or not the right decision was being made. Participants had strengths in different areas and this gave them the chance to benefit from their colleagues’ expertise and for their colleagues to benefit from their expertise. As a principal stated,

For new teachers it’s an incredible experience. You get to meet with your grade group team on a regular basis to share ideas, share strategies, share your children, do some platooning. For teachers who are borderline, who aren’t less than satisfactory, but aren’t as great as you might hope they would be, it’s been, it’s proven to be a good thing for them as well. So even without the intended purposes of the PLC, we’ve seen a lot of fruits of the labour. (P 1-2)

However, the participants at Lakeside acknowledged that to create and maintain a PLC required a lot of work. Because of this, it was felt that teachers in “easy” schools might find it more difficult to put forth the effort to create and maintain a PLC. Also, in schools with little staff turnover, there was little understanding of what school was like outside their own building and therefore little understanding of why creating a PLC might be helpful in improving learning for both teachers and students.

Participants at Lakeview felt responsible for the learning of all students in the school and not just the students registered in their classes. They believed what they did for kids really mattered, and as a result, students had many teachers looking out for their well-being. As one participant explained, “I love it here, we have a very supportive administrator who knows that what we do for kids really matters” (IDI1 4). In addition, teachers at Lakeview felt the creation and collaborative nature of their PLC had changed their teaching in a way that was beneficial for their students. A participant had the following insight,

I’ve found with the PLC we’re all working together, we all work on the same page and although we all do things a little differently, because that’s what we do as teachers, you work the best way that you can. But I find when we’re meeting a common goal there’s more sharing of techniques, of strategies, of all those things. And you can bring things to the table, if you’re having trouble with one student, for example, if they’re having trouble with any of things you’re working on, just to get feedback from other teachers, and to take that back to your students. I think
it works beautifully. I think the kids get a lot out of it, they may not know it, but it’s changed my teaching. It has definitely changed my teaching…to refocus on how I can individualize programs, but at the same time meet the needs of all those kids. (IDI1 4)

All participants felt that focusing on the growth their students made, rather than comparing their summative academic results to the summative academic results of students in more affluent neighbourhoods, was helpful and positive. In this way, Assessment for Learning (AfL) was the focus as opposed to looking at learning from a deficit perspective. A participant had the following thoughts about this.

So the data depends on the kids and where they come to you. You know, I’m doing my very best, but you know, my Twos are here, but they came to me with nothing. And now they’re excited about reading simple stories, or that they can read or they can recognize print in the classroom. So it’s all very exciting, but you know the graph compared to other people it’s like wooo are you meeting their needs? Well, yeah, I am, but I’m meeting them where they are. (IDI2 5)

What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have?
This section examines the influence politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have on an LC from both positive and negative perspectives.

Politics. Participants were very happy with the way their PLC teacher leader and administrator worked together to make things smooth and clear for the PLC groups. The guiding questions given to each PLC group before each session provided clarity of purpose, but it was not felt this was prescriptive. The following participant quote illustrates these thoughts.

‘Do we have to do that?’ everybody’s kind of panicky, but when you talk face to face, and ‘oh no, we just need to do this part, and this is why we’re doing it’, and then everybody just goes ‘oh, okay’. It’s the communication. Usually we’re told ahead of time what’s coming up and that’s through an email or a staff meeting, you know, like we’re given direction for our PLC. ‘This is what we’d like you to work on if you can’. But it’s not set in stone, I mean there are still people that think ‘we absolutely have to do this’ but most of us know if that’s not fitting with
what our priority is, that we can kind of put it to the side. There are jobs that have to be done, and our PLC leader is pretty clear on what those are and, you know, she’s really good about giving you reminders of when those days are coming up and giving you extra paperwork when you lose yours. (IDI2 3)

Participants also chose to use part of their staff meeting time and professional development time to continue the work of their PLC. They did not consider themselves to be a staff that had hard political leanings. However, they did appreciate that the district was really on board with the PLC initiatives in schools and that they were willing to support this with release time for the PLC teacher leader. They expressed the desire that the teachers’ union local become more involved in providing for release time for teachers to continue their PLC work. As the following participant stated,

I would like to see our union involved more in giving us that time. We’re very lucky. We are extremely lucky here that the principal has, you know, fit it into our schedules. To have it during school time and it takes a lot of work to do that. (IDI1 3)

Having the right people in place to lead a PLC, and providing these people with the training necessary to successfully lead the PLC process, was viewed as being very important. As stated by one participant,

(Name of PLC leader) is great first of all. Yeah, so again, it’s great people and it’s kind of the right people in the right spots…I think one of the things that’s helped also extend the vision of PLCs is to have people trained. (P 4)

It was also articulated by participants that if there were a strong union element at a school, it would be difficult to have a PLC, as a PLC requires all in the building to work together, as a team, and the union versus management stance is not conducive to this. In fact, “There are other buildings where it’s not going well.” (P 4)

One note of caution mentioned by one of the participants was that in schools where there has been very little teacher movement, teachers might find it very difficult to entertain the thought of doing things in a way different to what they are accustomed to. In these kinds of schools the initiation of a PLC may need to wait until there is a
substantial change in the staff. As a participant who previously worked in such a situation noted,

They’ve become a very tight unit themselves. They’re unique in that they’ve all worked together from when they first started, and they’ve all gone through their life changes together. And they’ve all found what works and they do meet within grade groups and whatever on their own and kind of plan things together. But as far as doing something that an administrator will come in and say this is what we’re going to do differently, PLC or whatever. That may or may not happen. You know I had a lot of respect for my colleagues but I often wondered how they would manage if they had to move. Being a teacher who has moved often, it really helps you see things a totally different way. Some changes are good, so you don’t get set in your ways. (IDI2 15-16)

**Interpersonal relations.** Almost all participants commented on the importance of good communication skills, especially when discussing an idea or when examining differing sides of something contentious. This communication needed to be extended to all levels of the school from administration to teaching staff to TA staff. They called themselves team-oriented and cohesive. The following quote from a participant explains what this means.

I see that we work well as a team. I think you have to in a school like this. You have to know what’s going on in different grades and different areas of the school because it all filters down to you somehow, someway or another, and I think the principal is very good at trying to keep us all focused on what we should be focusing on you know, rather than the petty stuff. So I think that’s our biggest strength, that we’re very team-oriented, and yeah, you have your little pockets of people, it’s just human nature, but for the most part, we’re pretty cohesive as a staff. (IDI1 3)

Participants reported that they had become very adept at using technology to communicate with one another. This helped them to be more immediately responsive to their colleagues while not requiring additional face-to-face meeting time. The following participant’s words express this well.
Communication’s really, really important, and they do that very well here. One of the things you have to become here is someone who checks your email. And if you come early in the morning like me at seven thirty, you need to make sure that you check at least twice before recess, even though you’re teaching, otherwise you will have missed important things. Not your personal email so much as the Lakeside staff one. (IDI2 13)

To get extra help for their students, Lakeside participants encouraged people from the community to come in and volunteer their time. They also encouraged beginner TAs to do their practicums at Lakeside. This had the effect of building positive relations with the wider community and helped students make connections with members of their community. The following participant described this as follows,

We have practicum TAs coming and going all the time. We have people from the community, volunteers that come in and just help wherever they can. So I’ve had an extra pair of hands or someone to sit one-on-one with somebody. (IDI2 6)

People were purchasing homes and investing in a permanent way in the neighbourhood. Participants saw this as a stabilizing factor for the school. The following quote from the principal indicates the impact of home purchase on the community.

Our neighbourhood has all the provincial housing so we have kids who have lots of challenges at home, or families in crisis. But our neighbourhood’s changing too. We’re having families starting to buy up some of the homes that are a little bit run down, and take them over and fix them up, so it’s kind of nice. Our kindergarten class last year, the majority of the families were home owners so people that are committed to the neighbourhood and community, which is great. (P 1)

Participants talked about the need for people working in a PLC to have open and shared communication. They also indicated that they knew that not all people were ready to be that way in practice. This was partly due to the fact that teaching has traditionally been a very private profession whereas a PLC is not private. A PLC, according to participants, encourages teachers to work in community. According to participants, for
Developing Learning Communities

teachers not willing to become less private, participating in a PLC could be a very
difficult thing to do. The following quote from the principal explains this perspective.

You know it’s really hard work. It’s really hard work and it’s change. And
teachers are very private people, and are sometimes reluctant to let others come
and play, or share ideas, or take ideas. And I think for teachers it’s hard because
it’s the de-privatization of their practice. It’s exposing areas that they’re maybe
not that great at and maybe they’re not ready to ask for help there yet. Some
people work better with others than some and it is a time commitment for sure. (P
2)

One participant had a similar experience. She did, however, notice that the person
who at one time resist ed the PLC in time began to enjoy participating. She was not sure
whether this was simply because this person needed to see it working with others first or
whether there was a disconnect due to differing personalities. The following quote from
this participant expresses this point.

I know when I first started doing PLC when I was teaching another grade it was
very difficult because one of the ladies I taught with was just not into it. She had
been teaching for a long time and was very stuck in her ways. But now there is a
lot of cohesiveness in that grade, and there’s a lot of teamwork going on, and you
can see it. So I really don’t know what it is. It could be personalities, it could be
just kinda going ‘okay I’ll give it a try’ you know. Everyone else is doing it.
(IDI1 6)

Trust. Participants valued the trust that was placed in them by the community.
They saw that in tangible ways with both their students and with the parents of their
students and it was one of the reasons that so many of the participants continued to work
there. The following explanation from a focus group participant is helpful at explaining
these thoughts.

We’re here because we want to be here and we love it. I think the parent group,
the clientele (not that they’re more needy than others), put a lot of faith in the
teachers here, and the administration, and the TAs. Just the whole family thing,
and I think as a teacher, I don’t know of anything that you could be more fulfilled
Developing Learning Communities

with than to have the feeling that the kids want you there, and they appreciate what you do, and if you’re away for a day or two, they’re all panicky, and they hope everything’s okay. It’s really neat to see. There’s a family atmosphere. I’ve never been to a school, other than Lakeside, where the students respect the adults in the building so much. They have a lot of peer problems and issues and family life issues, but they respect and worship every adult in this building. (FG 10)

The participants believed it was the PLC and its structure that allowed a deepening of the positive trust the staff had built with each other. As one participant put it, “Working together gives each teacher the opportunity to draw on the strengths of their colleagues and not have to do it all on their own.” (IDI1 5) Further, no teacher was expected to know it all and yet as she described it, as being human, we are all looking for validation and praise. The following comment from a focus group participant sheds light on this.

We’re not perfect. I always thought when I started teaching I’d know much more when experienced, and thirty years later, we are just as vulnerable as the students we teach and we’re just the same as they are in terms of needing some praise now and then. And we never admit that we are actually seeking praise, but I think indirectly we are. It’s kind of a good feeling. Kids need it, we need it, and it’s a team. (FG 2)

Because the PLC is a relatively new endeavor for most teaching staffs, it requires a degree of vulnerability from its members. According to participants, without existing positive trust among staff members, beginning or maintaining a PLC is not likely to happen. The following quote from a focus group participant explains why this is so.

I think a lot of people find it really a lot. It’s new ground for them to be able to be vulnerable with their associate teachers and say ‘I don’t know. I can’t do this with these kids’, or whatever, and you find out that everyone’s having the same problem, so you take it from there. (FG 13)
Also necessary from those who are choosing to participate in a PLC is the notion that the teachers will use the PLC to help in positive ways. Participants indicated that if there were people who used the sessions in a negative way, that would somehow negate the trust that the rest of the members were placing in the group to help develop and maintain the PLC. The following answer to the question “Does maintaining a PLC require certain things of its members?” is helpful in explaining this point.

Yes, you have to be committed to the time, to not turn it into a gripe session, or a gossip session, or whatever. You have to be committed to come in with an agenda and follow through with that agenda and we have found it’s easy enough to get off topic, and that’s fine and everything, but you need to be able to pull yourself back and say, okay, why are we here and what are we doing? And it’s kind of nice that we’ve been given the guidelines to follow, and yes, you come up with norms and how you’re going to follow through with things, but it’s nice to have a guiding question on what we’re working on this week. (IDI1 6)

Without the agreement of the group to use the agenda to guide activities and discussion in the group, participants noted that it would be easy for trust to be eroded and for time to be used in ways that do not benefit student learning.

**Budget.** In District A, principals have a fair degree of control over their budgets. At Lakeside the principal had been able to use some of this money to help further the school’s PLC goals. The principal explained how this worked.

When we do our budgeting I make sure that there’s staffing to cover grade groups. Every second week we meet together for an hour, which is basically hiring additional staff to do that. We actually have quite a bit of control over our budget, which is nice, because then it lets schools make choices. Or if there’s something that the district is wanting to see happen, it allows us to know our school and find out how we can make it happen in our school, ’cause every school’s so very different. (P 3)

In addition to providing the money for additional staffing to release teachers during the day, Lakeside had intentionally sent teachers to PLC conferences, using monies given to them by the district for enrolling international students. By attending
PLC conferences, participants were helped to understand the power of the PLC, thus helping participants to have that “aha” moment before the implementation of a PLC in their school. The following quote from the principal explains this reasoning.

In our first year of implementation, I took a team of six to Victoria, to a Solution Tree workshop that was all on PLCs. So that gave me somebody in every grade group who had the big picture, and who had some skills. The second year I took another six at the different grade groups. So there are people that have had a chance to think about it and hear some of the best people talk about it. (P 4)

The following words from the principal illustrate how important those two opportunities were to the success of the PLC implementation at Lakeside.

I don’t think it would have gone along as well without that opportunity. I’m not the best communicator all the time, so if there was a way that I could share what I knew with teachers it was good. And it was a really great experience. The conference was wonderful, but also just going away and spending time with each other as educators, and talking with each other around the table, and going shopping and having a few laughs, hitting the book store, you know, those are all really great things. (P 4)

Having time together, which comes down to a budget item, was crucial to the success of the PLC at Lakeside, according to participants. This was echoed at a focus group discussion when one of the participants stated,

Because it’s ongoing we do have that time. I think it keeps it together. I think that the time is crucial because teachers get so busy. If it’s not in your schedule, it’s really easy to push off, even though you want to do it, and you know it’s good because you’ve got too many commitments. This way it shows that the administration has a vested interest in this; enough to provide the funding to actually meet during class time, which I imagine is a significant chunk of money. (FG 7)

It is clear that, even though participants saw the PLC as desirable, they also knew that their ability to maintain it would be very difficult, if not impossible, if not given the
release time. Further to this, participants expressed the desire to have their TAs as part of their PLCs. It was felt that as TAs did a lot of the one-on-one work with students, it would be helpful to have them there at the PLC meetings. The following from a participant reflects this.

I think the TAs need to be more involved in the PLC because they’re vital to the school. They see some of the kids more, for in-depth instruction, than some of the teachers do… plus, what we may think of as important and we want to focus on for comprehension, maybe they don’t know. Maybe they don’t understand what comprehension means and the strategies that we need to use, so they do what they think is right, and it may not be. (So a disconnect maybe) Exactly, and you know, you’re always so busy, you don’t always have time to stop and chat about it. So I think definitely, they need to be included in the PLC. (IDI1 9)

Participants were very grateful for the time their principal scheduled for them during the week. Even so, participants felt that if it were possible to meet more often and to have more time, they would be able to do an even better job of meeting student needs through their PLC. One participant explained this by stating,

But the time factor, it just seems like there’s not enough…I would like to see, I don’t know how you’d work it, but I would like to see it twice a week. An hour twice a week, or even a big chunk of time one day, and then a smaller chunk the next day, because it just seems when you come the next day you have to review what you’ve done the week before and sometimes that takes too much time in itself. (IDI1 10)

How does the LC become systemic? This next section provides data that indicate whether or not there are ways that may help the LC to become systemic. To this end, examining the life system that was in place at Lakeside, to see if there were lessons to be learned, is helpful. According to participants, having teachers as the leaders of instruction and assessment was seen as a key part of the system’s strength. The following words from the principal explain why this is so.

Well I think that teachers have to see how it actually helps kids. We all get a little skeptical, because there’re so many things that come in and out. Okay, well this
Developing Learning Communities

is a new thing, or do this and it’s going to work, and we’re all looking for a magic wand, even though you know there’s not one…so to have it more teacher driven and not to have the principal as the PLC leader or PLC facilitator is probably the best thing that could have happened. (P 6)

Time was seen as a key part of the success of a PLC; time that was part of the school day so that there was no personal competing interests for that time. As well, teachers needed to be willing to work with others and not see this as an infringement upon their autonomy. As a participant, explained, “We are in each other’s pockets. Some people like to be in their own little world. And if you like to be an island unto yourself, this is not the place to be.” (FG 11)

Participants saw their collaborative work as a plus for both themselves and for their students. This was also a key reason why participants in this school were willing to continue with their PLC endeavors. The following participant stated,

Well, we all do a wonderful job with what we’re doing; with our way of doing things. It helps you look more closely at the things you know, and the things you do and helps them line up better with finding that common ground with everybody. You may have a different approach to things, but everybody is working on the same thing. And so it helps you be a reflective practitioner. You are, that’s the nature of teaching, but it takes some of the pressure off you, in that you have a collective expectation. So when you’re meeting with a parent, or you’re explaining to someone ‘this is what we’re working on, this is our main target or goal for this term’, you’re very solid in that. (ID12 8)

According to participants, cohesiveness and having the time to go over common assessments were what drove the group at Lakeside. As well, having people wanting to work with data helped the staff to depersonalize teaching and instead, focus on what learning needed to take place in order to move students forward. Participants worked together to choose assessment tools and then worked together during their PLC time to analyze that data and then make plans for what to do next to help student learning progress. As one participant stated,
Developing Learning Communities

We generally use our school goal to initiate the data and then the last few years we’ve been doing reading and writing formative assessments throughout the year as checkups and then summative at the end. And all of the reading and writing data that we’ve been compiling throughout the school is the basis of our PLC questions and the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) goals. And what really drives our groups, I would say, is having the time to go over each of our assessments together…I would say in the past, before PLCs, we still did the reading and writing assessments, but we didn’t have the time to sit there and collaborate and talk about it. And now that we’re actually coming together as a group instead of just working in isolation with our own little data we can actually compare notes. (FG 2)

Having some degree of ability to impact staffing also played a role in creating and maintaining an LC. According to participants, if incoming teachers know the current staff works in PLCs, then they are more likely not to choose a school with a PLC if that does not fit in with their expectations of the job. The following quote from the principal explains this thinking.

See we’re used to interviewing (for people who wish to apply for a job at a school). And that has been a real big burner for us in schools. Because you know, there’s a suitability factor, it’s the kind of thing you can’t put a number on. We would interview and we would also consider suitability for the school and needs as well as seniority. (P 13)

In relation to the above concerns, participants also felt that although many “job shares” work well together and add to the life of the school, there are instances in some schools where there are too many job shares unwilling to participate in the activities that go above and beyond the regular classroom duties. The following quote from a participant illustrates this point.

At my old school, they had set up their system so that a lot of them job shared and you know it really worked for them. And so to come in and change that was very difficult. You know, when you’ve got families and other responsibilities out of school. I did learn as a professional at this school that you are more than your job,
and you do have a life outside school, and you need to do that, but what the other school does is like really cut that line. (IDI2 12)

What the participant was expressing was the observation that at her old school very few teachers participated in any activities outside of their regular classroom duties. She believed that this was cutting a fine line between fully doing the job and minimally doing the job required.

**FSA data for Lakeside elementary.** Table 7 provides provincial government FSA data collected in February of 2008, 2009 and 2010. The data were collected from grade 4 students who attended the school during the years listed above. Rates of participation were generally high, ranging from 89-98% for each sub-test (reading, writing, mathematics), in each year.

It should be noted that the students at Lakeside were among the most vulnerable in the district. Although the school results were generally lower in each of the academic areas than the district results, it was noteworthy that they were generally higher than the provincial results in all three years.

Table 7

*Lakeside Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Four</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Reading and Numeracy – Average FSA scaled score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.
For Writing – Average FSA score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

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Retrieved October 16, 2010
Satisfaction survey data for Lakeside elementary. Table 8 provides provincial government collected satisfaction survey data for the school years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. The data were collected from grade four students who attended the school in the years listed above. Response rates were high (2007/08: 90%; 2008/09: 91%; 2009/10: 84%). Parent response numbers were too small to be of any significance and therefore, were not included. Of interest is the fact that although students at Lakeside were generally less satisfied with their perceived progress than the district and province as a whole, they were more satisfied than the district and province with their perceived progress in math. Students at Lakeside also showed an increase in satisfaction with safety while the district and provincial numbers remained static.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>DistrictA/Province</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>DistrictA/Province</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>DistrictA/Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>92/92</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>92/91</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>92/90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>91/87</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>92/87</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>90/81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>87/78</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>86/78</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>81/67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78/81</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79/80</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>68/73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>90/90</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>91/89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>89/88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>86/84</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>85/84</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84/81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8/11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8/11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>91/89</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92/89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>89/87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>62/65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62/63</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60/58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive responses are considered responses of “many times” or “all the time”
Windy Pines Elementary

Windy Pines Elementary school was located in the countryside of District A. Homes surrounding the school were single-family homes and farms: however, the school was close to a major highway, so it was easy to get to. The school drew students from all over the district because it was a district school of choice, housing a “traditional school” since 2003. As such, the school drew its population from many socio-economic backgrounds, with the majority being middle class. A greater parent commitment in terms of time was required for students attending Windy Pines, as most students were driven from their homes to this school. According to the Windy Pines website (2010), “over 50% of our parents served as volunteers” during the previous school year.

The school was a well-maintained, one-storey building consisting of two long hallways connected together to form an “L” shape, with classrooms off of each hallway. The following description from the school’s website helps to paint a picture of the school’s learning context.

School facilities include a fully functional computer lab with 28 IMacs, a gymnasium, and a modern library with thousands of books available to students on a daily basis. Each classroom in the school has lots of physical space. We also have four portables on site. Windy Pines has one of the largest playgrounds in the district. The playground includes two soccer fields, basketball courts, and an adventure playground with a slide, swings and climbing apparatus. (School District A website)

The school had a population of 260 students in 11 divisions. Staff at the school consisted of: one principal, 11 regular classroom teachers (one job share), one learning assistance/ESL/PLC teacher, one music teacher, one teacher-librarian (who is also the principal), one part-time PE teacher and two TAs.

PLCs took the form of teacher teams that worked together on common goals. These teams were made up of teachers who taught one of two grades (e.g., teachers of kindergarten and grade one made up one team). The PLC teacher leader at the school helped to plan the topics for discussion at each PLC meeting. The principal at the school spent extra time teaching so as to provide release time above and beyond what the district was able to provide to support this venture. At the end of the school year, the team assessed how well their plans for the year went.
The staff members participating in PLCs at the school were given the opportunity to fill out the staff survey (Appendix G) two weeks prior to the conducting of the interviews. The PLC teacher leader at the school made the surveys available to the staff. These data were collected from the school one-week prior to the interviews. Ten of the eleven participating teachers completed the survey, which represented a 91% return rate. Data were examined for any inconsistencies or trends so that they could be explored during the interview and focus group portions of the data gathering.

Survey data collected at Windy Pines elementary. Table 9 shows the data collected from the survey conducted at Windy Pines Elementary School. Any ‘not applicable’ responses or questions not answered have been included together in the fourth column, labeled NA (not applicable). For most of the questions asked, the responses were in agreement (either strongly agree or agree).

The only group of statements that do not follow this pattern are statements 2 (provincial policies), 3 (district policies) and 4 (union policies) in the BC Context dimension. On a four-point scale, the overall mean for this dimension was 3.54, with the mean ranging from a low of 1.80 for statement 4 (union policies) to a high of 4.00 for statements 5 (student learning) and 9 (parental perception).

The means for the next seven dimensions were as follows. In the Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension, the overall mean was 3.47, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.20 for statement 16 (decision-making processes) to a high of 3.80 for statements 12 (accessibility to key information) and 13 (proactive principal). The shared and supportive leadership dimension had the lowest mean of the eight measured at Windy Pines.

For the Shared Values and Vision dimension, the overall mean was 3.63, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.33 for statement 23 (high expectations) to a high of 3.80 for statement 20 (alignment of decisions). Meanwhile, in the Collective Learning and Application section, the overall mean was 3.59, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.33 for statement 29 (learning together) to a high of 3.70 for statements 26 (address diverse student needs) and 27 (open dialogue).

In the Shared Personal Practice dimension, the overall mean was 3.56, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.20 for statement 33 (peer feedback) to a high of 3.80 for
Developing Learning Communities

statement 34 (collaboratively view student work). While in the Supportive Conditions - Relationships dimension, the overall mean was 3.72, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.50 for statement 41 (examination of data) to a high of 3.90 for statements 37 (caring relationships) and 39 (celebration of achievement). Meanwhile, for the Supportive Conditions - Structures dimension, the overall mean was 3.58, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.30 for statement 44 (fiscal resources) to a high of 4.00 for statement 43 (collective learning).

Table 9

Windy Pines Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The BC Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community) at this school.</td>
<td>9 1 0 0 0 3.90 0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>1 3 2 0 4 2.83 0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>0 8 1 1 0 2.70 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>0 0 4 1 5 1.80 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our PLC positively affects student learning.</td>
<td>10 0 0 0 0 4.00 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our PLC positively affects adult learning.</td>
<td>7 2 0 0 1 3.78 0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.</td>
<td>6 4 0 0 0 3.60 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. This school is a desirable place to work in our district.</td>
<td>9 1 0 0 0 3.90 0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parents see this school as a good place.</td>
<td>10 0 0 0 0 4.00 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The community speaks favourably about this school.</td>
<td>9 1 0 0 0 3.90 0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This school handles challenges in a healthy way.</td>
<td>4 6 0 0 0 3.40 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - BC Context dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.54 0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
<td>8 2 0 0 0 3.80 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
<td>8 2 0 0 0 3.80 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
<td>3 7 0 0 0 3.30 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
<td>4 6 0 0 0 3.40 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>2 8 0 0 0 3.20 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
<td>3 5 0 0 2 3.38 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>4 6 0 0 0 3.40 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.47 0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 9

*Windy Pines Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=10)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values and Vision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Decisions are made in alignment with school’s values and vision.</td>
<td>8 2 0 0 0 3.80 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.</td>
<td>6 4 0 0 0 3.60 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.</td>
<td>3 6 0 0 1 3.33 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.</td>
<td>6 4 0 0 0 3.60 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared Values and Vision dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.63 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Learning and Application</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.</td>
<td>6 4 0 0 0 3.60 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.</td>
<td>4 4 1 0 1 3.33 0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.</td>
<td>4 6 0 0 0 3.40 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.</td>
<td>6 3 0 0 1 3.67 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Collective Learning and Application dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.59 0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Personal Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.</td>
<td>4 6 0 0 0 3.40 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.</td>
<td>2 8 0 0 0 3.20 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.</td>
<td>8 2 0 0 0 3.80 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall student improvement.</td>
<td>7 3 0 0 0 3.70 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Shared Personal Practice dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.56 0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Windy Pines Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=10) (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>S.A.</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>N.A.</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>St.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Supportive Conditions Relationships dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.72 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Supportive Conditions Structures dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.58 0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.48</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Statements dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3.80 0.41</td>
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</tbody>
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*Note. S.A. = Strongly Agree; A. = Agree; D. = Disagree; S.D. = Strongly Disagree; N.A. = No Answer or Not Applicable; M. = Mean; St.D. = Standard Deviation*

Lastly, for the *Statements* dimension, the overall mean was 3.80 with the mean ranging from a low of 3.70 for statements 49 (staff communication) and 50 (systemic communication) to a high of 4.00 for statement 47 (clean, inviting facility). The statements dimension had the highest mean of the eight measured for Windy Pines.

**Interview data.** The focus group interview was conducted in the school’s learning assistance room during a lunch break at the school. There were six teacher
participants representing various grade levels. The learning assistance room offered a relatively quiet place to meet. Immediately prior to the focus group, the principal of the school showed the interviewer many of the features of the building, the main resources available to teachers and students, and the playground. He also shared insights from the administrator’s point of view, regarding the impact of the PLC on the school.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in the principal’s office and in a classroom in which no students were present (both relatively quiet locations). One participant had been at Windy Pines for just over one of her three teaching years and the other for two of her twenty-five teaching years. One participant was the learning assistance/ESL teacher and the other was currently teaching children in the early primary years. The participant who was in charge of the learning assistance/ESL assignment, was also the PLC teacher leader at the school. As a result, she was able to offer insights regarding the ongoing district training available to PLC teacher leaders. This teacher had also spent one year teaching at a private school, so she was able to comment on the differences and similarities between her former and current schools. The experienced teacher, who had recently joined the Lakeside staff, was also able to comment on the differences and similarities between her former and current schools.

**What factors helped LCs to develop?** The participants interviewed felt very strongly that the school that wishes to develop and maintain a PLC needs to be not only goal oriented, but also needs to have a goal in which the whole school is involved. The following participant quote explains these thoughts.

I’ve heard from other schools too that it (PLC) doesn’t work. And I think as difficult as it is, having that common goal for the whole school makes it easier as well…I’ve heard from one school where they’re all doing their own different thing, because they didn’t have that umbrella focus to plug into. So a common goal that everyone plugs into makes it easier, it helps you to zoom ahead. (IDI2 16)

The staff interviewed also believed it was crucial for the leader of their PLC be a teacher and not an administrator. Of equal importance, the teacher PLC leader needed to know what a PLC was and the administrator needed to take on the roles of scheduling things (so that there was release time for teachers) and offering support (in the way of
Developing Learning Communities

resources). When asked if the PLC would work the same way if an administrator were leading it, a participant stated,

No, I think having a teacher lead, who has good rapport with all the teachers is best…There’s been a lot of support at the administrative level, but I think that at the same time it can’t be telling us what to do; otherwise there will be pushback. Yeah, I think the administrator’s role is more to provide the time and resources if it’s something they believe in. (IDI1 16)

It was also felt that to begin a PLC at a school, it was best to begin with a small number of handpicked teachers who had the ability to set an example for everyone else. As a participant explained,

That was already part of the thought process. The ones who were approached, were ones that they thought would work well together and would be open to it. Then the other teachers saw, and so last year there was two groups and then this year, there’s four groups…so one of the teachers isn’t formally involved…but besides that every other teacher is involved. (IDI1 9)

When asked if teachers were required to belong to a PLC, the answer was no, only those people who wanted to belong participated. By feeling that they were part of a greater whole, participants at Windy Pines were more inclined to want to participate in the life of a PLC, even though it did require extra time and effort. Staff had put their time towards the design of assessment rubrics and had also included the use of staff professional development (Pro-D) time to work on PLC goals. As stated by one participant,

Because everyone at the end of the year decided, as a staff, we wanted to work as a PLC and knew we wanted to focus on non-fiction reading. Because it was kind of decided that Pro-Ds would be saved for whatever was needed for PLCs. So as we would approach one, then we meet as a professional development (Pro-D) committee and, (everyone on the Pro-D committee is also on a PLC) it’s okay, what are our needs? And so it’s been like small group time where we work, we have some extra time as a PLC to see where we’re going next. (IDI1 10)
Helping teachers to understand that they retain their autonomy during the process of creating and maintaining a PLC was also seen as an important factor to participants, as stated by the following,

I would say that it’s been different with each of the groups. I think that it’s the level of buy-in, and also it comes back to really understanding what a PLC is. And that’s been a growth thing with one of the groups just kind of seeing that this is something that you don’t have to do in addition; it’s not just adding another outcome. It’s actually something that we can use to streamline outcomes and meet multiple needs. And then two groups really get it, and they’re just running with it. So I think two years from now everyone will see it. It’s just when you’re new, when it’s a very brand new concept there’s growing pains right? And that’s been for me the balance, of continuing to push, but at the same time respecting autonomy. (IDI1 16)

What factors hindered LCs from developing? Participants believed it was important to have a clear focus. One of the participants commented that at her previous school the focus was not clear and felt like it was on paper only. The focus was talked about from time to time, but nothing tangible in terms of student learning ever occurred. The following participant quote is quite descriptive of this scenario.

The school that I was at previously didn’t have a PLC. They were a very large staff and we had the goal of writing, but it was so vague. We were all teaching writing in our classes, but it wasn’t a certain aspect of writing, and we weren’t using a common curriculum, or common assessments. There wasn’t any kind of grade-wide assessment, so it felt like we had this goal, but there were no steps really in place to help us to meet that goal. I think other schools where there isn’t the time to meet, where there is no structured time for that, it is hard. I didn’t have the collaboration time and there wasn’t really a lot of commonality in terms of what we were doing, so it was everyone doing his or her own thing. I think it would take a few years journey for them to be at the level where they could do a PLC, because they’re not even used to talking with each other. (IDI1 13)
It was also evident to participants that a well-functioning PLC takes time to come to fruition. It requires the right circumstances and for people to be ready to put in the time and effort required. As one participant stated,

I think the biggest thing with our school is just that it doesn’t happen in a year and I think that some teachers and facilitators have been a bit frustrated this year, but they’re new. It’s a new start and realizing where we’re at has been a three-year journey and just allowing that time is really important. I also think that any teacher can be part of a PLC. It doesn’t matter if you’re brand new or that you’ve been a teacher for twenty years. That’s something that we’ve seen here, that I think has been really good, is that we’re all kind of figuring this out together.

(IDI1 19)

The time required to complete assessments that are helpful to student learning can also be prohibitive according to participants. If teachers are feeling that constant pressure, and are not able to work on the same goals for an extended period of time (in order to deepen their understanding of where students are in their learning and what their needs are), they become frustrated. When asked if there was anything in regard to assessment that might hinder a PLC, one participant had the following insight.

I think time would be one of the biggest things, especially with formative assessments. Having some of those assessments that are quick, but can really focus on what we’re looking at, when we’re creating them; that can take quite a bit of time. I don’t know whether we’re going to continue doing this non-fiction goal. Reading might not necessarily be our focus next year, but we’re going to continue doing these lessons. So I’ve tried to keep track of all the lessons we’ve done and the rubrics that we’ve made so that it can be right there for next year.

(IDI1 12)

**Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs?**

This next section presents data that indicates whether or not improved teacher learning and/or student learning played a part in creating and maintaining a PLC. Participants believed that teachers continue to learn throughout their careers. Learning together to implement the goals of their PLC made it that much more of a collaborative
effort. The participants valued being able to watch one another teach and believed that it helped to improve their practice. To illustrate this point, a participant said,

I think it’s been for teacher success. It’s allowed celebration time among teachers, because a lot of times you’re in your classroom on your own, doing your own thing, but because we actually teach together and we go through student samples together, we can actually support each other, and encourage each other, and give feedback. And so I think that’s been really positive, to learn from each other; even little things like teaching styles. (IDI1 16-17)

According to participants, collaborating on student work in order to improve student learning was powerful for both teachers and students. Participants at Windy Pines found they were no longer waiting until the end of their units to discover whether or not students were mastering the material presented in class. As stated by one participant,

(AfL) I think that’s one of the big strengths of why I like the PLC so much. Because you have that data that you start with, and then you gather data as you go, and at the end you can reflect on what’s worked and what hasn’t worked rather than just saying ‘Oh let’s do this’ and not having any reason behind where you’re going. At reporting time for me, this was a huge help because we were trying to decide how we would assess the kindergarten students on making connections. And when we did the lessons we had clipboards and we made anecdotal comments on every student. So I had six lessons worth of comments for each child; what kind of connections they were making, so when I sat down to report, it was all there. (IDI2 5)

A note of caution from one of the participants was that formative assessment was not something teachers were generally accustomed to using regularly. This was of concern, as it was thought that some members of the public and some teachers today still have the notion that teachers should be ‘all-knowing’. If there were staff members who felt they had to present themselves as ‘all-knowing’, they could not also be vulnerable, and express their inability to use formative assessment effectively. Therefore, the growth of the PLC might be jeopardized. As well, participants felt that if you had to spend
excessive amounts of time on management, then it was much harder to have the energy for PLC meetings. To illustrate this point, one participant who had taught elsewhere said, 

Coming from another school…I have energy here and get to teach, whereas where I was before it was all classroom management, and behaviour management, and at the end of the day you’re exhausted and you couldn’t care less about improving your lesson, because you just need to go home and have a nap.  (FG 6)

Participants also felt that choosing to work in a PLC required the participants to be willing, and to be somewhat vulnerable and open to learning, otherwise teacher learning was not likely to take place. For example, one participant stated,

You need to participate, you need to, you know, and you need to do your share in the PLC. And so far we haven’t had an issue with that. Everybody seems to say I’ll do this, you do that and we’ll work together on it. But I don’t think it would work if one person didn’t want to. (Does it require a certain vulnerability?) Yes, definitely, even the team-teaching, you know, but it’s so powerful, because I learned amazing things.  (IDI2 12)

Participants at Windy Pines used a variety of strategies to help their students learn, and it was through their discussion in their PLC groups that those decisions were made. For example, participants regrouped students for instruction as they went along. They designed assessments together, they collaboratively marked and they considered watching each other teach as part of their professional development (Pro-D). One member of the focus group said that her PLC was like differentiated instruction for adults. Another participant noticed there were not as many people coming out to the district sponsored primary Pro-D opportunities. In thinking about why this was so she stated,

I was just finding that people aren’t attending after-school workshops and we’re struggling trying to figure out why. We’re offering door prizes, we’re offering this and that and they’re just not coming out. Having been a teacher for a long time, and having always attended the primary meetings, we think, what has changed? Life is so much busier, there’s so much more technology involved. Do people really need to go, because it’s on the Internet, you can search things out.
But I’m also hoping that it’s because they’re doing their professional growth in their school through their PLCs. (IDI2 20)

Most Windy Pines participants felt they had grown so much as a professional group by participating in a PLC. The opportunity to watch other teachers, even new teachers teaching, was called powerful. The following statement expresses the desire of one participant to continue to grow as a professional, and it echoed the thoughts of others at the school; even if those professionals had been teaching for a long time.

For me personally, I just feel I’ve grown so much as a professional and that when I am not involved in a PLC I feel that I just do the same old thing and there is no growth for me and learning for me and for my students. Having worked under an administration where it was, ‘oh just do whatever you want’, ‘okay I’ll just do the same old thing that’s easy’. I felt that was part of the reason I actually moved. I didn’t feel like I was growing. (IDI2 19)

When asked whether the school’s PLCs had any effect on student learning, the participants clearly felt it had a positive impact. As one participant put it,

And then along the way we’ve used more informal things. We’ve created rubrics together, and done checklists to make sure that what we’re doing is really guided by what the students need. It’s very much for their learning. (IDI1 4)

As well, participants felt very strongly that having the built in accountability helped the PLC to continue to improve, as there was no option to ‘just put it away’ until a more convenient time. The life of a school is very busy and any new initiative, no matter how good, was more likely to be shelved if there was no way to continue to bring it forward. Having a mechanism for accountability (the PLC), as well as the time and the buy-in, was helpful according to participants. The following quote explains these thoughts.

I think it requires members to have a common goal and it requires a level of buy-in in terms of what we’re doing. And this is a beneficial thing, and giving it the time is really important. We obviously have the lesson time, but just the language that we’re building, and that’s being reinforced during the week, is really
important. And I think another thing too is accountability because I know, like last year when I was in the classroom, there can be new wonderful things. You go to a workshop and you’re like ‘oh, I want to implement these things’, but without having accountability life just takes over. And so having that weekly meeting, it keeps us all focused and it keeps us accountable to what we’re doing. (IDI1 9)

Participants found the use of technology an important tool for creating and sharing their lessons and plans with each other, but equally important, for helping the progress of their male students in working on their non-fiction reading goal. One participant’s explanation of the importance of technology was,

It’s been a really huge help. I think there’s definitely a lot of fear around technology and using it, but especially with some of the reading things, especially with some of the boys. They’re really struggling with reading and bringing in technology really draws them in. And so we have a movable smart board that we use in our library, that we’ve been using for some lessons, and we’ve been using photobooth to assess their reading. So we actually have videos of them reading, and they’re using comiclife, and we’re actually ordering ipods for our group. We’re going to be using that because there’re some apps, but also for recording and for engaging specifically our boys. So I think yeah, the technology’s awesome. It’s just getting the comfort ability with it among the teachers. The kids are so comfortable with it. (IDI1 14)

Participants felt there were a number of factors that might decrease the effectiveness a PLC has on student learning. These were: the pressure for letter grades in the intermediate grades, a lack of common assessments, and a lack of data that shows whether goals are being met. On this topic, one participant said,

I’ve been at schools where there have been school goals, but it’s just that it’s been our focus. At other schools we’ve spent lots of time developing a goal, and the next year the goal had to be changed and we spent hours again developing another goal. And we never had any data to say whether we met the last goal, so the data collection is vital to know where you’re going and to know what you’ve done. (IDI2 18)
What was most encouraging for participants at Windy Pines were the student achievement results. “Reading scores were up and the data showed students were getting better.” (P 1) For example, participants noted the RAD (Reading Assessment Diagnostic) assessment let them know what they needed to teach next, whereas letter grades did not. When asked what evidence proved the PLC was improving learning for students, a participant replied, “The data. The data shows and proves that they are doing well. And they’re, you know, they’re amazing, it’s amazing to see their successes.” (IDI2 19)

**What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have?**

This section examines in turn the influence that politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have on an LC. These factors were looked at from both the positive and the negative perspective, to ascertain what helps the LC to develop and what does not.

**Politics.** The participants did not see themselves as being political. They preferred to keep their focus on student and teacher learning, and the way that their PLC was structured seemed to do this for them. As reported by one participant, having the support teacher (Learning Assistance, English Second Language) as the PLC facilitator was important.

I teach a lesson with them (PLC group) and then on Fridays, during collaboration time, that’s when I meet with each of the groups. That structure is invaluable. I’ve talked with the principal and that’s one thing that he thinks is really important too. I mean facilitators can be great coming from the classroom, but having someone who’s in a position like learning services where they can be in everyone’s room, it helps to really keep it going. And so it’s meant that when I’m doing pullout or in-class support, I can reinforce things or preload vocabulary because I know what’s going on with each grade level. (IDI1 6)

Some participants said there were schools they knew of that struggled with getting PLCs started. This was attributed to the lack of a teacher leader willing to take on the role of PLC facilitator, thus causing the initiative to stall.

Having three to four people in a PLC was considered the optimum number according to participants, as it felt more like a team. With more than four members, it was thought that the group would gravitate more towards having a leader with a group. In addition, having the meetings weekly helped to keep the group focused and
accountable, both considered positive attributes by the participants. According to one participant,

Last year when I was in the classroom (different school), there can be new wonderful things. You go to a workshop and you’re like ‘oh I want to implement these things’, but without having accountability, life just takes over. And so having that weekly meeting, it keeps us all focused and it keeps us accountable to what we’re doing. (IDI1 9)

Participants also saw having time during the school day for PLC groups to meet as a crucial structure for the implementation and support of the PLC. Participants were very grateful for the scheduling, above and beyond the typically expected, provided by the principal, in order to put into place the time required to facilitate PLC meeting time during the day.

One issue participants had mixed feelings about was the meddling of the local union in the original release structure they came up with. Originally, participants wanted the principal to sit in on the PLC meetings. However, due to class size restrictions, he ended up having to teach a class instead. This problem arose when the school presented its project at a district “carousel”. The union was told by someone at that carousel that the music teacher was taking double classes so teachers could meet. While participants felt it was important to respect class size restrictions, they were also disappointed they could not go with their original plan. The following focus group conversation expresses the thoughts of the participants in the group.

One of the weaknesses I would say is the lack of support for what we’re doing in terms of the union. The way we’ve tried to organize and, without going into too much detail, (with not being able to double up classes?) Yeah, you’ve got it. That relates to the district policy of, we want you to do this, but we’re not going to give you funding. That’s not district, that’s union. Well the district says PLCs are really great. Then they should throw in an extra TOC. So I guess it’s support. So I would say, that that’s a weakness. It would be nice to have more money and more support. It doesn’t have to be a lot. (FG 9)
Developing Learning Communities

In terms of maintaining autonomy, participants at Windy Pines were not required to belong to a PLC, although almost all chose to. As well, participants still had the majority of the week to be autonomous within their classrooms. Participants reported that participating in a PLC enhanced their autonomy rather than taking away from it. When asked about the tug between autonomy and the interconnectedness of the PLC, one participant stated,

So far we’ve all been able to work it out. It hasn’t been an issue yet, but I think it could be. But I think because it’s not overtaking our entire week, we’re doing it once a week, you have the rest of the week to do what you want. But you know what? Once you start doing it you find out how powerful it is and it does spread into other things. (But then I guess that’s using your autonomy and saying ‘Hey, I like it this way’). Yes, true. (IDI2 12)

**Interpersonal relations.** Participants believed that positive relations were key to the creation and maintenance of a PLC. It was these positive relations that allowed for the collaborative atmosphere and provided the opportunity for participants to celebrate together. Having strong interpersonal relations allowed staff to see all of the students as their responsibility, rather than feeling responsible for only the students registered in their class. The following example given by a participant of the focus group is illustrative of these thoughts.

We can make them into smaller groups and help them one-on-one, which is huge. Especially when we spread them all out, and can go to them quickly, because there are four of us. That’s a strength, because sometimes when you don’t get to a child, you feel really bad. I think too, it’s a change of pace for the kids. They’re not just getting you. And sometimes we go out of our comfort zone and do things that we might not regularly do because there’s somebody else there. I think kids are less likely to fall through the cracks, because of all the extra teachers and the systematic way of instructing them. I think it’s good to see adults working together like that, and that really builds that sense of ‘oh they’re all my teachers, really, they’re all my teachers’. We’re a team, and they know it. (FG 11)
Participants felt that forcing participation in a PLC would not be conducive to convincing teachers that PLCs were worthwhile. “I’ve heard from other schools too, that it didn’t work (IDI2 16).” As well, if a staff was particularly competitive, participants thought it would be difficult to begin and maintain a PLC, because they would find the loss of autonomy threatening. As one participant put it,

If it was a really competitive atmosphere or ‘I’m better than you’, that wouldn’t work. I think in a school like ours, which is a choice school, I think there’s the potential for that to actually become structure, where teachers compete for the favour of parents. (FG 6)

Participants also believed that if the PLC were facilitator-driven, rather than teacher driven, it would be less effective. Having the PLC being teacher-driven allowed participants to respond to what they were seeing in their classes, rather than imposing on their classes what they would like to see. As stated by one participant, “You really want it to be teacher-driven. It can’t just be coming from me as far as where we should be going, and I would say for two of the groups it felt like that at the beginning” (IDI1 7). Another possible hindrance was having too many people on staff. Groups that were too large tended not to spend time talking to each other about curriculum and assessment practices.

**Trust.** Participants believed that without trust the questioning of old practices could not happen. When asked about the importance of relationships, one of the participants spoke specifically about trust.

I think that relationships are key because it definitely becomes a trust thing; especially if you have been used to doing something a certain way, to kind of question certain practices. And each of my groups has very different practices and each of my groups have very different personalities. As a facilitator working with these groups, having a good professional relationship and also just having friendship really helps to keep you working towards a common goal. And working together can definitely be tricky sometimes. When there’re different ideas it’s not that we all arrive at the same conclusion, and so there’s a lot of compromise and really listening to other people’s thoughts. And it’s meant that each of our four groups have definitely moved at a different pace. In terms of
what teachers are comfortable with and what they’re ready for, I see with two of my groups in particular this is the first step, and then I think next year it will be a little bit further. So it’s just pushing and encouraging and taking risks, which can be hard. But I think that culture of openness is really important and building that trust among the team. (IDI1 5-6)

According to participants, it is important that each school’s staff trusts the structure that has been put in place, not only by the school, but by the district as well. When participants invest time and energy into a district-sponsored initiative, they want to trust that they are not wasting time on a passing fad that will not be supported the following year. One participant described the district structure as one facet of the strength of the PLC at the school.

One of the strengths I think has been the structure of “A”, because PLCs have been seen as a priority. And I know even with budget cutbacks they’re still trying to keep that going because it is seen as such a vital part of the good things that are happening in our district. I think that giving that priority at a district level has really benefitted all of the schools and has provided a real connecting point because otherwise everyone, once you get settled into your position, just does their own thing at their school. It’s that structure that has allowed us to come together as a district. (IDI1 4)

Budget. Participants did understand that it required money to provide for the infrastructure and for the release time given to teachers so that they could meet in their PLC groups. In their eyes, this meant that PLCs were a priority in their district, even with the cutbacks that all districts in British Columbia were facing. Participants thought that not only was the time given very important, it was also crucial in allowing PLCs to grow and in allowing participants to respond together quickly to emerging student needs. The following quote from one of the participants shows how staff responded quickly and used Pro-D time, money, and resources for their PLCs.

Being the facilitator and in the learning services role, I help with a lot of the assessment across the grades. It helps us to kind of pinpoint and pick out red flags across the grade levels more quickly than it might if we’re all just working on our
own. So we’re definitely given a lot of encouragement and support from our administrator too, to meet those needs. So we get time at staff meetings to talk about things and our Pro-Ds this year have all been PLC focused (except for one math workshop). (IDI1 10)

Participants did feel that having release time was crucial to the success of their PLC groups and they believed that without the release time, it would all begin to fall apart. A focus group participant reported that some schools only met in their PLCs after school; something those school staffs found to be very frustrating, even if the meeting was for only half an hour. One of the participants stated,

I think it would be interesting without release time. I think it would all start to fall apart because people are busy with their families, and aren’t able to stay after school for things and so it won’t be because of a desire not to continue on. It will just be because time is finite and something’s gotta give. (IDI2 8-9)

**How does the LC become systemic?** This section examines data that indicates whether or not there are ways that may help the LC to become systemic. To this end, it is helpful to examine the life system that was in place at Windy Pines to see if there are lessons to be learned.

The participants believed there were a number of things a school could do to help a PLC become more systemic. At the outset, the most important consideration was to start small. Participants believed if a school tried to start too big too quickly, the initiative would fail. A need for participants to be brought in at the beginning, during the training, was also expressed. At Windy Pines, three participants went to a PLC conference in Victoria three years ago and then shared their experiences with the staff. That was the beginning of the process. As one participant stated,

(A Former Learning Services teacher) said specifically, that her goal was to start really small till she figured it out too; and again that was different. I noticed in other schools that our district sucked at it because it was so new for a lot of people. At some schools everybody was on board PLC, and then it became more scattered and it was difficult to keep track of everybody. In some cases they

127
failed. So she really wanted to just start very small and sort of see how it worked and then build on that. (FG 8)

It also helped if there was someone on staff to take all the data and put it into a format that was easy to share. Having an infrastructure in place in the building was also required according to participants, or it was difficult for the PLC meetings to take place. Participants were appreciative of the infrastructure that the district had helped to put in place. As stated by one participant,

I think the thing is, having some kind of infrastructure in place is important, because otherwise it just doesn’t happen. Then you might have the informal collaboration, but in terms of a whole school, or grade level, there’s not enough momentum behind it. And you know things are busy, there’re always things happening at schools and so I think the way the district has set it up where we have that Wednesday morning meeting every week. That’s amazing. (IDI1 5)

The use of technology also helped to improve communication. Participants had used email, and had also used Skype when they wanted the principal to participate in the discussion and he was supervising a class. According to participants, a common goal was thought to be very important for a school’s PLCs, and knowing the distinction between collaboration and a PLC was a sign of a more developed PLC. When asked to explain the difference between collaboration and PLCs, one participant answered with the following,

I think a lot of teachers here naturally collaborated because we have very involved parents, and we like to keep a lot of the same expectations among the grade levels. But with the PLCs it was more focused. We had the initiative with non-fiction reading. It was more intentional and then there was more accountability with it, even in terms of the assessment before and after and along the way. So with collaboration we share ideas, and that’s always helpful but with the PLCs it’s been more of a focused journey. (IDI1 2)

From the above description, it is clear that the participants saw a big part for AfL (Assessment for Learning) to play in their PLCs.
FSA data for Windy Pines elementary. Table 10 provides provincial government FSA data collected in February of 2008, 2009 and 2010.

Table 10

Windy Pines Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data

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<td>98%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Reading and Numeracy – Average FSA scaled score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.
For Writing – Average FSA score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

The data has been collected from grade four students who attended the school in the years listed above. Rates of participation were 100% for each sub-test (reading, writing, mathematics) for each year listed. For Windy Pines students, it is interesting to note that student achievement is higher than both the district and the provincial average in all three areas (reading comprehension, writing and numeracy), with two of the scores (writing 2010 and numeracy 2009) showing 100% of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

Satisfaction survey data for Windy Pines elementary. Table 11 consists of provincial government collected satisfaction survey data from the school years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. The data were collected from grade four students who attended the school during the years listed above.

Response rates were high (2007/08: 96%; 2008/09: 95%; 2009/10: 92%). Parent response numbers were high for two of the years (2008/09: 80%; 2009/10: 70%) and have therefore been included in parentheses beside the student responses for each question for these years. Of interest is almost all questions show a higher degree of satisfaction at the school level, than that of the district and provincial level, with
Table 11

Windy Pines Elementary Satisfaction Survey—Percent Positive Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>DistrictA/Province</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92/92</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>91/87</td>
<td>87(84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>87/78</td>
<td>74(81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>78/81</td>
<td>82(78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>90/90</td>
<td>97(87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>86/84</td>
<td>97(97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8/11</td>
<td>3 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>91/89</td>
<td>100(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>62/65</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive responses are considered responses of “many times” or “all the time”

Responses from parents are given in parentheses

the exception of the academic areas of reading, writing and math in the 2008/2009 school year. Parental satisfaction was consistently higher from the 2008/2009 year to the 2009/2010 year as well.

In summary, the results obtained from District A showed many similarities between schools, as well as some differences. For example, each school had a teacher PLC leader who helped each PLC group within that school to work on goals. A difference between the schools is that two of the three schools required teachers to participate in a PLC. An in-depth analysis of the similarities and differences between the schools can be found in Chapter 7.
Developing Learning Communities

Chapter 5: Findings for District “B”

This chapter describes the results obtained in the second district in this study. There are three main sections in the Results for District “B” chapter. The first describes the context of District B; the second and third sections describe the findings from the two schools studied within District B.

Context of District B

District B was a relatively large geographic area for a Greater Vancouver School District, consisting of approximately 130 school sites on 328 square kilometers. The district, for the most part, structured its instructional organization and delivery around an elementary (kindergarten to grade seven) and secondary (grade eight to twelve) model. There were a few exceptions to this; however, this research was conducted in two elementary (kindergarten to grade seven) schools in District B. This was a district that continued to experience growth in its student population, an anomaly for school districts in British Columbia. Many of the building sites were new or relatively new (built within the last 20 years).

A rich mosaic of cultures was represented within the student population. The following paragraph from the district website, shows this multiculturalism:

Approximately 44% of students attending school in the district are from a household in which a language other than English is spoken. Of the many languages other than English represented in District B, the highest percentages are Punjabi, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Vietnamese and Filipino. (School District B website Fact Sheet)

District B was one of the larger districts in greater Vancouver in terms of student population. Because of this, trying to organize common processes for PLCs was more difficult and complex. District B also had a very active teachers’ union that took issue with some practices it attributed to PLCs. The following, from District B’s local teachers’ union’s November 2008 monthly newsletter, shows its reticence in regard to PLCs:

In some elementary schools, principals seem to be encouraging Grade Group meetings to promote district developed assessments such as BBB (name of assessment), with an eye to producing data for the school and the District in the
Developing Learning Communities

form of test results. In some secondary schools, the District has attempted to change the ground rules for teacher-driven Professional Learning Communities so as to specify that data can be used for school and District accountability reports.

Teachers at both Elementary and Secondary have resisted these attempts, and rightly so. The logic of a data-driven system leads eventually to uniformity of teaching and learning styles among the so-called successful, and disempowerment and a sense of hopelessness among those that are deemed not to succeed. Both of these outcomes are undesirable in an education system, and a society, which values diversity and individuality. It’s no accident that the international push for data-driven education originated at trade talks and other meetings of the financial elite. The same people whose goal is to make millions for themselves by outsourcing jobs to sweatshops and forcing people out of their homes would be happy to implement a system which reduces individuality, critical thinking, and empowerment among those whom they seek to control.

At Elementary the “B” Teachers’ Association (“B”TA) recommends that topics for discussion at Grade Group meetings be decided by consensus among the participants. If a teacher does not find it useful to attend the Grade Group meeting, he or she should ask to be able to do another professional learning activity, or continue to teach their class. At Secondary, teachers should also decide the topics for discussion, and oppose any demands on their voluntary collaborating groups to produce data. (“B”TA Newspaper, 2008, p. 10)

This same topic was again discussed in the December 2008 and September 2009 issues. The January 2009 issue reported this as motions that were brought to and passed by the Fall BCTF Representative Assembly, as well as referencing the forced collaboration time being implemented, and being fought both legally and politically in another BC school district. The following resolutions designed by the “B” TA do a good job of delineating these thoughts generally.

Resolution 135 - Grade-Group meetings That schools in which the principal has arranged time during the school day for collaboration in the form of Grade-Group meetings, attendance be at the teacher’s discretion.

Resolution 136 - Grade-Group Meetings Agenda That members who attend Grade-Group meetings insist that the choice of topics to be discussed be decided by consensus among the individual members attending. (“B”TA Newspaper, 2009, p. 2)

Because of the push back from the teachers’ union, District B did not have a cohesive way of trying to encourage the development of PLCs. Instead, this was left up to individual schools to work out on their own. Further, the direct and purposeful involvement of district level staff towards the development of PLCs would most likely have been counterproductive.
Each of the schools in District B participating in this research has been given a pseudonym in order to ensure its anonymity. The next two sections of this chapter explain the findings from each of the schools from District B in relation to the research questions being asked.

**Trillium Elementary**

Trillium Elementary school was located in a suburban neighbourhood close to a major highway that runs through the north of District B. Homes that surround the area were middle or upper middle class single-family homes. The school did host a number of international students as well. According to the school’s growth plan,

Trillium is known for its solid academic standing, distinct fine arts representation and wide offering of sports activities. Students also make use of a wide variety of technology skills that are imbued in school programming. Trillium students make use of their ‘multiple intelligences’ and are encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways. Students are provided with numerous opportunities to participate in a number of activities. Older students embrace the notion of student leadership and can be seen taking on roles throughout the school. Buddy programs build bonds between older and younger students as well as providing a unique learning opportunity. Staff, students and parents are able to get to know each other quickly providing a family-like atmosphere. (Trillium School Growth Plan 2008-2012, updated May, 2010)

The school was a one-storey building consisting of pods of classrooms (an open area space that classrooms open up onto). Hallways connected these pods. As stated in the school growth plan, the school was built in 1995. It was well maintained, and had a modern playground for students to use. The school had a population of 340 students in 15 divisions, and staff at the school consisted of: one principal, 16 regular classroom teachers (two job shares), three learning support teachers, one music teacher, one teacher-librarian, one part-time counsellor and one special education assistant (SEA).

The crafting, drafting and completion of the school growth plan was “a collaborative effort between the PAC (parent advisory council), the SPC (school planning council) and the staff” (Trillium growth plan). The growth plan lists the following three goals for the school community: becoming numerate, enhancing writing skills and healthy living.

The PLC at this school was not formalized. The staff chose to participate in many district initiatives, and it was working together on these initiatives that formed the
framework for the PLC. The principal of the school often took classes in order to free teachers up to meet together regarding an initiative.

The staff members at the school were given the opportunity to fill out the staff survey (Appendix G) two weeks prior to the conducting of the interviews. The principal at the school made the surveys available to the staff. These data were collected from the school one-week prior to the interviews. Thirteen of the sixteen eligible teachers completed the survey, which represented an 81% return rate. Data were examined for any inconsistencies or trends so they could be explored during the interview and focus group portions of the data gathering. When the surveys were collected, the principal of the school shared insights about the impact of the PLC on the school.

Survey data collected at Trillium elementary. Table 12 shows data collected from the survey conducted at Trillium Elementary School. Any ‘not applicable’ responses or questions not answered have been included together in the fourth column, labeled NA (not applicable). For most of the questions asked, the responses were in agreement (either strongly agree or agree).

The first statements that did not follow this pattern were statement 2 (provincial policies) and 4 (union policies) in the BC Context dimension. On a four-point scale the overall mean for this dimension was 3.44, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.64 for statement 2 (provincial policies) to a high of 3.85 for statement 8 (desirable school).

The means for the next five dimensions were as follows. For the Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension, the overall mean was 3.47, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.17 for statement 17 (shared responsibility and accountability) to a high of 3.77 for statement 13 (proactive principal). The shared and supportive leadership dimension had the highest mean of the eight measured at Trillium.

Meanwhile, the Shared Values and Vision dimension had an overall mean of 3.32, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.00 for statement 24 (using data for prioritizing) to a high of 3.69 for statement 21 (focus on student learning). For the Collective Learning and Application dimension, the overall mean was 3.37, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.31 for statement 31 (collaborative analysis) to a high of 3.46 for statement 27 (open dialogue).
### Table 12

*Trillium Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=13)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The BC Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community) at this school.</td>
<td>8 5 0 0 0 3.62 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>1 5 5 0 2 2.64 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>3 9 0 0 1 3.25 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>1 9 2 0 1 2.92 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our PLC positively affects student learning.</td>
<td>10 3 0 0 0 3.77 0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our PLC positively affects adult learning.</td>
<td>4 8 0 0 1 3.33 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.</td>
<td>6 5 1 0 1 3.42 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. This school is a desirable place to work in our district.</td>
<td>11 2 0 0 0 3.85 0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parents see this school as a good place.</td>
<td>8 5 0 0 0 3.62 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The community speaks favourably about this school.</td>
<td>8 5 0 0 0 3.62 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This school handles challenges in a healthy way.</td>
<td>8 5 0 0 0 3.62 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - BC Context dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.44 0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
<td>5 8 0 0 0 3.38 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
<td>10 3 0 0 0 3.77 0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
<td>7 5 0 0 1 3.58 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
<td>7 6 0 0 0 3.54 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>7 6 0 0 0 3.54 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
<td>2 10 0 0 1 3.17 0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>4 9 0 0 0 3.31 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.47 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values and Vision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.</td>
<td>3 9 0 0 1 3.25 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Decisions are made in alignment with school’s values and vision.</td>
<td>5 8 0 0 0 3.38 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.</td>
<td>9 4 0 0 0 3.69 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision.</td>
<td>6 7 0 0 0 3.46 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.</td>
<td>1 11 0 0 1 3.08 0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.</td>
<td>0 13 0 0 0 3.00 0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared Values and Vision dimension</strong></td>
<td>3.32 0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 12

**Trillium Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=13)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Learning and Application</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.</td>
<td>5 8 0 0 0 3.38 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.</td>
<td>6 6 1 0 0 3.38 0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.</td>
<td>6 7 0 0 0 3.46 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.</td>
<td>5 8 0 0 0 3.38 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.</td>
<td>4 8 0 0 1 3.33 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.</td>
<td>5 7 1 0 0 3.31 0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Personal Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.</td>
<td>4 9 0 0 0 3.31 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Collective Learning and Application dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.37 0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.</td>
<td>4 8 1 0 0 3.23 0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.</td>
<td>2 8 2 0 1 3.00 0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.</td>
<td>2 11 0 0 0 3.15 0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.</td>
<td>5 8 0 0 0 3.38 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall student improvement.</td>
<td>2 10 1 0 0 3.08 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Shared Personal Practice dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.17 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.</td>
<td>10 3 0 0 0 3.77 0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.</td>
<td>6 7 0 0 0 3.46 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.</td>
<td>4 9 0 0 0 3.31 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.</td>
<td>3 9 0 0 1 3.25 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.</td>
<td>4 9 0 0 0 3.31 0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Supportive Conditions Relationships dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.42 0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### Table 12

**Trillium Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=13)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Structures</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.</td>
<td>6 6 1 0 0 3.38 0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.</td>
<td>5 5 3 0 0 3.15 0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.</td>
<td>2 9 1 0 1 3.08 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.</td>
<td>5 8 0 0 0 3.38 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average – Supportive Conditions Structures dimension Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.25 0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.</td>
<td>3 10 0 0 0 3.23 0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.</td>
<td>7 5 1 0 0 3.46 0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.</td>
<td>5 5 2 1 0 3.08 0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.</td>
<td>5 7 0 0 1 3.42 0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.</td>
<td>6 6 0 0 1 3.50 0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Statements dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.36 0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. S.A. = Strongly Agree; A. = Agree; D. = Disagree; S.D. = Strongly Disagree; N.A. = No Answer or Not Applicable; M. = Mean; St.D. = Standard Deviation*

The *Shared Personal Practice* dimension had an overall mean of 3.17, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.00 for statement 33 (peer feedback) to a high of 3.38 for statement 35 (sharing practice). While in the *Supportive Conditions - Relationships* dimension, the overall mean was 3.42, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.25 for statement 40 (embedded change) to a high of 3.77 for statement 37 (caring relationships). The shared personal practice dimension had the lowest mean of the eight measured for Trillium.

In the *Supportive Conditions-Structures* dimension, there was one statement where the pattern of agreement was not as strong as the rest within the dimension: statement 43 (school schedule). For statement 43, there were ten respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while three respondents disagreed. For the *Supportive Conditions - Structures* dimension, the overall mean was 3.25, with the mean...
Developing Learning Communities

ranging from a low of 3.08 for statement 44 (fiscal resources) to a high of 3.46 for statement 42 (time provided) and 45 (technology availability).

Lastly, in the Statements dimension, there was one statement where the pattern of agreement was not as strong: statement 48 (peer proximity). For statement 48, there were ten respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while there were three respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. For the Statements section the overall mean was 3.36, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.08 for statement 48 (peer proximity) to a high of 3.50 for statement 50 (systemic communication).

**Interview data.** The focus group was conducted in the school’s library during a lunch break at the school. Five teachers, representing various grade levels, participated in the focus group interview. The library offered a relatively quiet meeting place.

Two in-depth interviews were conducted in the staffroom, a relatively quiet location. One participant had been at Trillium for twelve of her twenty-nine teaching years. The second participant had been a teacher for twenty-six years and had been at Trillium since it first opened sixteen years ago. He also taught in a district other than District B for his first four years.

One participant was currently teaching children in the early primary years, while the other was teaching children in the early intermediate years. Both participants had been at the school for a long time, and were therefore able to offer insights about the long-term development of the Trillium community.

**What factors helped LCs to develop?** The participants interviewed believed it was important for members of the school community to see themselves as part of the whole instead of isolated in their own classrooms, that they had common goals together and that they worked together for the betterment of all students. The following quote from a focus group participant is a good example of participants’ thoughts at Trillium generally.

I just know that we all feel like all the students belong to all of us. You don’t feel bad if you have to go in and say ‘(Name), I need to see one of your kids. I think what I’m trying to get at is we have a common goal. We go try something, then we come back and debrief it or see how it went and what way do we go next. So there’s always a plan and we’re always driven by our vision and where we’re
Developing Learning Communities

going. So we take time to come back. We always come back as a group and talk about whatever we tried. And it’s always tied with our school goals. So right now we’re doing a lot of numeracy so we’ve been doing a lot of that connected to numeracy. I’ve done it informally with (Name). We both teach at the same grade level and I know that we’re kind of on the same page for curriculum. I’ll say ‘How did your kids do with this assignment, and usually they match up really well. So then it’s, ‘okay now I need to make it more difficult or tone it down a bit. (FG 11-12)

Another factor that participants believed helped their PLC was having both a strong formal leader (the principal) and strong teacher leaders. Having a strong principal, who recognized each person’s strengths and empowered them, was as important as having strong teacher leaders when dealing with contentious issues. The following in-depth interview quote expresses this thought.

I think that when a teacher feels successful the students will be successful. It just goes hand in hand. We’ve done a lot on healthy living and initially, there were people on staff who were like, ‘I don’t want to go into the action room. We can’t afford to give twenty minutes or half an hour of daily activity. We have enough on our plates’ you know, we all feel that way, right? And when we started that action room what a difference it made. My class last year was physically active every day, sometimes twice a day. We’ve got an independent circuit in there. We have one teacher who’s taken on the role of changing the stations every six weeks or so. And now I can’t imagine my day without it. But teachers were resistant at first. (IDI2 21-22)

The participants at Trillium also believed that when their students saw them as learners this had a powerful effect on students. Students saw that learning was a life-long activity not only for children, but also for adults. The following illustrates this.

We explain to them (students) that we are part of this numeracy project, so sometimes we’re going to have people in here who are going to be working with them. I showed them (students) something and I said ‘Did anybody show your parents? Did they think it was weird?’ ‘yeah’. ‘But why is it weird? I said, it
works’ and it’s just a different way of doing something. So kids know that they are part of this new learning in the class, and also that I’m going to be learning; that I won’t be in the room sometimes because I’m going to be out learning how to do something better in my class. And I definitely think it transfers, because as somebody that never liked to teach math, it’s something that I love, because suddenly as an adult, I began to realize what math was for me. And so I tell the kids that. I explain it to them and they can see the passion; they can hear it in my voice; they can see it in what we do and the kids are excited. (IDI2 17-18)

The participants saw the structure of the school building as conducive to the development of an LC. This was because small numbers of classrooms all opened up onto a common area. As well, the positive morale of the staff was important. According to participants, to keep staff morale up, not only are teachers required to be positive, but also a supportive community and leadership from the principal are essential. For example, a participant indicated that at Trillium there was a parent who came in regularly to help in the computer lab, even when she was not helping her daughter’s class specifically. The following thoughts from a participant regarding morale are helpful at explaining these thoughts further.

These are communities in and of themselves. Even the Kindergartners, they know all the teachers in their pod area. Also, leadership is really essential. Morale of the staff is also huge. Morale that comes from the commitment of not only the staff, and the leaders, and the administration, but also from the community. (IDI2 14)

When asked if morale could be destroyed if a community was unresponsive to the school community’s needs, or ‘in your face’ rather than supportive, the participant replied,

It could. On the other hand, I believe that in some schools, inner-city schools especially, you can have these incredibly strong, close staff with tight bonds because it’s a protective measure. They are so committed to those kids, as hard as it is. They know how important their jobs are. On a way different level than it
would be in a school like this. That can also create an LC because they realize that they want to get through to those kids, to create a safe haven. (IDI2 14)

When participants saw a need they acted upon it. This action-oriented way of responding to what was happening in the community also helped to encourage the growth of the community, as these positive experiences for participants and students were a reward in and of themselves. The following quote from a participant is helpful at explaining this.

As a school we target (student needs). So for instance when our grade 5s are in French, we have all the grade 4s and we designated that a literacy time because we saw early on that our grade 4s needed that extra targeted time to learn. What we do is two of the three of us work together and we’ve done different things. In the first term we did really targeted reading strategies with the kids. This term we’re starting the kids on novel study kind of work. This gives us more flexibility than just our Language Arts program. It allows us to just target specifically for what those grade fours need. (IDI2 6)

**What factors hindered LCs from developing?** Participants at Trillium thought that time, money, and relationships played the biggest part in getting in the way of an LC. Participants talked of time commitments, both inside and outside the school building, playing a part.

Time and outside commitments are always a big thing for what you want to bring in, right? Sometimes we have family commitments, and because a lot of our learning time is not always within school hours we sometimes have to juggle that. But for most people, if we know ahead of time, we do try to plan those times, then that tends to work for us. You know, finances definitely can have an effect if your learning is based on having time to observe, which might require TOCs, or resources, or bringing people in. (IDI2 9-10)

Another factor that participants at Trillium spoke of was the importance of leadership. If the principal was viewed to be micromanaging or not supporting teachers
with difficult parents, participants believed it would be difficult for them to show the vulnerability required to support a PLC.

**Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs?**

This section examines data that indicates whether or not improved teacher learning and/or student learning played a part in creating and maintaining their PLC. Improved teacher learning is examined first, followed by improved student learning.

Participants wanted to continue to learn and get better at their craft. They were interested in keeping current with advances in their field. At Trillium this also meant having the opportunity to visit classrooms in other schools. For example, one participant stated,

Well then I got to thinking, we’ve got a Pro-D day coming up. And instead of going to that workshop, I think I am going to see if I can find some Smart Board training. And I didn’t find anything formal, but I found a teacher who’s using it in her classroom who was willing to have me for the day. So that’s what I’m doing for the Pro-D day. Now I can’t wait. It’s so good for me to stay fresh and new. No matter how many years you’ve been at it there’s always something new. (IDI1 16)

Further to the power of teachers teaching teachers, the act of observing in one another’s classrooms was not a novel concept to the participants at Trillium. The following quote from a focus group participant was illustrative of this.

Some leaders at this school readily offer the opportunity to come and observe and the principal would be willing to let us have prep time or cover us so other people can observe a lesson, and everyone shares their materials here. (FG 7)

When asked why staff at this school felt comfortable having observers in the classroom, the following was the reply:

People feel it’s a safe place. And there are an awful lot of strong teachers on staff. And it starts early. I mean, at one time we had ten student teachers working with us, and we were having eight to ten student teachers per year for the first few years, so we got used to it. We got used to having a lot of people in the room. We also remember, us older ones, when we were starting out and how much we
appreciated the extra help. Also, we’ve got lots of parents that just kind of wander in and out of rooms, so you have to get used to adults being in and out. I think there are an awful lot of strong and confident personalities here too and that goes a long way. (FG 7)

Participants at Trillium examined student progress together, and made plans for teaching together as they found that this helped them to be better teachers. As stated by one participant,

During that first term, we (all three teachers) had all seen the kids, and we were wondering. Some kids you always know about, everybody knows about that child, but there are some children you don’t know about, and so we’re saying ‘I notice’ and suddenly it’s ‘Oh yeah, I know’ and that allowed us to have a really clear picture. So we kind of come together. So that’s a strength and I think the parents can see that. So when you’re able to talk, and you’ve got the data and you’ve got confirmation and support from other teachers, I think you get a clearer picture of a child. And the other thing is, when kids realize that they have three teachers, there is more likelihood of a bond occurring. And that leads to success. We’ve got three pairs of eyes watching, guiding. (IDI2 4-5)

These sentiments regarding more than one teacher being responsible for each child’s learning were echoed throughout the whole school. As one focus group participant stated,

We know what is going on at different grade levels. We’re articulating more clearly between the grades, and we try to give students within one grade group similar opportunities, like all going on the same field trips. And we’ll discuss together grade group issues. (FG 12-13)

Participants at Trillium did use data to help inform their decisions. Additionally, when these data were being used, they were primarily used by teams of teachers rather than by teachers in isolation. The following focus group conversation describes this process well.
We do a lot of collaboration, especially with grade groups or combinations of grades. It takes many forms, like platooning or, team teaching. I guess a lot of the data that we use is brought to our attention and a lot of that comes from the district. I mean they create their goals and that is filtered down to teachers through administrators. (FG 4)

In response to the above, the group was asked: ‘You say you have a lot of grade groups that like to share, so you’re sharing the grades. Do teachers then also choose how they’re going to teach certain units or how they’re going to assess those kinds of units? Is there any of that kind of assessment for learning that teachers here like, or choose to do?’
The response by one focus group participant was,

We do that in grade four and five a bit. We decide together what we’re going to do, and how we’re going to teach it, and how we’re going to mark it. We do the school wide write in grade groups too and we score those together too. (FG 4)

By working collaboratively, it was possible to pull those teachers who were happy with the status-quo along with the rest; to the point that they then became advocates of the new initiative. The following quote from a participant is helpful in explaining this.

I’m just thinking about the numeracy thing, because that’s a pretty good example of how we kind of work collaboratively. Teachers who were maybe more resistant to change before, are now on board. We started this numeracy project three years ago, and in the first year it was a bit of ‘Oh, I don’t know why we need to look at those new ideas, because everything I’ve been doing for the last, you know, umpteen years has been fine’. And now we’re really seeing a shift. People are saying ‘Oh, I never thought of it that way, can you tell me more about that’ and teachers are trying things that they wouldn’t have tried before; a different approach or problem solving approach. They’re trying something and reporting back to their grade group or to the whole staff. They’re coming back and saying ‘Oh, I never thought I would do it that way, but it is better’. (IDI1 13)

Having staff stability was also seen as helpful in gaining some depth over time with their collaborative efforts. Without this, it could be frustrating for those teachers
who must begin anew each year, even though the new staff is very much appreciated. The following participant’s insight is helpful at explaining this understanding.

They (other teachers) also meet together and because (name of teacher)’s class is my buddy class, sometimes I’ll say to her I’ll do the buddy activity so that she can duck out and go and meet with the other two (her grade level teachers). They’ll exchange report card information or whatever they do, and I would love to be part of that with somebody at my grade level. I did that at another school, we did all our planning together and I loved that. I miss that and I’d like to do more of that. I wish we could keep the same staff for longer, you know, that whole maternity leave thing. It’s been a bit of a revolving door. It’s just the way it is. But I would love to have somebody else consistently at my grade. I’ve noticed with kindergarten, we’ve had the same two gals doing kindergarten for a number of years, and they’re certainly on board with the math and I’m really seeing the good results with my class this year. This is the first year I’ve been able to move really quickly in math at the beginning of this year, because they (the students) were really solid and that’s great. (IDI1 5-6)

The participants at Trillium believed that their collaborative efforts had had a positive impact on student learning. Though participants at Trillium knew that their predominant focus was to help students academically, there was recognition that schooling was more than just academics. As one participant put it,

Academics are important, and we know that otherwise we wouldn’t be teaching. But there’s more to education than just the academics. Children who are going to go out into the world and be good citizens and make a difference don’t always have to be the smartest. Right now there’s such attention given to achievement but that is only part of what we do. (IDI2 15-16)

Connected with the desire to instill positive non-academic attributes in their students was the importance participants put on helping their students develop into leaders. Opportunities to help students develop positive leadership skills were actively pursued within the school. Examples of this were evident within the student leadership team and the technology assistance that students gave to the adults in the building.
Participants reported that when students saw their teachers were happy, they in turn were happy too. The following focus group quote demonstrates the reasoning behind this.

I think the kids are happier. Compared to my other school, I can see the difference, because the doors seem more open. And it just seems like such a small thing, but you know, when it’s a rainy day here, they can play hockey in the hall. I’ve never seen anything like that at a school and I think that’s so great. The kids probably appreciate that. But I also think the kids see us talking to each other too. They see us interacting with each other and they know that we’re all together and it’s good. (FG 12)

The fact that the student body was not seen as super needy in comparison to some schools in District B made it easier for participants to focus on the academics as well. This was appreciated, as stated by the following participant’s statement.

You don’t have to go very far from here to come to schools that have a lot more challenges than we have here. So that’s a big bonus. For me, that’s part of the reason I’m here. I like to be able to attack the curriculum and really see the learning in the children. I’ve been in schools where you have a lot more challenges and you’re putting out fires, and you’ve got students in foster care, and we have a few students with those kinds of challenges here. But generally it’s pretty stable and we’ve got pretty supportive parents. (IDI1 2)

The participants were very encouraged by the results they were seeing in their students as a result of the numeracy project they were engaged in. This was due in part to the time participants spent in collaboration before, during and after lessons had been taught to students. A district teacher leader’s assistance with this initiative was also thought to be helpful.

When asked what might get in the way of helping student learning in a school, one participant stated that if teachers felt the need to have total control or possession over their own classrooms, it would be more difficult to be collaborative. For example,

We’re not afraid to go into one another’s classrooms. These aren’t just MY students. There are some teachers in some schools that if you go up and you say something about a student in their class, they become VERY agitated and
offended. Because sometimes when you say something, it can be seen as critical about that person and their ability to manage. But the kids in this school know that we’re all their teachers. (IDI2 13)

What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have?

This section examines in turn the influence that politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have on an LC. These factors are looked at from both the positive and the negative perspective, to ascertain what helps the LC to develop and what does not.

Politics. Participants at Trillium did not consider themselves to be a politically active group. Their focus was on their own school community and what could help both their students and themselves as teachers. As one participant stated,

We don’t become too political at this school because our main goal is here on site. But there are some things you can’t help. It’s policies that have been established earlier through our teachers’ union or through the district and the board of education. So there are some things you can’t control and you have to work with it. We try and work around things the best that we can. We don’t have anybody who’s standing around saying, ‘You have to do this’, or ‘Let’s fight this’. But I would never want the union not to exist. It’s an important part of why we have some of our freedoms and why we’re able to make decisions as professionals. But we take the best of both and move forward. You have to be able to do that otherwise, it’s going to be gridlock, no movement, just pushing back and forth. And that’s not going to help, and who wants a war zone? That’s not healthy. So we tend to not let ourselves become too engulfed. I think we are good at keeping the focus on the education of our students and what’s good for us as a staff, our relationships with each other. You know, there are some things it’s just not worth fighting about. (IDI2 20-21)

Participants at Trillium very much appreciated the release time their principal was able to provide for them. As stated by a participant of the focus group,

Well it’s a big deal because sometimes administrators expect you all to meet after school, or before school, or during your recess or during your lunch. There’s not any kind of compensation for that. But because she does enable us, she gives us
Developing Learning Communities

coverage or whatever, when we are asked to meet at lunch, or after school, nobody really minds because you feel ‘Well gee, I had half a day a couple of weeks ago to work on so and so, so it’s the least I can do. And then she brings us food and you know what? That’s a small thing but it makes a big difference. (FG 5)

One factor all participants felt was important was not allowing people to become negative or aggressive. It was felt that everyone was entitled to have their opinion, but they did not have the right to push this on others. This also applied to visiting members of the teachers’ union as evidenced by the following focus group quote.

In fact we don’t like that aggressive thing. I’m the union rep and I just give out the information, and everybody is adult and professional enough to decide how they’re going to use it. So I hope I don’t push an agenda in any way. But we had a union guy come out one day and I actually told him don’t bother coming back. He was really aggressive, wasn’t quite the right fit for us, which is kind of hard because I never realized how intertwined politics were with teaching. (FG 10)

Participants also talked about the importance of taking the time to make sure everyone had a say and felt like they were on board. This school level of politics is important to note, as without the buy-in from the teachers, it is unlikely that any initiative will thrive. The following participant describes this well when saying,

But the thing that really would inhibit it (an initiative) is the idea of everybody being on board. You want that whole. You want that sense of unity, and when you have a group of professionals who are committed, but who also have established themselves in certain areas, you know, we’re all doing the numeracy project, but for some people, it’s not something that they’re going to openly say, yeah I need to learn this, because we aren’t all in that same learner mode. (IDI2 9-10)

Interpersonal relations. Even though the participants at Trillium took their work very seriously, there was an evident sense that having fun was important to them. During the focus group session, one participant made a point of saying that it was important for
people to have a sense of humour. The following quote from a focus group participant was representative of this sentiment.

We like to laugh and give each other a hard time. But part of that is the comfortable feeling we have with each other. I honestly think it’s the school culture that makes us successful. If we weren’t happy, and we didn’t feel comfortable and positive, then we wouldn’t be that successful. (FG 13-14)

The personalities on staff were described (by participants) as being strong and positive. They were supportive of one another and there was willingness to both give and take. As stated by another focus group participant,

In other schools there will be lots of great people. But there’ll still be some that aren’t that giving, and open, and friendly or helpful. But it’ll still be a good place to work. In comparison, here almost everyone has something positive, or is open and willing to help. And no one just shuts his or her door and wants nothing to do with anyone. For everybody here, that’s part of his or her personality, so I think that makes a big difference too. As well, we have a really positive feel here. But it’s the people that make it positive. This comes from the administration, but it also comes from the teachers. (FG 7)

In addition, one participant noted it was important to celebrate whatever talents and skills people brought to the school. If what they had to offer was beneficial to students, then it should be welcomed, regardless of whether or not one personally valued that skill or talent. The following participant had this to say on the topic:

You can’t change how other people are, right? And you keep moving on, and I think that’s what we see in some of our district based project meetings. You hear people coming who are enthusiastic, but when they go back to their school, it’s hard because they’ve got some people who are pushing back. And you know what? You have to be aware that some people are going to be different, and you know that how somebody approaches their teaching isn’t going to be exactly the same as yours. But you need to say to yourself, are the kids benefitting? Are they learning? Are we all moving ahead? As individuals we all bring something, and that’s important. Because you know you have to respect what everyone brings.
Maybe you don’t think that having a great coach is important at your school. Maybe you think they should be looking more at the fine arts component, but how can you deny that that’s not something that’s going to reach out and be valuable to some kid. I think a lot has to do with people’s mindset, and what teachers are thinking, and how accepting they are as individuals. You know, if you’re accepting as an individual, and you’re open, hopefully you bring that to your workplace too. I think it’s really basically trust, professional respect. (IDI2 24-25)

According to participants, communication was also very important if a school’s staff was to keep moving in a positive direction; especially if someone had done something that you did not like or did not understand. Without communicating your thoughts, issues could fester and then become unhealthy for everyone. The following participant quote is helpful at illustrating this point of view.

We’ve talked about communication. I think one thing I really learned from (name) is if you’re having a problem with somebody, just go and say something to him or her. Don’t worry about it. And I think it’s really positive and (name) models that too, so if you do have a bit of, you know, a few words, you’re able to just go to the person and talk to them. And I think that’s really important, and a lot of people don’t do that, never mind teachers. (IDI1 6)

**Trust.** Participants at Trillium believed that trust and professional respect were key attributes of a well-functioning LC. They also thought the principal held them accountable in a way that was supportive. The following from the focus group session explains this well.

She supports. She validates. She makes you want to be good. She wants you to be here. She holds you accountable. When I first started here, she made a lot of classroom visits, informal observations, not formally observing, but just dropping something off, seeing how you’re doing, asking if you need help with anything. She recognizes the strength that every staff member has and I think that empowers us. She respects what we do, and she makes you feel comfortable enough to take risks, so you’re willing to do stuff and try stuff. She believes in us. She lets us be
the leaders. She’s also very good at delegating, like instead of trying to do everything she’ll say ‘oh great, you think that’s a good idea so why don’t you take that on’, and report back to her. And she trusts us to handle it. (FG 2)

Participants also trusted one another to not take advantage of either the system, or of each other. This came from being open and feeling accepted. A participant gave an example of this when she stated,

At the beginning of the year we always leave room in our classes because we have international students that tend to come in January. When they arrive we all think ‘how are we going to accommodate these students’? It affects the LST (learning support teacher) schedule but I don’t hear too much grumbling. Sometimes an LST teacher will come to me and say, ‘we just got a whole rash of international students, so I’m going to have to cancel your group for a couple of weeks’, which is fine with me. So the flexibility is there. As (name) said, we all feel like they’re all our kids and you know, we’re okay to trust each other; that if this is what’s best for the whole group then it’s okay. (IDI 7-8)

Trust issues could prevent a PLC from growing and thriving. The Trillium participants noted the following trust issues: staff not willing to look at more than one side of an issue, staff not on board, lack of support or trust from parents, staff hiding resources in their rooms rather than sharing, and professionals in the building not respecting one another’s time. When asked if having a certain combination of people on staff could soothe those turbulent waters, a participant replied,

I think we do have people like that on staff. I think we have people who do that really well; who try to look at both sides, because it’s not like we haven’t had conflicts amongst our staff here, and between each other. But you know what? It’s too important to let that get in the way of where we want to go. It’s because you care about the people on your staff. We’re all aware of each other’s faults, the things that we fall down on. I guess it’s that sense of community that you have for the people in the school and for the school itself. We deal with it, I guess, like you would with anything. This is what happens sometimes in life and
you have to kind of confront things, deal with them and try to move on. (IDI2 11-12)

**Budget.** Participants were grateful for the time the principal secured to ensure teachers could meet together and plan for their students. They also found the timely purchase of resources and the sharing of those resources to be helpful. The principal’s invitation to the staff to look at the budget, if they were interested, was noted and appreciated. One participant also mentioned that the PAC was also very generous with money. He stated:

PAC is really supportive at this school. They put money into every teacher account, plus lump sums for technology or for library books, and then if you want something in particular, like the music teacher needs something, it’s no problem. (IDI1 12)

Participants felt that without the money to help release teachers, or to purchase materials for new initiatives, maintaining the PLC would be that much more difficult. The following participant’s quote is helpful at explaining this.

Any kind of finances have an effect because part of your learning is based on having time to observe, which might require TOCs, or resources, or bringing people in. (IDI2 9)

**How does the LC become systemic?** This section examines data that indicates whether or not there are ways that may help the LC to become systemic. To this end, it was helpful to examine the life system that was in place at Trillium to see if there were lessons to be learned.

The participants at Trillium believed having structures in place helped to encourage and foster an LC, and having staff in place that were open-minded and desirous of working together were key elements in helping an LC to become systemic. At Trillium it was not uncommon for a group of teachers to be released during an assembly so they could work on a common goal. As stated by one participant,

If it’s an assembly, she’ll (the principal) release, for example, the numeracy team; or she’ll say I really need you guys to get this one thing together, this proposal or
Developing Learning Communities

whatever it happens to be. Can you use that assembly time for the three or four of you to meet? And you know it’s great because we don’t need fifteen teachers to sit there at an assembly. She’ll take the whole school, sometimes, for an assembly and release all of us. So I’m very mindful of that, and I want to make sure that whenever I’m asked to give a little bit after school I say yes. (IDI1 7)

Participants were also beginning to see the effect of the collaborative efforts of their colleagues as a result of the platoon teaching and of the team teaching. They enjoyed demonstrating lessons for one another, and viewed themselves as a team that had a great number of talents. There was a worry of losing the district’s helping teachers (who often begin the cycle of demonstrating lessons) due to cutbacks in funding as explained by the following participant.

I’d hate to see that, and it won’t end for us, even if we lose the project and we’re just on our own. Because the helping teacher will come and do a demonstration lesson, and we’ll get TOCs to cover the classes so we can all come and watch. And I love that. And then there’s all kind of rich conversation after. Even if we lose the TOC funding, we don’t need the helping teacher to come and do a demo lesson; we have enough talent here. We can demo for each other and I think that will continue, and maybe that’s a bit of an indicator of how strong the program is that it will go on without the district support. (IDI1 16)

As a team, the participants at Trillium had goals they had chosen, and the platooning and team teaching that they did took this into account. The platooning was very purposeful in its design and in its delivery, according to one participant. As a result, participants could target specific skills they wanted students to attain. The participants viewed their mandate to include the whole child, not just academic achievement. This was a more measured and balanced view, according to participants, that helped to lead to more happiness for all.

Connected to this happiness was the importance of having some regularity to the flow of the day, and of the week. If last minute changes were made more often than they needed to be, this had a negative effect on the teacher’s ability to feel effective. A few years back, things were not as harmonious at Trillium. According to one participant,
When there are last minute decisions all the time it’s hard. And you’d come into the school in the morning to find out there’s an assembly in fifteen minutes. So there goes your lesson out the window. Or, maybe there was a lesson that I had three or four parents lined up to come and help me with, and now I’m going to look bad because I’m going to have to tell them, we’re not doing it now. There was a real tension here and there was too much teacher against teacher. Everybody had their issues, and I just learned to shut my door and teach my class, and try and forget about all that stuff going on. It was impossible to forget about because there was always parking lot chatter and that kind of thing. (IDI1 9)

It is apparent there was a time when creating the conditions for a healthy PLC was elusive for the participants. It is the current leadership in partnership with the staff who are committed to openness. According to participants, this is what made the PLC so vibrant.

**FSA data for Trillium elementary.** Table 13 provides provincial government FSA data collected in February of 2008, 2009 and 2010. The data were collected from grade four and grade seven students who attended the school during the years listed above. Rates of participation were generally high, ranging from 83-96% for each sub-test (reading, writing, mathematics), in each year.

For grade four Trillium students, it is interesting to note that the achievement was higher than both the district and the provincial average in two of the three areas (writing and numeracy). For grade seven students, achievement was higher than the district average in two of the three areas (reading comprehension and numeracy) and higher than the provincial average in all three areas (with the exception of reading and writing in 2008).

**Satisfaction survey data for Trillium elementary.** Table 14 provides provincial government collected Satisfaction survey data for the school years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. The data was collected for grade four and grade seven students who attended the school during the years listed. Response rates were high (For grade four 2007/08: 88%; 2008/09: 91%; 2009/10: 82% and for grade seven 2007/08: 91%);
## Table 13

*Trillium Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data*

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<th>Grade Four</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Seven</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Reading and Numeracy – Average FSA scaled score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.
For Writing – Average FSA score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

2008/09: 91%; 2009/10: 100%). Parent response numbers were too small to be of any significance and therefore, were not included. District B and provincial average results for grade four and seven were also included. Of interest in the grade four data, is that both the district and provincial averages, for the most part, declined a little each year, while the school’s data generally, was lower in the first and last year listed, and higher in the middle year. In all three years the school’s average perception was generally lower than the district’s average, although there was less of a difference in the last year listed (2009/2010). The grade seven school data showed the opposite pattern to the grade four data. It was generally higher in the first and last year, and lower in the middle year. The district data for grade seven students also followed this pattern. In all three years, the school’s average perception was generally lower than the district’s average, although there was less of a difference in the last year listed (2009/2010).
Table 14

*Trillium Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>District B/Province</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92/92</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>87/87</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78/78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>82/81</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>90/90</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>86/84</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>90/89</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70/65</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>District B/Province</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>84/83</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80/74</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78/72</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>77/72</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>89/88</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82/78</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>88/85</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58/53</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive responses are considered responses of “many times” or “all the time”

**Parkside Elementary**

Parkside Elementary School was located in a suburban neighbourhood close to one of the commercial centers of District B. Homes that surrounded the area were single-family homes and apartment buildings. The school drew from many socio-economic backgrounds, and was classed as an “inner-city” school, as there were many families considered needy and vulnerable. However, the school also enrolled students from families that would be considered middle class. District programs at Parkside included: a
school meals program, an inner city school early literacy project, a grade K-2 phonemic awareness project, project SPARK, and Soar to Success.

The school was a two-storey building consisting of three long hallways connected together, with classrooms off of each hallway. The school was well maintained and had a modern playground for student use. On the other side of the playground was the neighbouring secondary school. The school had a population of 384 students in 17 divisions. Staff at the school consisted of: one principal, one vice-principal, 17 regular classroom teachers, four learning support teachers, two music teachers, one teacher-librarian, one part-time counselor, two child care workers, and nine special education assistants (SEAs).

Parkside was a diverse community and was in the process of modifying its school’s plan so that it reflected the foundation of a community school. According to the school’s 2009-2010 growth plan, entitled *Priorities for Student Learning*,

We have a wonderfully diverse community representing 26 different languages with significant representation from Vietnamese (14%), Punjabi (7%), Filipino (6%) families. We continue to see an increase in our Punjabi speaking families and our Laotian and Arabic families. We have received families from rural Mexico and families from refugee camps in Thailand where the children have not received schooling. School data released January 2008 indicates that 47% of our students speak a language other than English in the home (twice the provincial % and marginally higher than the District %). 38% of our students are classified as ESL students for funding purposes (4 times the provincial % and twice the District %). 8% of our students have aboriginal ancestry (more than double the District %). Canada census data indicates that 33% of our families have annual incomes below $30,000 (1.5 times the District and Provincial %), yet the education attainment of 70% equates to both District and Provincial %. (Parkside School Plan, 2009-2010)

The PLC at this school was not formalized. The staff chose to participate in many district initiatives, and it was working together on these initiatives that formed the framework for the PLC. The principal and vice-principal of the school often took teachers’ classes in order to enable participants to meet together on an initiative. The staff often chose to share new initiatives with the rest of the staff at what they called a “curriculum café”. At a curriculum café, the principal brought in pizza so that participants could meet together at lunch and share a promising educational idea or practice.
The staff members at the school were given the opportunity to fill out the staff survey (Appendix G) two weeks prior to any interviews being conducted. The Principal at the school made the surveys available to the staff. These data were collected from the school one week prior to conducting the interviews. Fifteen of the sixteen teachers completed the survey, which represented a 94% return rate. Data were examined for any inconsistencies or trends so they could be explored during the interview and focus group portions of the data gathering. When the surveys were collected, the principal shared insights about the impact of the PLC on the school.

**Survey data collected at Parkside elementary.** Table 15 shows the data collected from the survey conducted at Parkside Elementary School. Any ‘not applicable’ responses, or questions not answered have been included together in column four. For most of the questions asked, the responses were in agreement (either strongly agree or agree).

The first statements that do not follow this pattern were statements 2, 3 and 4 in the *BC Context* dimension. These statements were related to provincial, district and union policies. In looking at the three statements together, the data indicated that district level policies were seen as the most helpful of the three. On a four-point scale, the overall mean for this dimension was 3.23, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.21 for statement 2 (provincial policies) to a high of 3.67 for statements 5 (student learning) and 10 (school reputation).

The means for the next three dimensions were as follows. In the *Shared and Supportive Leadership* dimension, the overall mean was 3.32, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.00 for statement 13 (proactive principal) to a high of 3.53 for statement 15 (distributed leadership). For the *Shared Values and Vision* dimension, the overall mean was 3.46, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.13 for statement 24 (data use for vision development) to a high of 3.67 for statements 21 (school goals) and 22 (policy, program, goal alignment). Meanwhile, in the *Collective Learning and Application* dimension, the overall mean was 3.48, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.20 for statements 30 (collaborative data analysis) and 31 (collaborative analysis of student work) to a high of 3.60 for statements 25 (staff seek knowledge together), 26 (addressing diverse student needs), 27 (open dialogue) and 28 (continued staff inquiry).
### Table 15

*Parkside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The BC Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community) at this school.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Our PLC positively affects student learning.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Our PLC positively affects adult learning.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. This school is a desirable place to work in our district.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Parents see this school as a good place.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The community speaks favourably about this school.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. This school handles challenges in a healthy way.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - BC Context dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about across grade and subject areas.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values and Vision</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Decisions are made in alignment with school’s values and vision.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average - Shared Values and Vision dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15

*Parkside Elementary Staff Survey Data (n=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>S.A.</th>
<th>A.</th>
<th>D.</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>N.A.</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>St.D.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective Learning and Application</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>address diverse student needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning through open dialogue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideas that lead to continued inquiry.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge to solve problems.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Average – Collective Learning and Application dimension</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.56</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Personal Practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>encouragement.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>al practices.</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve instructional practices.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>share the results of their practices.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall student</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>improvement.</td>
<td>Average – Shared Personal Practice dimension</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions – Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on trust and respect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to embed change into the culture of the school.</td>
<td>Average – Supportive Conditions Relationships dimension</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the *Shared Personal Practice* dimension, there were two statements where the pattern of agreement was not as strong as the rest of the statements within the dimension: statements 34 (collaborative review of student work) and 36 (sharing of student work), both dealing with the sharing of student work. For the *Shared Personal Practice* dimension, the overall mean was 3.22 with the mean ranging from a low of 2.93 for statements 34 (collaborative review of student work) and 36 (sharing of student work) to a high of 3.53 for statements 32 (observing peers) and 35 (sharing practice).

Meanwhile, in the *Supportive Conditions-Relationships* dimension, the overall mean was 3.58, with the mean ranging from a low of 3.33 for statement 41 (examination of data) to a high of 3.80 for statements 37 (caring relationships) and 38 (culture of trust and respect). The supportive conditions-relationships dimension had the highest mean of the eight measured at Parkside.
For the *Supportive Conditions-Structures* dimension, there was one statement (43) where the pattern of agreement was not as strong as the rest within the dimension. For statement 43 (school schedule), there were twelve respondents who agreed with the statement, while there were three respondents who disagreed. The *Supportive Conditions-Structures* section had the lowest mean of the eight measured at Parkside. The overall mean was 3.00, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.80 for statement 43 (school schedule) to a high of 3.07 for statement 45 (technology availability). Lastly, for the *Statements* section, the overall mean was 3.17, with the mean ranging from a low of 2.87 for statement 47 (clean, inviting facility), to a high of 3.33 for statement 49 (school communication).

**Interview data.** The focus group was conducted in the school’s library during a lunch break. Five teachers, representing various grade levels participated in the focus group interview. The library offered a relatively quiet meeting place. Two in-depth interviews were conducted in the library. One participant had been at Parkside for five of her seven teaching years. The second participant had been a teacher for ten years and had been at Parkside for seven of those ten years. One participant was currently teaching children in the late primary years, while the other was teaching children in the late intermediate years. Both participants had previously had the opportunity to work at other schools in District B, and were therefore able to comment on similarities and differences between those schools and Parkside elementary.

**What factors helped LCs to develop?**

Participants interviewed at Parkside believed that they (teachers) were the best choice to lead the PLC, supported by the administration. Further, the actual structure of the PLC needed to come from within the school itself for the PLC to continue to develop. The following quote from a participant is helpful at explaining this.

I think part of it must be dependent upon administration. I think if you’ve got an administrator that really clamped down on things, like our curriculum cafes, where we all get together and have pizza, and let us run it, you know and was just a participant. I think if you really got someone that said ‘We’re going to have professional learning communities and I’m going to run them and every week somebody’s going to present on some…’ I think that might shut it down. I think
the administrator must be a part of it. We’ve had two different administrators who’ve both been very supportive of it. So the grass roots part then, is very important in helping to maintain the PLC. And it has to be structured from the inside because we do what we do and our administrators support us. Our administrators do not force us into it. I don’t think they could. Even though we find it exhausting sometimes, it’s enjoyable. It’s enjoyable for me and fulfilling to learn new things and to try them, and to have some things work and to share things that work with other people, and things that don’t and help each other with our problems. It’s fulfilling and it’s sort of what teaching is about. Nobody ever thinks that when they became a teacher they’re going to hole up in their room with a pack of kids and have to deal with everything all on their own. (IDI1 7-8)

Participants believed that even though staff had come and gone, the LC persisted because it was such a positive experience. This somehow rubbed off on new staff members, such that they wanted to participate. As stated by one participant,

I mean we have turnover here, but it’s never half your staff leaving at once. And I think that because it’s a positive experience, it rubs off. That’s the only reason I can think of as to why we maintain it. When we have people come and go, the people who come in get encouraged to behave that way, and then it becomes positive, and they realize that it makes life better, easier, and so it must rub off. I think it’s because it’s what people really want. If you have three people leave and three new people come in, they find that this is a community where we share problems, and ideas, and curriculum cafes, so then it very quickly becomes natural. I think it’s so much easier to share your ideas and problems than it is to keep them. And I think that’s why I’m surprised that more schools aren’t like this, because I think it’s so much harder to keep yourself separate. (IDI1 6-7)

Because of these sentiments, participants at Parkside were never satisfied with the status-quo, and were continually looking to make improvements to their practice. It was a core group of staff that kept this momentum going through their example. As one participant stated,
I think what works here is, we’ve had a core group of sort of strong leaders, or people that set a really good example. And their enjoyment in it and their positive attitude towards things pulls in the others and offers that supportive feeling to everybody. (IDI2 10)

Participants believed that teachers at inner city schools generally sought out support systems because of the additional challenges presented to them at those schools. The PLC was an example of such a system, and this way of thinking was described as follows, by a participant at the school.

Because it’s quite challenging we feel the need for greater support. Therefore we actively seek out support systems, and that’s one of the ways that they are maintained. It’s like a survival kind of thing. You just need more people to help you get through the day; help you with the students and the problems that you may face with them. I think too that people that are here want to be here, because they feel that they are making a difference. As a result, there is quite a bit of collegiality around here. There is that sort of atmosphere here where we are flexible and we accommodate each other as best as we can. But it goes deeper than that. I think that there is a passion for the kids in this community, in this school. The teachers go all out to give them the best; to do what they can to help them succeed. Unless you are a very dedicated educator, I don’t think you would typically remain in a school with such great challenges, because it’s hard work. And it requires a lot of additional effort to be successful in this type of setting. Therefore, the people who remain and are the consistent core base who have a very similar focus and a very similar vision. We are always looking at getting better at learning and implementing new programs in order to serve the students better. (FG 1-2)

A participant described those teachers who are part of the core. “I think if you can get a good twenty-five percent of the people on board, then you have enough support yourself, and can carry on and move forward, and set that example, and hope that others can come along.” (IDI2 14) Connected to this was the fact that these people, even though they had been teaching for a long time, still had the energy and enthusiasm to want to
developing learning communities. The following focus group quote from a participant explains this well.

And although many of us have been teaching for a considerable number of years, I don’t think anyone’s really to that point where they’re really kind of jaded; where they’re saying ‘Oh, you know what, that was tried in the eighties and it didn’t work, so we’re not doing it now’. I mean you get teachers who will just say ‘Nope, I’ve tried it before and it doesn’t work, and I’m not going to try it now.’ I don’t think anyone really says that here. I think we’re more open. We’re more prepared to take risks and try new things. The staff isn’t polarized. I would say that in other settings, there could be very polarized staff where there are people who are sort of trying new things, and other people who are fighting against new things. But I don’t see that here. I think generally people value one another’s expertise, and acknowledge that everybody has their strengths and that’s valued. I think that’s part of the collaboration that happens. (FG 10)

What factors hindered LCs from developing? Some Parkside participants believed the people within the school were the primary reason learning communities sometimes had difficulty developing and being sustained. A number of the participants had the opportunity to work at other schools prior to working at Parkside, and it was these experiences that participants drew upon to explain this phenomenon. According to one participant, what got in the way of forming and maintaining a PLC at other schools was the following:

Sometimes there are personalities that don’t work together. People who do it their way and aren’t willing to open up to another way, or even see another person’s way. One of the other schools I worked at was quite difficult. I would not call it a Professional Learning Community. It was quite negative. There were a lot of cliquey groups. One group would get their back up about something, and then another group would get their back up, and then there was actually infighting and arguing. It was a negative atmosphere. The people didn’t see eye-to-eye on things. They weren’t willing to stay after school for a meeting because in their eyes their job ended at two forty-five. So it was quite different. It was almost as if they were in it for different reasons. Some people were there because they liked
working with children, loved teaching and wanted to do the best job they could. Others were there to leave at two forty-five because they could. A number of them were on the verge of retirement and had publicly said that they were done. They were in it to top up their pension as much as they could, but they had finished, and didn’t have any energy left, so that provided some stumbling blocks and some walls. There were three of us who were younger, within our first five years of teaching, and then there was a gap of about fifteen years, and the rest of them had twenty plus years of teaching experience. So it became the young versus the old in their eyes. The admin. was very supportive, but it was sort of a struggle. It became the young people and the admin against the old. (IDI2 7-8)

The participant felt that because the staff remained much the same, while the administration was changed every few years, the staff became even more entrenched in this negative behaviour. The following shows her thoughts.

I think it slowly built over some time with the changing of administrators, with the staff staying very solid. The staff thought that things worked just fine as is, saying ‘If it’s not broke why are we going to fix it? You can’t make us’. It’s really nice to hear that the staff has now shifted and some have retired, so it’s a much more positive place now. What happened was unfortunate though. I often wonder if those teachers realize how much they dragged things down. And is that really how they wanted to go out? I’ve worked with many people who have retired before and they didn’t have that attitude. I wonder if it was because there was such a large group that it developed that negative sort of group mentality. (IDI2 8-9)

Time was another factor the participants at Parkside believed played a part in the development of a PLC. Because the students at the school were so needy, participants felt there was just not enough time to do all they would like to. This time crunch had the propensity to cause burnout among dedicated teachers if ways to address this time crunch were not enacted. The following quote from a participant explains this well.

There’s so much that we want to do and just not enough time. There’s so much that I want to do right now, with setting up differentiation and you can only take
Developing Learning Communities

these tiny little steps. You want to get there and you wish you just had a week to sit down and do nothing but plan. And you know, you don’t have that. There’s no lack of motivation, or will, it’s time. (IDI1 6)

Participants also acknowledged that not all teachers were interested in working collaboratively. So if there were a majority of teachers with this mind-set, it was unlikely that a PLC could be started, much less developed or sustained. As one participant said, I know there’re people who like to do their thing and this is just their job, and they do their thing, and they go home and they come back, and they do it again, and they go home. They don’t have the interest in collaborating or working together. I think you have to make it a priority; put your effort into the right places. You need to be willing to be open to new ideas; to be flexible. (IDI2 6)

In addition, it was really hard for teachers to go into a school each day if they felt it was a negative working environment. There were people at Parkside who did not choose to collaborate, but “they don’t hinder others from doing so” (IDI2 13). This was very different from what one participant described at a different school she worked at previously, where the people who wanted to collaborate were definitely in the minority. It was really hard to survive in that school, and to want to get up and go there the next day, because there were so many negative things floating through the air. It was two others, and myself so it was really hard. If there were more of us it could have been more of a team feeling. I think it would have been more positive. (IDI2 13)

**Does improved teacher/student learning play a part in maintaining LCs?**
Participants at Parkside actively looked for ways to become better teachers. They sought out district initiatives in which to participate, and enjoyed taking risks with their teaching practices. This was a school where participants saw value in experimenting with their practice when trying to meet student needs and this was known within the broader community as well, as evidenced by this focus group quote.

I’m new to this staff. I met someone who was in a course that I was taking and they recommended this school to me. There’s a reputation outside the school that
the principal is very supportive and cares deeply about the students. Also that there were good programs going on, and that the staff was very committed to making a difference. When I first came to the school, for professional days last year, what really struck me was how honest people were within a formal forum. It didn’t seem as if there was just one opinion that was being expressed, but various opinions could be expressed, and people were willing to work through that. Another thing that I really appreciate is that people here are willing to take risks with their ‘knowledge and understanding’. For instance, we have the curriculum café. That’s when teachers come and share a particular strategy they’re using in the classroom. They’ll do a demo. I’ve done it and I’ve had teachers come into my class to do a lesson, showing for instance how to use text pictures for nonfiction. (FG 2)

It was a district-initiated program that first got the participants into one another’s classrooms at Parkside, and now that they’ve done it, they would not go back to their old ways. They continued to learn from one another, as reported by one focus group participant.

You just feel comfortable more to let people in. You really don’t care once they’ve seen you. Well I think at my old school that was going on as well. They were also involved in that district program, so there was a lot of sharing. This year I’m an LST teacher, but when I was a classroom teacher I would invite my LST teacher in to work on a particular program with me so that she could model it in front of me, and that gave me the courage to try as well. It was almost like she was my teacher and then she could release responsibility to me, and then that gave me the confidence to take over. (FG 3)

Participants did take time to work together on things like curriculum planning and assessment. Although Assessment for Learning (AfL) was not used school wide, there were examples of participants using AfL to help improve student learning. The following example from one of the focus group participants was helpful at explaining this.

I think I use it daily in my role as an LST teacher, like when I’m taking a running record for reading. They’ll check in with me to see if they’ve made an error.
They see it on the paper in front of them, so it’s a constant assessment for learning. Last year we did a writing sample and then we had a half-day release with a literacy support teacher. We used the performance standards to figure out where the students were, and to discuss whether or not we thought the student was within or not within expectations. There was a lot of discussion about that. (FG 5)

The participants did not consider themselves to be stagnant in terms of their instructional and assessment practices. Whenever participants went out and learned something, they brought it back to the rest of the staff. They enjoyed getting into each other’s classrooms to see new strategies in action and because of their PLC, there was often cross-grade collaboration. The following, as stated by one participant, explains how the PLC was affecting student success.

I think it’s great. There’s a lot of cross-grade collaboration; teachers working together as buddy classes or even just supporting each other. If you know the grade twos are doing a really cool science experiment, you think let’s throw the kids together; let’s all do it. I also think us modeling those professional relationships really just shows the kids good relationship examples, because they don’t all have those positive relationship examples at home. They’re picking up on those behaviours here. (IDI2 12)

A new participant on staff was particularly grateful that her colleagues shared their resources and curriculum ideas. If something worked well, the participants wanted to give all of the students in the school the opportunity to benefit, not just the students registered in their classes. As one focus group participant stated,

I was a brand new teacher as of last year. Everyone talks about their first year as being extremely challenging, in the sense of not knowing where to go with curriculum and where to go for resources and the staff here just kind of come to you. I didn’t have to go in begging and pleading and knocking on doors. I don’t think we ever knock on doors around here. I think we do like to share. When I do something and it’s gone well, I’m excited about it and want to spread it. You like to think that maybe that’s the beginning of something that’s going to help other
Developing Learning Communities

children. Because really, that’s what we’re all about and I think that’s why we don’t have blinders on when we’re in our own classrooms. We want to know that our entire school is doing a good job. (FG 11)

One drawback to looking at only your own school, according to one focus group participant, is you sometimes get a skewed idea about what a particular grade level of work should look like as you become so enmeshed in your own school’s culture. This participant thought it would be helpful for teachers to be able to mark some things district-wide, so that the bigger perspective could be seen. In regard to this she stated, I feel it’s an area we should really be working on, and I’ve said this not only in our school, but almost district wide, because I think that you get a very skewed perception of what is approaching, meeting, exceeding, in a school where you have so many struggling students. (FG 6)

In terms of student learning, the participants saw all the students as their collective responsibility. Because the student body was needy, participants viewed their job as helping the whole child, not just the academic part of learning as evidenced by this participant’s comment. It’s just a different world and you have to approach things differently. When you go through the teacher-training program, you’ve got a lot of emphasis on curriculum where here, you can’t do the curriculum until you know the kids have actually eaten breakfast in the morning. You know we have a breakfast program that teachers run, so the kids can eat. You know you can’t do it until you know they are safe. Did they have a good night? There are some kids that come in and they didn’t. There were things happening at home that have to be dealt with or honoured as being part of what they bring to school first, before any learning can happen. So we’re really whole child centered here. I think that’s one of our strengths. (IDI2 5)

According to participants, the students knew the teachers not only cared for each other, they cared for them as well. Participants noticed the students picked up on this collaborative nature and tried to emulate it in the classroom. Participants said they did
Developing Learning Communities

not use AfL in any systemic way within the school at this point. However, they were beginning to look closely at differentiated instruction as a strategy to help student learning, and differentiated instruction, by its very nature, uses AfL. In this regard one participant said,

We do a lot of ongoing assessment in our classrooms, because we have so many different levels of kids, and one of our big pushes right now, as a school, is differentiated instruction. We have a semi-research group on that, and I’m looking at it independently myself. A big thing for us right now is trying to find a way to figure out where everybody is, and sort of work out where they are and how to do that. (IDI1 3)

What influence do politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget have?

This section examines in turn, the influence that politics, interpersonal relations, trust, and budget have on an LC. These factors are looked at from both the positive and the negative perspective, to ascertain what helps the LC to develop and what does not.

Politics. The participants saw politics generally as something that was not helpful; something that educators needed to work beyond. As stated by one participant,

I don’t think that this is a school where politics is a big thing. I think relationships are a huge thing. There’re still people that don’t get along, and people who have falling outs, and you get mad at people, but it’s more like family relationships than it is politics in my view. (IDI1 9)

However, diminishing provincial dollars, as a result of politics, was a real hardship. Participants did not believe this reduction in funding supported education and tried very hard to ameliorate this, as stated by the following participant. “Funding is the basis for everything. Resources, time; if we had more funding we could have more counseling, we could have more LST, more release time, more Pro-D. Everything is based on funding.” (IDI1 5) In support of this were the following thoughts from a focus group participant.

At the end of the day, those that are in power aren’t necessarily swayed by what is best for children, best for education, for meeting children’s needs. At the end of the day it comes down to dollars and cents and how they balance their budgets.
So when that tends to be your driving focus, your policies are not really created for the betterment of education. You can buffer somewhat, but when budgeting is determined, it affects the classroom experience without a doubt. So it’s hard to say that you’re not negatively impacted. I feel compelled to spend a great deal of my own money to give children the education they deserve. This year I have kept receipts and in the fall I was well over five hundred dollars out of my pocket to finance my classroom. And you know what? It’s not even something I feel I can’t do. Because I’m so determined to make a difference. I think we all believe that education is a way out for these kids. (FG 3-4)

The push and pull between district-based management and the local union were also not seen as being particularly helpful. As one participant stated, this was what participants had come to expect, and it was because they were adept at doing what they thought was best, regardless of who was saying what, that they were able not to be pulled into this negative vortex. The participant stated,

The conflict between the ‘B’T’A and the District is what constantly pulls us in two directions. I know for me, you get something that you think is a good idea and the district says ‘Yes, do it!’ and the ‘B’T’A’s going ‘Don’t do it!’ and you kind of feel that they’ll argue about anything. You know what I mean? They don’t even look at the issue anymore; they just look at where it comes from. And we’re constantly being pulled in those two different directions. But we’re a more middle-of-the-road school. We just tend to go, ‘Yup, they’re doing it again’, and ‘this is what we’re going to do’ you know? Because we don’t have a really strong political pull here; but some schools do. (IDI1 4)

When asked whether or not she thought schools with strong political views might find it more difficult to create and maintain a PLC, her response was,

Yes, I think they do. I’ve been at schools where you get somebody who’s really strongly union, or really strongly district, and they can’t and won’t interact with each other. And if they’re really strongly union, they won’t consider anything outside of what the union says. And so I think that if you are strongly political and you can’t find a balance, I think that makes things difficult. (IDI1 5)
Participants at Parkside saw themselves as educators who were willing to go the extra mile, regardless of the politics or the politicking going on around them. They saw themselves as educators who required more knowledge, and had a desire to be flexible and stretch themselves to best serve their students. The following focus group quote illustrates this well.

This year I do feel I am pretty excited about the way (name) and I are completely collaborating on the grade two program. We plan everything together. We split our prep, what our needs for the classrooms and we also share the work. So she’ll say, ‘Oh, look what my kids did,’ and I’ll say, ‘This is what my kids did’, and we’ll kind of compare it. But I’d like to see that be more broad and holistic, and criticize it. (FG 6)

Interpersonal relations. The participants believed their collegiality and willingness to try new things was a strength. It was because of positive interpersonal relations among staff that this willingness existed. One participant’s comparison between her previous and present school paints a good picture of the benefits of not being a status-quo school.

I always find here, that if there are new ideas, or if there is something that people have learned, it’s shared. We don’t really keep things to ourselves. We talk about things, we have curriculum cafes, and I mean even if the whole staff doesn’t jump on board with something, there are usually people who are interested in what you are doing. And we’re always just trying new things all the time. It’s never status-quo. This was not my experience at other schools. (IDI1 2)

The participants at Parkside recognized that it was important for them to have time to celebrate together as well. By eating together during their curriculum cafes, having salad days, and being a generally inclusive community, participants felt supported by one another emotionally as well as professionally. This was also extended to the parent community, as evidenced by the following quote from the focus group.

We try to get the parents involved in different ways. I know that we have had different ethnic groups coming and working here, so they will be aware of what is happening with their children. They come so they are part of the school
community. It’s not only the teachers and the students; we’re trying to make it an inclusive community. (FG 8)

Knowing where people were coming from was an important factor according to one participant, if you were hoping to move forward as a staff in a supportive way. “I think it’s sort of how you approach it, and understanding people’s views, and knowing where they are coming from, and they are working in ways to sort of pull it together, and support them in a way that they need” (IDI2 10).

Trust. Participants believed it was their openness and their ability to respect one another’s differences that fostered trust amongst staff members. Even though there were some members of the staff who did not choose to participate in PLC initiatives, they supported the members of the staff who did. The following in-depth interview quote illustrates the importance of trust, among other important factors, for developing and maintaining a PLC.

As a group we maintain consistency by making sure the students know what to expect from you or from anybody. If something were to happen, you know that there is that trust. And between staff members I think this is true as well. What also helps is the flexibility and openness to each other, and to new things. (IDI2 6)

Having a collegial atmosphere also helped staff to encourage one another to keep trying, even when it was tough, as it often was at an inner-city school. Evidence that this was a staff that enjoyed getting involved in new and promising initiatives comes from the following participant.

Sometimes-I have to be honest, it’s slightly overwhelming. But we’re a very get-involved school. If something’s out there, we’ll be doing it you know. And for the most part we’re all excited and happy to do that, and I do say with just a little touch of humour that sometimes it’s a little overwhelming, but very few opportunities seem to pass us by. I think (principal’s name) has probably the majority of the credit for that because if there’s something going, or money is available, (principal’s name) will get our name in and get the money for us, and all of a sudden we’re forming a committee. (FG 9)
Developing Learning Communities

Working together at this level of intensity required participants to explore their differences with not only honesty, but with respect for where each was coming from. This did not go unnoticed by students. Participants believed that their students saw this behavior and that it had a trickle-down effect as stated by one participant,

Kids know if you’re feeling upset about something and you can tell them ‘I just need a few minutes’. Whoever is going to come in they’ll be here for a few minutes while I take a break, and the kids see that caring behaviour of that adult and that kind of stuff all just sort of trickles down. (IDI2 2)

**Budget.** Participants at Parkside were determined they would not let the absence of much needed dollars stand in the way of them making a difference. They reported they did use technology, but not in a way that was necessarily related to their PLC. The following, as stated by a participant, is descriptive of these thoughts.

I don’t know that technology is directly related to the learning communities. We use technology a lot at this school, and we put a lot of funding not only into getting technology, but also into using it effectively. I think that’s because there’s probably nine or something of us that did TLITE, which is a huge number. I mean we don’t waste money on technology—we actually use our technology, which I think is a huge thing. But I don’t know that it’s necessarily related to the learning communities. At least I can’t see a particular connection. (IDI1 8)

Another point that participants made at the focus group and in-depth sessions was the negative impact the loss of budget had on students who had some sort of special education designation. A participant stated,

You know, whether it be in terms of class size, or supports, or resources or money set aside for professional development, (name of colleague) and I spent many years in special education, and we saw our resources being whittled away year after year until really our curriculum was a shadow of what it once was. So it’s hard to say that you are not negatively impacted. (FG 4)

Of all five schools examined in this study, the participants at this school were the most vehement in their dissatisfaction with reduced monetary resources.
How does the LC become systemic? Participants at Parkside used a number of strategies to help make their PLC more systemic. One of these was the use of email. Since I’ve been here in the last seven years, even just the use of email has been huge. You know it’s come to the point where we only get things emailed to us. We don’t get notices in our mailboxes anymore. There’s the odd thing we get, but that went from a few people using email in the beginning, to over time, almost everyone using email. We supported those who were new to computers, and got them on board with it, and it’s just fast. It’s an easy way to communicate. If you think of something you need to tell somebody, you need to tell a student, you can just whip off an email to him or her. It sort of makes it easier to communicate. I think that makes a big difference. (IDI2 10)

Another participant pointed out that being a teacher at Parkside would be very difficult if there wasn’t a PLC. Participants felt the energy and time invested in their PLC was well worth it. They shared their learning, they were open about their problems, and they were explicitly supportive of one another. An individual expressed this sentiment as follows:

I don’t think that we’d have a lot of success if we didn’t have the professional LC, just because of the job and what it entails. You need that support to get you through. And when people come in and they’re new, everybody sort of goes out of their way to help them and fills them in on things, ‘This is how this happens’ ‘When you see this happen, this is what you do’ and I guess just being overall supportive. When you feel supported, you feel good about yourself you know. And, it’s rare that you’re able to hear that you’re doing a good job in our profession, I find. So when somebody says, ‘Oh that’s great, you did a great job!’ you feel good and the feeling sort of rubs off on other things that you are doing. (IDI2 11)

The participants were grateful for the release time their principal and vice-principal provided for them. They were also appreciative of the district-based resources that were available to the staff throughout the school year. Both of these systemic
supports helped the participants to continue with their PLC initiatives. The following focus group quote explains this point of view.

I think the District has a part in this in that there are resources provided, whether it’s provided in the helping teachers who will come in, like our DI (Differentiated Instruction) team, the gifted helping teacher, or the high school teacher who comes in. Some of us have volunteered to be on the district DI team as well, and throughout the year we meet from time to time, which keeps us interested and learning together. Then we can broaden into some more professional development, which we did just recently up at SFU, the Surrey campus. They had a speaker funded by the “B”TA plus the District. So our union and the district worked together to develop this resource. I think that our district in many ways, helps to support us. (FG 9)

Another strategy used by participants to keep their PLC systemic was to continue to keep a broader view of their jobs, rather than just looking at what they were attaining within their own classrooms. They saw the success of the students at the school as everyone’s business. Aligning with this, the participants at Parkside did not see their jobs as existing only from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. They put in the hours needed to do what they thought needed to be done. The following participant quote illustrates this well. “We don’t have blinders on when we’re in our own classrooms. I mean, we see it as an entire school. We want to make sure that our school is doing a good job.” (FG 12)

As an aside, one participant had the following thoughts when thinking of the number of teachers who leave the profession. She stated, “I think that we lose a lot of good teachers because of the nature of the profession, and maybe if it was more supportive, if there were supports in place, maybe we wouldn’t lose as many.” (IDI 9) Her thoughts support the notion of systemically developing a PLC within every school to support the induction of new teachers into the profession.

**FSA data for Parkside elementary.** Table 16 provides provincial government FSA data collected in February of 2008, 2009 and 2010. The data were collected from grade four students who attended the school during the years listed above. Rates of participation were generally high, ranging from 82-94% for each sub-test (reading, writing, mathematics), in each year. It is important to keep in mind when examining the
data, that Parkside was known as a school of greater need within the district. Data shows that grade four students generally showed an increase in achievement over the three years, with the exception of numeracy. Although the school results were generally lower in each of the academic areas than the district and provincial results in two of the three years, it is interesting to note that their results were higher than the district and provincial results in reading and writing in 2010. Also of interest is that the grade seven students at Parkside generally showed they were closing the gap between their results and the district and provincial results.

Table 16

*Parkside Elementary 2008-2010 FSA data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>490</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Reading and Numeracy – Average FSA scaled score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.
For Writing – Average FSA score followed by proportion (%) of students meeting or exceeding expectations.

*Satisfaction survey data for Parkside elementary.* Table 17 provides provincial government satisfaction survey data for the school years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10. The data were collected from grade four and grade seven students who attended the school in the years listed above.
### Table 17

**Parkside Elementary Satisfaction Survey – Percent Positive Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>District B/Province</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>92/92</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87/87</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>78/78</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>82/81</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90/90</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>86/84</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>90/89</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70/65</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/2008</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
<td>District B/Province</td>
<td>2008/2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you try your best at school?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>84/83</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at reading?</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>80/74</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at writing sentences or stories?</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>78/72</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you getting better at math?</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>77/72</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you respect people who are different than you?</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>89/88</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel safe at school?</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82/78</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At school, are you bullied, teased or picked on?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know how your school expects you to behave?</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>88/85</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58/53</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive responses are considered responses of “many times” or “all the time”.

Response rates were high (For grade four 2007/08: 96%; 2008/09: 95%; 2009/10: 96% and for grade seven 2007/08: 84%; 2008/09: 90%; 2009/10: 93%). Parent response numbers were too small to be of any significance. Therefore they were not included.

The grade four data showed that Parkside students were more satisfied than grade four students in the district and province for the 2007/08 and 2008/09 years. In the 2009/2010 year, the district perception was better than the Parkside perception in almost all areas.

The grade seven data showed that Parkside students were generally a little less satisfied.
than the district and provincial percentages. One difference was perception of math, in which grade seven students at Parkside in all three years, showed a greater satisfaction with their perceived achievement in math than their district and provincial counterparts.

**Summary**

In summary, the results obtained from District B showed there were many similarities between the two schools. For example, each school had teacher PLC leaders that helped each PLC group within their school to work on their goals, and neither school required participation in a PLC. There were also differences between the schools. For example, one of the two schools had teacher-organized curriculum cafes. A more in-depth analysis of the similarities and differences between the schools in District B can be found in Chapter 7.
Chapter 6: Analysis of Quantitative Data

This chapter presents an analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the five schools in this study, as well as an analysis of the government collected FSA and satisfaction survey data. There are three main parts to the chapter. The school survey data are examined first, followed by the FSA data and finally the satisfaction survey data.

School Survey Data

The survey used was based on one designed by Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman (2008). Their survey was designed to assess and analyze schools as PLCs, and was organized around seven dimensions. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used on the quantitative survey data to discover any similarities and differences between the schools, as well as to further enhance and support the analysis of the qualitative data in chapter seven.

An eighth dimension designed around the BC context was added for the purposes of this study. Each of the eight dimensions was examined in turn: the BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions-relationships, supportive conditions-structures, and statements. ANOVA tables and graphs, showing levels of agreement, are provided within the text of each section to provide a visual representation of the data being presented for each dimension.

BC Context

While PLCs exist in many schools in Canada, it is important to note that because provincial legislation guides the context in which schools are situated, the challenges faced in each school may be impacted by provincial, district and school policies; the latter two aligning with the first according to law. There were eleven statements within this dimension. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement, choosing between four possible responses: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. In the next section, each numbered statement within the dimension will be examined for instances of response alignment between the five schools studied.
The first statement asked respondents whether or not they saw their school as a strong PLC. Of the five schools, all saw themselves as strong PLCs with 100% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. On a four-point scale, the overall mean for this statement was 3.52, with the means ranging from a low of 3.17 at Sunny Brook to a high of 3.90 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 1, $F(4, 60) = 5.67$, $MSE = 0.20$, $p = 0.0006$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Table 18 and Figure 3 show this data visually.

Table 18

Statement 1 Data Analysis

1. There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community) at this school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{u,.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>11.77</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.22</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Statement 1 Graph

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
$F_{u,.05}$ = critical F Ratio for $a=.05$
For statistical analysis, responses are weighted as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Statements 2, 3, and 4 had to do with provincial, district and union policies. Statement 2, about provincial policies, will be examined first. Of the five schools studied, only Lakeside had more than 50% of respondents agreeing or strongly
agreement that provincial policies had a positive impact on the school’s PLC. On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 2.62 and the means ranged from a low of 2.21 at Parkside to a high of 3.00 at Lakeside. The one way ANOVA for statement 2, $F(4, 47) = 2.71$, $MSE = 0.35$, $p = 0.0413$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 2 can be seen in Table 19 and Figure 4.

Table 19

**Statement 2 Data Analysis**

2. Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.62</td>
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</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{0.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>0.0413</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>16.51</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20.31</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
$F_{0.05}$ = critical F Ratio for $\alpha = 0.05$
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Statement 3, about District policies, is examined next. Of the five schools studied, the majority at each school agreed or strongly agreed that district policies had a positive impact on the PLC. The school with the lowest agreement, Parkside, had an agreement of 65%, while the school with the highest agreement, Lakeside, had an agreement of 100%. On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 2.97, with the means ranging from a low of 2.69 at Parkside to a high of 3.33 at Lakeside. The one way ANOVA for statement 3, $F(4, 54) = 3.73$, $MSE = 0.26$, $p = 0.0095$, demonstrated
statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 3 can be seen in Table 20 and Figure 5.

Table 20

Statement 3 Data Analysis

3. District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{0.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{0.05} = critical F Ratio for \( \alpha = 0.05 \)
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Statement 4, about union policies, is the last of the policy statements examined. Of the five schools, only one, Trillium, had more than 50% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that union policies helped their PLC, and one school, Windy Pines, had 0% of people agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 2.52, and the means ranged from a low of 1.80 at Windy Pines to a high of 2.92 at Lakeside. The one way ANOVA for statement 4, F(4, 41) = 3.91, MSE = 0.34, p = 0.0088, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 4 can be seen in Table 21 and Figure 6.
Table 21

Statement 4 Data Analysis

4. Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
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</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
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<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{0.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Between</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>0.0088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>19.48</td>
<td>45</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{0.05} = critical F Ratio for α=.05
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Statements two through four (about provincial, district and union polices), when examined together, show that district policies were seen in the most favourable light in terms of helping PLCs, followed by provincial policies, and then by union policies. There were also more respondents who chose to not reply to the provincial and union policy statements than the district policy statement. This may have been because districts were doing a good job at making explicit what they were doing to help, whereas the province and the union were not. It is more likely, however, given the data collected during the in-depth and focus group interviews, that participants had specific reasons to find provincial and union policies not helpful.

Statements 5 and 6 were about adult and student learning in the PLC. For both statements it was clear that staff at all five schools saw their PLC as supported by both student and adult learning. In regard to student learning (statement 5) the agreement ranged from 82% at Sunny Brook to 100% at Lakeside and Parkside.
Table 22

Statement 5 Data Analysis

5. Our PLC positively affects student learning.

No. of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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</table>

One Way ANOVA

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<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{a=.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.78</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
$F_{a=.05}$ = critical F Ratio for $\alpha=.05$
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 3.58, with the means ranging from a low of 3.11 at Sunny Brook to a high of 4.00 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 5, $F(4, 60) = 7.12$, $MSE = 0.22$, $p = 0.0001$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 5 can be seen in Table 22 and Figure 7.

In regard to adult learning, the agreement ranged from 90% at Sunny Brook to 100% at Lakeside, Windy Pines and Parkside. On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 3.40, with the means ranging from a low of 3.06 at Sunny Brook to a high of 3.78 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 6, $F(4, 58) = \ , MSE = 0.30$, $p = 0.0155$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 6 can be seen in Table 23 and Figure 8.
Developing Learning Communities

Table 23

Statement 6 Data Analysis

6. Our PLC positively affects adult learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{0.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.0155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>17.12</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21.08</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
$F_{0.05}$ = critical F Ratio for $\alpha=.05$
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Most respondents saw technology as something that helped their PLC (statement 7). Agreement was over 80% in four of the five schools (Lakeside, Windy Pines, Trillium, Parkside). In the fifth school, Sunny Brook, agreement was over 50%, but was less than 60%. On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 3.08, with the means ranging from a low of 2.61 at Sunny Brook to a high of 3.60 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 7, $F(4,59) = 6.95$, $MSE = 0.31$, $p = 0.0001$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 7 can be seen in Table 24 and Figure 9.
### Statement 7 Data Analysis

7. Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
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</table>

**One Way ANOVA**

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>8.53</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>2.53</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>18.08</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- **SA** = Strongly Agree; **A** = Agree; **D** = Disagree; **SD** = Strongly Disagree;
- **NA** = No Answer or Not Applicable
- **F_{.05}** = critical F Ratio for α=.05
- For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
  - **SA** = 4; **A** = 3; **D** = 2; **SD** = 1; **NA** responses are not included

Statements 8, 9, and 10 were related to the community and the reputation of the school. For all three statements, the majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed. The only anomaly was the one school (Lakeside) where there were respondents who thought that their school was not seen as a very desirable place to work by others. In probing for a rationale for this, it was discovered that the staff themselves believed this was how they were viewed, but they themselves enjoyed working at the school. On a four-point scale, the overall mean for statement 8 (the school is a desirable place to work) was 3.52, and the means ranged from a low of 3.00 at Lakeside to a high of 3.90 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 8, F(4, 60) = 5.40, MSE = 0.30, p = 0.0009, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 8 can be seen in Table 25 and Figure 10.
Table 25

**Statement 8 Data Analysis**

8. This school is a desirable place to work in our district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M (Mean)</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
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</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{0.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.0009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.30</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24.22</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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Notes:
- SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
- NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
- $F_{0.05}$ = critical F Ratio for $\alpha = 0.05$
- For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
  - SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

For statement 9 (parents see this school as a good place), the overall mean was 3.47, and the means ranged from a low of 3.18 at Sunny Brook to a high of 4.00 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 9, $F(4, 59) = 6.94$, $MSE = 0.18$, $p = 0.0001$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 9 can be seen in Table 26 and Figure 11.
Table 26

Statement 9 Data Analysis

9. Parents see this school as a good place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{0.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15.94</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{0.05} = critical F Ratio for α=.05
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

For statement 10 (the community speaks favourably about the school), the overall mean was 3.46, and the means ranged from a low of 3.00 at Lakeside to a high of 3.90 at Windy Pines. The one way ANOVA for statement 10, F(4,56) = 7.90, MSE = 0.22, p = 0.0000, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 10 can be seen in Table 27 and Figure 12.
Table 27

Statement 10 Data Analysis

10. The community speaks favourably about this school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{0.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>12.24</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{0.05} = critical F Ratio for α=0.05
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Statement 11 was related to how well the school community handled challenges.
All five of the school communities saw themselves as places that handled challenges well, with over 90% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. On a four-point scale, the overall mean was 3.47, with the means ranging from a low of 3.28 at Sunny Brook to a high of 3.64 at Parkside. The one way ANOVA for statement 11, F(4, 59) = 1.43, MSE = 0.25, p = 0.2338, demonstrated no statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for statement 11 can be seen in Table 28 and Figure 13.
Table 28

Statement 11 Data Analysis

11. This school handles challenges in a healthy way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{(a=0.05)}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.2338</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>14.52</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15.94</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{(a=0.05)} = critical F Ratio for a=0.05
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

In summary, the data from this dimension indicates that the staff at these five schools did see themselves as strong PLCs, with an overall mean for the dimension of 3.27. The one way ANOVA for the BC context dimension, F(4, 663) = 13.55, MSE = 0.41, p = 0.0000, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for the BC Context dimension can be seen in Table 29 and Figure 14.
Participants at all five school sites saw themselves as able to handle challenges in a healthy way, which agrees with developing and sustaining. They saw their schools for the most part as being well regarded by both the professional school community and by the parent and broader community. They also believed that district policies were, for the most part, helpful, but provincial policies and union policies were not.

**Shared and Supportive Leadership**

The shared and supportive leadership dimension consisted of seven statements. For all seven statements most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating there was positive shared and supportive leadership at all five schools. In summary, the data for this dimension showed an overall mean of 3.36. The one way ANOVA for the shared and supportive leadership dimension, $F(4, 438) = 3.33$, $MSE = 0.27$, $p = 0.0106$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the

Table 29

**Dimension: The B.C. Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>27 129 23 0 19 3.02 0.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>34 52 7 1 5 3.27 0.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>65 26 7 2 10 3.54 0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>68 61 8 0 6 3.44 0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>62 74 19 3 7 3.23 0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>256 342 64 6 47 3.27 0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>22.34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>13.55</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>273.16</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>295.50</td>
<td>667</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
$F_{.05}$ = critical F Ratio for $\alpha = .05$
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included
Developing Learning Communities

five sites. Data for the Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension can be seen in Table 30 and Figure 15.

Table 30

*Dimension: Shared and Supportive Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**One Way ANOVA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{0.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.0106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>118.61</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122.21</td>
<td>442</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable

F_{0.05} = critical F Ratio for \( \alpha = 0.05 \)
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

**Shared Values and Vision**

There were six statements in the shared values and vision dimension. For all six statements, there was a high degree of agreement among respondents with most agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statements. In summary, these five schools did see themselves having shared values and vision, with an overall mean of 3.38 for the dimension. The one way ANOVA for the shared values and vision dimension, F(4, 378) = 7.26, MSE = 0.26, p = 0.0000, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for the shared and values and vision dimension can be seen in Table 31 and Figure 16.
Collective Learning and Application

There were seven statements in the collective learning and application dimension. There was a high degree of agreement among respondents for all seven statements, with most agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. In summary, a mean of 3.39 for this dimension indicates that these five schools did see themselves as having collective learning and application. The one way ANOVA for the collective learning and application dimension, $F(4, 446) = 14.74$, $MSE = 0.28$, $p = 0.0000$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for the collective learning and application dimension can be seen in Table 32 and Figure 17.
Developing Learning Communities

Table 32

Dimension: Collective Learning and Application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
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<th>Source</th>
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<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$F_{0.05}$</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>16.24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>14.74</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>122.86</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>139.10</td>
<td>450</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
For statistical analysis, responses are weighted as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Shared Personal Practice

The shared personal practice dimension consisted of five statements. There was less agreement within this dimension than within the three previously reported dimensions. Although the majority of respondents did either agree or strongly agree with most of the statements, when conducting the focus groups and in-depth interviews, it became apparent that some participants saw these statements as infringing upon professional autonomy. In summary, the data from this dimension indicate these five schools did see themselves having a shared personal practice with an overall mean of 3.15. The one way ANOVA for the shared personal practice dimension, $F(4, 311) = 11.82$, MSE = 0.34, $p = 0.0000$, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for the shared personal practice dimension can be seen in Table 33 and Figure 18.
Table 33

**Dimension: Shared Personal Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supportive Conditions – Relationships**

There were five statements in the supportive conditions-relationships dimension. For all five statements there was a high degree of agreement among respondents, with most agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. In summary, the data from this dimension indicate these five school staffs did see themselves having supportive relational conditions with an overall mean of 3.45. The one way ANOVA for the supportive conditions-relationships dimension, F(4, 314) = 9.98, MSE = 0.26, p = 0.0000, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for the supportive conditions-relationships dimension can be seen in Table 4 and Figure 19.
Table 34

Dimension: Supportive Conditions - Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{r.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>10.47</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>9.98</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>82.32</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>92.79</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{r.05} = critical F Ratio for a=.05
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Supportive Conditions – Structures

There were five statements in the supportive conditions-structures dimension. For four of the five statements, there was a high degree of agreement among respondents, with most agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. The one exception was the statement about collective learning and shared practice, where two of the schools had a few respondents that disagreed (Trillium and Parkside) with the statement, while the other three schools (Sunny Brook, Windy Pines, Lakeside) only had respondents that agreed or declined to respond. When probing for why this was so, it was discovered that for some participants, shared practice was considered to be an infringement on teacher autonomy. In summary, the data from this dimension indicate these five schools did see themselves having supportive structural conditions with an overall mean of 3.32. The one way ANOVA for the supportive conditions-structures dimension, F(4, 315) = 10.70, MSE = 0.33, p = 0.0000, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the
Developing Learning Communities

five sites. Data for the supportive conditions-structures dimension can be seen in Table 35 and Figure 20.

Table 35

**Dimension: Supportive Conditions - Structures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trillium</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
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</table>

One Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{a=0.05}</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>3.50</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>2.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>103.12</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117.12</td>
<td>319</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Notes:
SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable
F_{a=0.05} = critical F Ratio for a=0.05
For statistical analysis, responses are weighed as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

**Figure 20. Dimension: Supportive Conditions – Structures Graph**

**Statements**

The last four statements in the survey inquired about the cleanliness and attractiveness of the building, the proximity of colleagues within the building, and communication systems. Respondents at all five sites were generally in agreement with these four statements, with only a few dissenting votes. In summary, the data from this dimension indicated these five school staffs did see themselves as professionals, with the positive LC communication practices and structures described in the statements, showing an overall mean of 3.29 for the dimension. The one way ANOVA for the statements dimension, F(4, 253) = 12.52, MSE = 0.30, p = 0.0000, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the five sites. Data for the statements dimension can be seen in Table 36 and Figure 21.
Developing Learning Communities

Table 36

*Dimension: Statements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunny Brook</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeside</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windy Pines</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.41</td>
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<td>Trillium</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkside</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
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<td>148</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.60</td>
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One Way ANOVA

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<th>Source</th>
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<th>d.f.</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F_{α=.05}</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
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<td>3.77</td>
<td>12.52</td>
<td>2.41</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>76.13</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91.20</td>
<td>257</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree;
NA = No Answer or Not Applicable

For statistical analysis, responses are weighted as follows:
SA = 4; A = 3; D = 2; SD = 1; NA responses are not included

Overall, the responses chosen by the respondents for the last seven dimensions indicate that participants at each of the five study sites do see themselves as members of a professional learning community according to Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman’s (2008) survey. Furthermore, participants at all five sites were cognizant of the tension between autonomy and shared practice.

**FSA Data and Satisfaction Survey Data**

Both FSA and satisfaction survey data for the five school study sites were examined to see if they could shed any light on student performance, and perceived student performance, in the learning communities within each school. FSA data are examined first, followed by satisfaction survey data.
FSA Data

FSA data are summative in nature. They take a snapshot of how students are doing in the areas of mathematics, reading, and writing mid-way through the grade four and seven year. FSA data were chosen for this study, as it was the only test common to all school sites in British Columbia, and to the five schools studied. Participation rates in the FSA vary from district to district, based on the political response of boards of education, management, and teachers. The BCTF (teachers union) has become increasingly vocal about getting rid of the FSA—trying to encourage: parents to withdraw their children, teachers to speak to parents about the BCTF stance, and boards to not participate willingly in the government’s tests. Therefore, the participation rates in the schools and districts studied are of importance as a district with a lower participation rate indicates less reliable data than a district with a higher participation rate.

The participation rates of districts A and B during the three years of data being used for this study was high, varying from 87-93% participation on each of the three sub-tests (reading, writing, numeracy). Participation at each of the schools studied was also high, ranging from 82-100% participation in each grade (four and seven) and subtest. Trillium had the lowest participation of any sub-test for any year (82%) and Windy Pines had the highest participation of any sub-test for any year (100%).

During the in-depth and focus group sessions held at each school, it became evident that participants believed their students were doing better academically than they had previously done, as a result of staff initiatives. This was shown on a variety of assessments; some designed by the participants themselves for their school context and some, like the RAD, designed elsewhere but not in use at all schools. However, none of these assessments occurred at all five schools. Therefore the assessments used at all five of the schools were not easily comparable. As well, only three years of FSA data were available at the time data were collected, as the government changed the timing of the administration of the FSA three years ago. For this reason it was not possible to see if this year’s grade seven students had improved since their grade four FSA testing four years ago. Of interest instead, was whether or not students in each school were doing as well as they should in comparison to their peers (district and provincial data), taking into account life challenges faced. Unfortunately, there is no way to compare the data of
Developing Learning Communities

schools that are alike in their makeup, as the government does not provide this kind of data nor this kind of data synthesis. The data shown seem to indicate that the schools in this study were doing better than they should. It is reasonable to think this may be because of the PLC initiatives in place at each school.

The two most needy schools in this study (Parkside and Lakeside) both showed that their students were doing better than should be expected given students life challenges (i.e., socio-economic, ESL). Both of these school populations relied on school meal programs to feed students, in addition to educating them. Scores, while lower than some of the district averages, were generally higher than the provincial averages or were closing the gap in achievement between school and provincial scores. For example, grade four reading scores showing students meeting or exceeding expectations at Parkside increased each year (59%, 61%, 71%) while the district and provincial scores decreased (68%, 66%, 65% and 74%, 69%, 68%). At Lakeside, reading scores at the school level (77%, 75%, 70%) were above the provincial level (74%, 69%, 68%) for all three years.

The two least needy schools in this study (Windy Pines and Trillium) had results that showed students to have better achievement than their district and provincial counterparts in almost all areas. This was particularly true of the school that had high parental involvement (Windy Pines). For example, grade four reading percentage scores at Windy Pines for the three years of data collected, were 91%, 98%, 89%, while the district and provincial scores were 82%, 79%, 77%, and 74%, 69%, 68% respectively. At Trillium, grade seven reading scores were 69%, 71%, 77% while the district and provincial scores were 64%, 67%, 69% and 69%, 66%, 65% respectively.

The data for the remaining school (Sunny Brook) in this study showed achievement was generally lower than the district average, but higher than the provincial average. Grade four reading scores were 80%, 92%, 70%, while the district and provincial scores for the same grade and test were 82%, 79%, 77%, and 74%, 69%, 68% respectively. Sunny Brook was also a school that had a proportion of its students receiving lunch at the school. Given the challenges faced by the families of these students, one would not expect them to be achieving higher than the provincial average.
Developing Learning Communities

Overall, it appeared the PLC structures in place at all five schools studied were perceived by participants as having a positive effect on the achievement of the students entrusted to the school, although there were some subject areas in each grade for each of the three years of data collected where this was not true. Why this is so, falls outside the scope of this study. It does not appear that the FSA data examined is conclusive in shedding light on the improved learning noted in the schools studied.

**Satisfaction Survey Data**

Satisfaction survey data are collected each spring from students in grades four, seven and ten. It is also collected from interested staff members and from parents. Because the survey is administered at school, student participation rates are generally high. Staff and parent participation however is generally low. Oftentimes it is so low that the data are not significant enough to be meaningful. This was the case in this study as well. Only one of the schools studied had a parent response large enough to include.

Of the two most needy schools studied (Lakeside and Parkside), Parkside students generally had a poorer perception of their abilities than their district counterparts, while at Lakeside, students generally had a better perception of their abilities than their district counterparts. In the school with the better perception (Lakeside), students were generally closing the achievement gap (according to FSA results). Perhaps students at this school were aware of the fact that they were improving in comparison to the provincial average, whereas at the first school, students were already generally doing better than the provincial average.

Of the two least needy schools studied (Windy Pines and Trillium), Windy Pines’ students consistently perceived their achievement as higher than their district counterparts, while Trillium’s students seemed to oscillate from year to year between a higher and lower perception compared with their district counterparts. Interestingly, the grade four and seven students at Trillium seemed to have opposite perceptions from each other each year. The school population with the consistently high student perception (Windy Pines) had the most involved parent group of all five schools studied. The Windy Pines’ parent group was the only parent group that had a significant response to the satisfaction survey. They perceived that their children were doing well in all areas questioned.
In the remaining school in this study (Sunny Brook), satisfaction survey results showed that while the district’s results generally declined over the three years examined, the school’s results generally improved over the same time period.

Overall, it appears that those students who had the most life challenges did not perceive that they were improving. Students who had the fewest challenges and who had strong parental support appeared to be most satisfied, while students with average parental support seemed to oscillate in their perceptions. Of greatest interest is the school (Sunny Brook) situated in the middle of the five in terms of neediness. Sunny Brook’s school population was showing a steady improvement in student perception even though the overall district perception by students was steadily declining. The data collected at all five sites were examined as a whole next, using the guiding questions for this study as a framework.

**Summary**

This chapter presented an analysis of the quantitative data obtained from the five schools in this study, as well as an analysis of the government collected FSA and satisfaction survey data. The school survey data (based on Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman’s 2008 survey) showed that the participants at each of the five study sites did see themselves as members of a PLC. FSA data and satisfaction survey data also indicated that the LCs at each school site were having a positive effect on student learning and student perceptions of learning.
Chapter 7: Findings Based on Analyses of School Data

This chapter presents an analysis of the data obtained from the five schools in this study. I examined both the qualitative and the quantitative data as a whole to see if there were similar themes emerging from both sets of data. The research questions were initially used as coding categories to decide on themes using a constant comparison method. Where the data did not fit these categories data was recoded until it fit the categories used. By triangulating the qualitative and quantitative data collected, there was an overlapping of data and therefore a more trustworthy result. The chapter is organized around the five sub-questions asked in this study. They are:

1. What factors helped LCs to develop in the elementary schools studied?
2. What factors hindered LCs from developing in the elementary schools studied?
3. What influences did the following factors have in helping or hindering the development of LCs in the elementary schools studied: politics, interpersonal relations, trust, and budget fluctuations?
4. To what extent was the development of LCs in the elementary schools studied helped by improved student learning or improved teacher learning?
5. Did LCs become part of the way any of these elementary schools systemically operated?

Finally, a reconceptualization of the theoretical and conceptual framework used in this study is presented.

What factors helped LCs to develop?

There were a number of common factors from the five schools studied that indicated what helped or hindered LCs to develop and be maintained. These data were arranged around five broad themes that emerged from this research. These themes were leadership (both positional and non-positional), organizational structures, capacity, school design, and school goals. Each of these themes is examined in turn.

Leadership

The literature on leadership cites the importance of allowing leadership to flow to where it makes most sense within the organizational structure. Mitchell & Sackney
(2009) wrote that in an LC leadership is distributed, as it is appropriate to do so. This means that it is important that there be both positional and non-positional leaders within the school. In this research, leadership from both positional and non-positional perspectives were seen to be factors which helped learning communities to be both developed and maintained. Participants at all five schools spoke of the importance of leadership, expressing sentiments similar to the following.

It (the LC) has to be structured from the inside because we do what we do and our administrators support us. Our administrators do not force us into it. I don’t think they could. Even though we find it exhausting sometimes, it’s enjoyable. (IDI1 8)

Participants in one district (District A) spoke of the benefit of having a district-based team to help them with their initiatives. Participants from all five schools spoke of the importance of having teachers lead the PLC, and administrators facilitate the conditions conducive to allowing them to develop. Participants claimed that the positive experience of the PLC carried forward, especially where the student body was tougher to teach due to student life challenges. Participants at all five schools believed the leadership of both the principal and the teachers within the building were needed and crucial for the PLC to be maintained. They furthermore believed the members of a PLC had to be open-minded towards new initiatives. All five schools had participants who believed this positive open-mindedness was susceptible to diminishment in the face of people who didn’t share a similar perspective, as illustrated by the following quote.

Sometimes there are personalities that don’t work together. People who do it their way and aren’t willing to open up to another way, or even see another person’s way. One of the other schools I worked at was quite difficult. (IDI2 8)

Further to this, in a managed system, it doesn’t matter as much if people get along. In a PLC this does matter, so personalities in an PLC system are important.

The results obtained from the staff surveys also support the notion of learning communities that are doing well having a high degree of shared leadership, learning and practice in that the overall mean for the shared and supportive leadership dimension was 3.36. This result shows a high level of agreement among respondents at the five schools. The connection to the living systems approach is that the respondents appear to be more
responsive to emerging needs through shared practice and shared direction, based on shared thoughts and discussion, rather than being “managed” in order to support the status-quo. In a living system, collaboration is more significant. Mitchell & Sackney (2009) comment on the status-quo phenomenon when they explain that when educators confronted the reality that reforms never last, rather than reflecting on what might be changed, they simply did more of the same and were surprised when they got the same results. Leadership at the five schools studied, for the most part, was distributed when it was appropriate to do so. This is significant in that LCs tended to grow and develop when there was capacity for good positional and distributed leadership.

**Organizational Structures**

The structures that participants at all five sites found conducive to developing and maintaining their PLCs centered around release time, and the people in place within the structure itself. Participants viewed supportive administrators who provided regular release time for teachers to work in PLC groups as key to the success and maintenance of the PLC. One district (District A) provided time for PLC leaders to meet as a group within the district. This was seen as a very helpful organizational structure, as the following participant statement shows:

> I think that the time is crucial because teachers get so busy. If it’s not in your schedule, it’s really easy to push off; even though you want to do it, and you know it’s good because you’ve got too many commitments. (FG 7)

The other district studied (District B) provided money that could be used to buy release time in the form of TOCs (teachers on call), to schools choosing to participate in district initiatives that would encourage teams of teachers to work together for a common goal. Both structures enabled PLCs to grow and develop within their respective schools.

The results obtained from the staff surveys indicated that participants supported the design and maintenance of organizational structures such as release time, scheduling, money, and communication that help the LCs to develop. The overall mean for the supportive conditions-structures dimension was 3.32, and for the shared and supportive leadership dimension it was 3.36, showing support for the development of structures conducive to helping an LC. This supports the living systems point of view in that a
basic structure is provided to enable positive or developing growth to occur. The structure, however, is not managed or prescriptive, but is allowed to grow in directions that make the most sense to those who are within the system itself (Capra, 2002; Stoll & Seashore Lewis, 2008).

**Capacity**

Capacity building is linked closely with sustainability, as without the capacity to improve, it is unlikely there will be any sustainability. Stoll, Fink & Earl (2000) listed the following as some of the important attributes to pay attention to when trying to build internal capacity: believing in success, making connections, attending to motivation, understanding and experiencing emotions, engaging in community, inquiring, creating, and practicing new ideas. In this study, staffs with challenging students continuously looked for new ways to try and meet their students’ needs, thereby embracing the attributes above (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2000). For these staffs, ‘status-quo’ teaching was not an option. Because of this, these schools often had teachers who were ready to embrace the idea of ‘shared practice within community’ so important to a PLC. Participants at all five study sites remarked that the school’s staff saw all of the students in the school as their collective responsibility. They also commented that this was not the case in schools that did not operate as a PLC.

I’ve found that with the PLC we’re all working together. We all work on the same page, and although we all do things a little differently when we’re meeting a common goal, there’s more sharing of techniques, of strategies. (IDI 1 4)

The staffs at all five school sites saw themselves as very involved. Few district or school opportunities passed them by. Participants expressed how fulfilling it was to work together and share new ideas. They also expressed the notion that it was important to move boundaries if they wanted to continue to grow as professionals.

Staff survey data supported the importance of helping increase the capacity of teacher leaders, as indicated by the high means for the shared and supportive leadership dimension (3.36), and the collective learning and application dimension (3.39). Participants consistently saw themselves as responsible for: student learning, using data to make decisions, creating high expectations for themselves and for students, and
Developing Learning Communities

working collectively. A living systems approach encourages this kind of capacity growth as well, in that a living system requires the connectivity and harmony of all of its various parts in order to continue to develop. Stated simply, “an environment in which everyone can develop, grow and learn” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. 192) is one in which the quest for growing continued capacity is a cornerstone.

**School Design**

There were participants at all five study sites who believed teachers should not be required to participate in the school’s PLC, even though two of the schools studied (Sunny Brook and Lakeside) required participation of each teacher enrolling a class. Support time and direction were also noted as key components to a healthy, functioning PLC. Three of the five schools (Sunny Brook, Lakeside, and Windy Pines) had participants who stated it was important to have someone on staff who knew what a PLC was, knew how to facilitate PLC groups, and furthermore understood why teachers should invest time in one. For example,

> The principal and the PLC leader work very closely together to help us move forward. This is very important to the success of PLCs here. I appreciate that they can see how to get the information that’s important. (IDI2 4)

Participants at all five schools felt it was important for teacher leaders, with the support of their principals, to be the main players of this role.

This again speaks to the interconnectivity required of people in developing an LC. The data collected from the collective learning and application dimension shows an overall mean of 3.39, and supports the notion that staffs do need to work together when searching for solutions. Forcing people to work together goes against this premise, and might be the reason teacher union representatives make comments like the following in response to more managed styles of PLC implementation.

> This kind of lecturing on community-building is not likely to generate wide support among teachers, and the hectoring tone contrasts with the same authors (DuFour et. al., 2005) encouraging messages of collaboration and mutual support. (Naylor, 2007, p. 2)
Developing Learning Communities

This strongly expressed sentiment supports participants’ comments from this study that required membership in an LC could be counterproductive in the long run.

**School Goals**

School communities are generally more successful when they make important decisions in a collaborative community through shared dialogue (Hargreaves, 2008; Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Stoll & Seashore Lewis, 2008; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Participants in this study did, however, differentiate between collaboration and PLCs generally.

Participants in all five school communities studied expressed the idea that the PLC was goal-oriented but collaboration was not necessarily so. Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) also speak of this phenomenon when they state: “planning staff social activities, developing student behaviour codes, or swapping test-prep strategies, are just another distraction from the core task of teaching (p. 92)” and are not connected to learning and achievement. Participants in this study felt the design of common school goals was imperative to the growth and maintaining of their PLC and that these goals should be worked on over time in a structured way. It was this structure that allowed participants to feel comfortable with holding each other accountable for their group decisions. As a focus group member in one school stated,

> We have a common goal. We go try something, then we come back and debrief it or see how it went, and what way do we go next. So there’s always a plan and we’re always driven by our vision and where we’re going. (FG 11)

School survey data collected from the shared values and vision dimension supported this premise, with a mean of 3.38. Participants in this study generally agreed that school goals need to be focused on student learning beyond test scores and grades, and decisions should be made with the school’s values and vision as a filter. Participants also agreed that stakeholders should actively be involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement. These beliefs and practices are supported by research (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007) that showed the collaborative nature of an LC is connected to improved student achievement, and to school improvement generally.
Developing Learning Communities

What factors hindered LCs from developing?

There were a number of common factors from the five schools studied that indicated what did or could prevent LCs from developing and being sustained. These data are arranged around five themes that emerged from the data collected. These themes were: finite time, leadership (both positional and non-positional), capacity, school design, and school goals. In this next section, each one of these themes will be examined in turn.

Finite Time

Researchers (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Leithwood & Strauss, 2008) write of the importance of collective learning and shared understanding. For this collective learning and shared understanding to occur, teachers must have time to come together. In regard to this, participants from all five schools spoke of the importance of having time during the school day to work on PLC initiatives. There was concern expressed that the energy being spent on the PLC may be for naught if the time given was to be pulled away. It is not uncommon in education for new initiatives to receive funding and then lose that funding a short while later. Hargreaves (2002) expressed concern over this very issue when describing the cumulative effect of change initiatives on teachers over their careers as “a serial killer of initiative and enthusiasm over the duration of teachers’ careers” (p. 190). Many experienced participants spoke of programs in the past being funded for a few years, with the funding then taken away. There was concern that if this were to happen, the PLC would become one of those ‘failed initiatives’ due to lack of funding for release time. Participants also said they knew of colleagues who were not interested in investing the time to develop and maintain a PLC because they fully expected the funding to disappear. They expressed that there was much energy required and time given to get to the place they were at and that it would not have been possible to get to this place in only one year’s time. As one participant stated, “It’s not just about PLC time, but about carry over into class time.” (IDI1 7)

School survey data also pointed to the importance of structures like adequate time being in place to help an LC to grow, showing a mean of 3.32 on the supportive conditions-structures dimension. Participants also spoke of the importance of release
time within the school day. Without sufficient release time, it was more likely that purposeful conversations around data, student learning and shared vision would become brief items at staff meetings, and not part of the lived day-to-day experience of those in the school community. Without release time set aside for purposeful conversations, the system was more likely to become managed, as management was simpler and faster.

When conversations become more meaningful and self supporting it was more probable that teachers would continue with them of their own free will. The following quote illustrates the rationale for this, “Learning communities have started to succumb to pressures from external curricular expectations and accountability measures…and are starting to revert to traditional norms and operating structures” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. 14).

**Leadership**

Participants at three of the five schools studied (Sunny Brook, Trillium and Parkside) thought the principal could be the cause of discouraging the development and maintenance of the PLC if they were: changed too frequently, more micromanaged or top-down in style, or not prepared for how difficult it could be to create and maintain a PLC. An example of one of these observations from a participant was, “He made it seem not top-down by attending all the meetings and learning alongside everyone else” (IDI 1 15).

Participants indicated that if principals were changed too often, the staff no longer saw them as the long-term leaders of the school (IDI2 8-9). They were simply the next principals to be out-waited, so that staffs could continue on with what they wished to do. There was no impetus to change in this kind of school, and the status-quo reigned. This fits with the managed system in that the system is ‘managed’ by the staff so as to inhibit connectivity with the broader system in which the school is situated. This political dimension of change (Hargreaves, 2005) is what causes the difficulty in this instance.

Secondly, a more micromanaging or top-down style of principal did not invite collaboration, which was the lifeblood of the PLC according to participants (IDI2 15-16). In this type of school, the PLC did not exist because the system was ‘managed’ by the principal. The sentiment, “The need to have all changes designed by management, and
imposed upon the organization, tends to generate bureaucratic rigidity (Capra, 2002), illustrates the managed perspective.

Thirdly, participants at one of the schools studied (Sunny Brook) indicated how hard it was on both the principal and the PLC teacher leader to begin and lead the PLC initiative. This observation was echoed in the other schools studied. Had the principal not been both experienced and a long-time principal at the school and had the teacher leader not known her colleagues well, the PLC might not have taken hold in this school. The following expresses the strength of this sentiment well. “We said we thought they (teachers) were coming for us. They were going to attack. I didn’t think we’d survive. It was pretty rough” (IDI1 24). This school was also the only school studied that had local union executives on staff. Perhaps these union executive staff members were privy to conversations in other BC school districts, where there were developing issues around autonomy and PLC development generally. Regardless, developing a culture of trust and respect for taking risks, as indicated by statement 38 of the staff survey, with an overall mean of 3.13, is crucial in a school like the one just described, and agrees with the notion it is much easier to maintain the status-quo; to continue on with the managed system, rather than allow the paradoxical messiness of a living system style of LC (Hargreaves, 2008).

**Capacity**

Four of the five schools (Sunny Brook, Lakeside, Trillium, Parkside) had participants who spoke of the importance of a positive and open-minded staff when trying to develop a PLC. The participants who spoke of this, all had the previous experience of working on staffs where there was a negative-group status-quo amongst teachers. These were often the teachers who had been teaching the longest and had not moved schools in a long time. This was not to say all experienced teachers who chose to stay in a school for a long time became this way, but this could develop over time at some schools and it was very difficult to change if those teachers chose to stay. In one school in which a participant previously worked, a change in negativity was not noted until most of the negative group had retired. The participant described her experience working at the school by stating, “It was really hard to survive in that school and to want to get up and go there the next day, because there were so many negative things floating through the
Developing Learning Communities

Staff survey data indicated that supportive conditions, in terms of relationships, were a key feature of an LC (the supportive conditions-relationships dimension which had an overall mean of 3.45). A negative kind of atmosphere does not allow space for a living system to grow.

Three of the schools studied (Lakeside, Windy Pines, and Trillium) had participants who indicated personal outside commitments could play a part in the health of a school’s PLC. One participant spoke of a school at which she had worked previously where all teachers were about the same age, with the same kinds of pressures on them. Participants spoke of the stages of life impacting the ability of teachers to commit time. If teachers had small children or needy parents at home, for example, they were less able to put in the hours needed to collaborate with others. They were typically in survival mode, with their doors closed, and a myriad of family commitments to attend to at the end of the day. These teachers were not interested in taking the time needed to explore the notion of the PLC. In this kind of school, supportive conditions, in the way of structures (release time), were not evident and therefore it was difficult to begin the collaborative conversations necessary for achieving other facets of an LC (statements 14-41 which had overall means ranging from 2.97-3.65) as described in the staff survey. Here again, without having purposeful conversations, the managed system or status-quo becomes predominant.

All five schools studied had participants who spoke of the importance of staff readiness to embark on a PLC. Participants expressed the notion that not all teachers are ready to ‘de-privatize’ their practice. They explained that some teachers enjoy the solitary nature of closing their doors and teaching what they want. They further explained that these solitary-minded teachers found it difficult to consider structuring their teaching day differently. Furthermore, there were some teachers who found the idea of opening their doors to others as not only a loss of their autonomy, but also an invitation to vulnerability. “Change is difficult, and you risk a lot with your colleagues the more you share, because you risk a perceived judgment” (IDI2 5). Some teachers entered the profession when it was standard for teachers to teach alone in their classrooms. For some, this degree of autonomy was a factor that drew them to the profession. For these teachers the managed system, where everyone is separate, and not
Developing Learning Communities

involved in working together, was a preference (FG1 28). In these kinds of schools, collaboration was not connected to learning and achievement but was instead connected to staff social activities, and more procedural discussions like behaviour codes (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

School Design

Size and organization of the school were mentioned by participants in three of the five school communities studied (Lakeside, Windy Pines, Sunny Brook) as factors that can impact the effectiveness of an LC. At a larger school, participants felt it could be difficult to meet in teams small enough for everyone to have LC input. It could also be difficult to come to agreement on what was important, since each person’s ideas naturally have less airtime. Proximity to each other was also valued by participants as evidenced by the results to survey question 48, which had an overall mean of 3.32.

Participants reported it was hard to have PLCs in schools where there were fewer than two classes of a grade. The reason for this being teachers of differing grades have differing curriculum requirements to teach. “You can’t collaborate to the same extent when you’re not teaching the same things in the same level” (FG 14). Participants stated that the optimal size for an elementary school wanting to develop and maintain PLCs was one that had two or three classes of each grade group.

School Goals

School goals that had no depth or substance hindered PLCs, according to participants in three of the five school communities studied (Lakeside, Sunny Brook, and Windy Pines). In these types of schools (no-depth-goal schools), participants reported that goals were given lip service at staff meetings. Even though there may have been Pro-D time devoted to the goal topics, there was relatively no daily or weekly conversation between professionals regarding progress and future plans. This showed a more managed system than a living system, in that a living system would facilitate the purposeful conversations needed to ensure goals became part of the day-to-day conversation of the teachers in the building. Because of this, goals that are talked about only at staff meetings are goals that are more managed in nature.
Participants found it frustrating if their PLC goals changed each year. They believed time was needed during the first year to choose goals, expectations, roles and responsibilities, as well as to choose assessments that worked well. By switching goals in year two, the foundation set in year one was lost. This was because there was not enough time to continue on with new goals as well as with old goals and still have the meaningful conversation necessary to keep the goals alive. Participants further expressed the importance of going slowly so items of importance were not missed in the rush. It took time to be thoughtful about making plans and then carrying them out. The following from a focus group participant is expressive of these thoughts. “I feel like we’ve done a lot this year. We’ve got a lot of stuff going, but I don’t feel like we’ve actually been able to really use it yet” (FG2 22). The survey data collected also supports this with an overall mean of 3.49 for the collective learning and application dimension. This speaks to the importance of including all teachers in purposeful conversation and action to meet student needs. The living systems perspective supports this notion, since it is the connectivity of all within the system, the collaborative work culture (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009), on the issues at hand that help to find possible solutions.

**Influence of Politics, Interpersonal Relations, Trust, and Budget**

Data from this research showed ways in which politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget could have both a positive and a negative impact on an LC. The positive impacts tended to fit with the living systems lens, whereas the negative impacts tended to fit with the managed systems lens.

**Positive Factors**

This section examines the positive influence that politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget can have on helping LCs to develop and be sustained. Each will be examined in turn.

**Politics.** Schools studied generally had staffs that were appreciative of their own school and district-based policies. They were less appreciative of provincial and local union policies. School survey data agreed with this, showing that district policies were seen as the most helpful (with a mean of 2.97), followed by provincial policies (with a
Developing Learning Communities

mean of 2.62), and union policies (with a mean of 2.52). Participants at all five sites generally considered themselves rather apolitical in that they kept their focus on what was good for students and staffs, articulating that some things were not worth fighting for. At one school, the staff representative (rep) told the local union rep not to come back, as the union rep was too negative and did not fit in with the staff’s view of how business should be carried out (FG 10).

In all five schools, participants were appreciative of the guidelines and directions given to help keep them focused. They liked the weekly meetings at three of the five schools (Windy Pines, Sunny Brook, and Lakeside), as the meetings helped to build accountability into the weekly routine. As one participant commented, “Without direction the most urgent will take precedence” (FG22). This fits well with the living systems perspective, in that the staffs were not willing to be pulled by policies that did not help them to grow as an LC, unless they had no choice. As pointed out by Hord & Somers (2008),

How union contracts are negotiated and enforced can support the creation and development of professional learning communities or hinder the process…any widespread advocacy for the establishment of PLCs in schools has yet to come from unions (p. 59).

The people within the school were key to the success of any PLC initiatives. Participants at all five sites reported that having a principal willing to plan for release time, and to facilitate for the emerging needs of the staff, was important. Of equal importance was having teacher leaders on site, who were willing to work alongside their principal and their colleagues in planning and implementing plans from the PLC groups. Participants stated that PLC leaders (both formal and informal) needed to be willing to listen, and to get into hot water from time to time. As well, the staff needed to be intolerant of aggressive behaviour from colleagues, especially when members of the staff were trying to stretch themselves by being flexible, adaptable, and trying new things. Participants at three of the five sites (Trillium, Lakeside, and Sunny Brook) indicated naysayers could often be brought on board if they saw others being successful, and if there was data to support this. Survey data supports the notion of flexibility, adaptability, seeking out new practices, and respectful behaviour, with a mean of 3.39 for the collective learning and application dimension.
By having release time provided during the school day, many issues with the local union were avoided. Participants at all five sites reported that their PLC initiatives were routinely discussed at staff meetings, and were the focus of professional development days. Participants indicated a high level of engagement in purposeful discussion around vision, values, student learning, and working together generally. Survey data supports this, with a mean of 3.38 for the shared values and vision dimension. The living systems perspective supports high levels of engagement in purposeful discussion, as this indicates a high degree of connectivity (Capra, 2002).

**Interpersonal relations.** Participants at all five sites reported that they were a team-oriented, positive-minded, cohesive staff. They saw these positive interpersonal relations as key to the success of their PLCs. Remaining flexible and having a good sense of humour were also considered key attributes that helped these school staffs maintain strong interpersonal relations. A common theme amongst members of each staff was a willingness to try new initiatives in which their colleagues were interested. “We don’t really keep things to ourselves. We talk about things. There are usually people who are interested in what you are doing, and we’re always trying new things all the time. It’s never status-quo” (IDI1 2). Taking risks can be daunting if there is not a culture of openness. It was this support of one another that helped to lessen the feeling of vulnerability as all were learning together as a team. The satisfaction this brought was evident when participants at two schools stated they had left their school, and then when the opportunity arose, they came back.

Participants at all five sites were very happy with the way their principals helped to keep their staffs focused on their goals and on what was important. In addition, having their administrators share their enthusiasm, vision and purpose was considered a strength. Participants reported that their principals assumed their staffs wanted to continue to learn. This was appreciated.

Survey data collected supports the notion of being team-oriented, positive-minded and cohesive, with a mean of 3.36 for the shared and supportive leadership dimension, and 3.38 for the shared values and vision dimension. The living systems perspective is also supportive of this notion in that staffs are invited to work together to help all facets of the community to become better. The managed system perspective would instead see
Developing Learning Communities

individual teachers working in individual classrooms without the benefit of teamwork, or only working together when mandated to do so. Leadership is distributed, as it is appropriate to do so. This results in a community of responsibility (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

**Trust.** “Working together empowers people,” (IDI1 2) represents how participants felt at each of the five study sites. Trust amongst the staff was considered an important element in forming and maintaining the PLC. The principals at all five sites were trusted to hold their staff’s accountable in a supportive way. This trust was reciprocal. Principals trusted their staffs to work together as a team, to take risks, to be honest, and to explore their differences respectfully. Staffs generally reported that because they were happy, they were more open than they might have been otherwise. Staffs recognized trust was imperative if they were to question old practices and explore new ones. Survey data supports this. Staffs rated the importance of trust as very high (with an overall mean of 3.49 on the supportive conditions-relationships dimension) when it came to establishing supportive conditions within the school. The living systems perspective supports this notion as well, in that teachers are less likely to be open with their practices if they do not trust those around them. “Although professional learning communities stress the creation of collaborative communities, the communities do little more than provide social pressure to normalize management’s intentions” (Tarnoczi, 2006), shows a less trusting perspective of an LC. With trust, teachers are more likely to build from one another’s ideas, thus creating a kind of synergy in the building.

**Budget.** According to participants, the two biggest positive impacts on their PLCs from the budgetary point of view were the cost of releasing people for planning purposes, and the purchase of technology. Staffs at all five study sites were very appreciative of the money spent to provide for release time. “I think it would start to fall apart without release time, just because time is finite and something’s got to give” (IDI2 9). In one district, staffs knew that their board supported their PLC work with money. This sent a positive message to staffs that their PLC work was valued. When principals shared budget decisions with their staffs, this was also appreciated. Participants noted having the infrastructure in place made it easier to maintain the PLC. Participants at all five sites appreciated money spent to help purchase technology. Participants stated
technology was useful for both teachers and students in communication, lesson design, and lesson implementation. Survey data supports the sentiments just stated. According to the survey results from statements 44-46 (fiscal resources are available for professional development, appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff, resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning), having the appropriate personnel, fiscal resources, and technology is important, with overall means ranging from 3.17-3.31.

**Negative Factors**

This section examines how politics, interpersonal relations, trust, and budget can discourage the PLC from being formed and sustained. Each will be examined in turn.

**Politics.** In the view of many participants, divisive and fractured life has an effect on schools. Politics has the propensity to negatively affect the PLC, according to participants at all five schools. This was shown in both the survey data and the interview data. Overall means for statements 2, 3 and 4 in the BC context dimension, ranged from 2.52 to 2.97, the lowest of all of the eight dimensions measured, and firmly within the disagree portion of the scale. The interview data can be grouped into two main categories, negative effects from within the school building, and negative effects from outside the school building.

Within the school building, participants saw the local union and its strong adherents as having the ability to sabotage the PLC. Participants at all five schools studied indicated it was necessary for teachers to work beyond the hold of negative politics if they wanted to maintain their PLC. Common perceptions amongst the participants studied indicated the following are antithetical to building and maintaining PLCs: conflict between the district and the local union, negative and aggressive teachers, teachers who pull the autonomy card, teachers who are worried about the de-privatization of their practice, forcing people to belong to a PLC, and teachers who were ‘me’ oriented and who used the union to support this stance. As one participant explained, “I’ve been at schools where you get somebody who’s really strongly union, or really strongly district, and they can’t and won’t interact with each other, and you can’t find balance. I think that makes things difficult” (IDI1 5). This fits well with the managed system in that
systemic processes that are antithetical to the nurturing of an LC are very difficult to ameliorate if there are those who insist on using them or supporting them.

Outside the school building participants saw factors associated with the teachers’ union and with the government as having the ability to sabotage the PLC. Provincial accountability practices were seen as inappropriate as they did not take into account the advantages and disadvantages inherent in each school population. Participants in all five schools spoke of the demoralizing effect the FSA tests had (in particular, the published rankings) on hard-working teachers in challenging schools. As well, all five schools had participants who were critical of the diminishing dollars at the school level. As one participant stated, “It comes down to dollars and cents, not what is best for our kids” (FG 3). Participants generally saw the provincial government as out of touch with the reality of schools’ needs. From what participants said, a managed system fits well with the notion of being out of touch with the members of the community it is supposed to be leading, as there is no implied requirement for dialogue, just a tacit understanding that the set process will be followed.

Participants in this study generally saw the union as an obstacle to overcome when developing their PLC. Only a few of the participants believed the local union was helpful with developing or maintaining their PLC. In one school (Lakeside), participants stated they would like to see the union more involved in helping to find release time for teachers involved in PLCs. In another school (Windy Pines), participants expressed dissatisfaction with the way the union meddled in their plans for doubling up classes to secure release time for PLC meetings. Participants at all five schools indicated a school staff that was too pro-union had difficulty with the concept of collaboration and shared practice. According to participants, teacher naysayers were generally supported by the union, rather than encouraged to participate in their school’s PLC with their colleagues (IDI1 5). This fits well with the premise of individual teachers in individual classrooms (managed system) rather than the premise of teachers working collaboratively in communities (living system).

Interpersonal relations. Interpersonal relations that were not positive had an impact on the success of the PLC. This was commented on in all five of the schools studied. Participants consistently stated not all teachers showed the capacity to develop a
Developing Learning Communities

PLC. “Teachers who are egocentric or selfish do not truly understand the purpose of a PLC. The PLC is no place for the one-upmanship, that an egocentric teacher is more likely to be engaged in” (FG2 18). According to participants, some teachers were just not team players. Further to this, it was the solitary teacher in front of the classroom that appealed to some when they first went into the profession. They simply were not wanting or willing to share. It was also noted that how well people worked together in schools had a lot to do with how accepting people were as individuals. If clashes between individuals were the norm in a school according to participants, then it was hard for teachers to be open and to “expose areas of less greatness” (P 2).

According to participants, the principals were also seen as a big factor in determining the success of the PLC, as their leadership was needed to help to create morale. The principal’s leadership could, however, be sabotaged by the staff if the principal was changed every three to five years, or if there were staff members who did not do well with authority, according to participants. All five schools had participants who stated the PLC should be facilitated by the principal, but driven by the teachers on staff for it to grow and have legitimacy. This means there are many opportunities for a PLC to be derailed, as there are many different people in a school building, some who may not have the capacity to allow a PLC to develop, and who have the power to do the derailing. From the above, it appears a managed system might be all that is possible in a school if there are no larger systemic responses available to help a school become ‘unstuck’.

Trust. According to participants, without trust amongst the members of the staff charged with creating and maintaining a PLC it is unlikely a PLC will exist. “Consistency, openness and trust are required to maintain a PLC.” (IDI2 6) It was lack of trust with the government’s stewardship of the education ministry that led to some discontent among participants. When teachers felt judged at the school or district level by the level of achievement their students reached, without any acknowledgement of where the students began, trust was lost. Participants felt that when change was driven from above (provincial government, district, or school) without any consultation with those whom it most affected, trust was again eroded (IDI2 20-21).
According to participants, once a PLC was established, it was much easier for teachers to participate, as they could see up front what the commitment looked like, and what degree of vulnerability was required. Without trust it was difficult to get teachers to consent to the vulnerability required to move their practice from the tried and true onto new ground. Furthermore, when the whole staff was not on board for such an initiative, it was that much harder, as those involved in the initiative felt like they were on display, and others were waiting for them to fall. “Having people on staff who really try to look at all sides” (IDI2 11), was very helpful in alleviating some of this reticence. Without trust, a more managed system is likely, as the purposeful conversations needed for an LC will not happen in the absence of trust (Tarnoczi, 2006; Naylor, 2007).

**Budget.** Lack of funds was an issue cited by participants in all five schools studied, and is an issue that has the potential to derail the positive effects of the PLC. This lack of funds was generally attributed to the provincial government. Participants were frustrated with the messages of increased funding from the government, as the increased funding was not adequate to cover the increased costs at the schools. All five school communities reported that they were happy with the way their districts tried to allocate resources to schools. It was generally felt they were doing the best they could with the dollars they were given.

Since the maintaining of PLCs relied heavily on the cost item of release time, participants reported that they were grateful for the release time they were given, worried that it might be taken away, and hopeful that there might be a way to find more release time in order to work on PLC goals. Because of these thoughts, participants saw that finances had a real and powerful ability to hinder the development and maintaining of their PLCs. Connected to this, at smaller schools there are naturally fewer monetary and human resources and therefore a lesser ability to creatively cover classes for release time.

**Does Improved Learning Play a Part in Maintaining LCs?**

There were many common threads among the five schools studied that demonstrated that improved teacher and student learning did play a part in helping to maintain LCs. The existence of the LCs contributed to improved student and teacher
learning. This in turn helped to maintain the LCs. The next three sections will explore these common threads (both positive and negative), beginning with teacher learning.

**Teacher Learning – Positive Factors**

Data gathered from the five sites in regard to teacher learning, can be organized around four main themes that emerged from the data: group power, watching peers, assessment, and a desire for personal growth.

**Group power.** Participants at all five sites spoke of the power of the group to have a positive influence on the activities chosen by staffs. By planning together, participants felt their peers supported them, and they were part of a larger group that was “trying to figure this out together” (IDI1 19). One participant described belonging to a PLC as differentiated learning for adults. All participants expressed the notion that their PLC kept them moving; that they had grown so much as professionals because of the power of their PLC group. This encouraged them to want to continue with this work. As one participant stated, “good professional development ideas often sat on the shelf. This was not because they were not good ideas” (IDI1 9). It was because the professional development did not have built in time to discuss the implementation within the context of the building in which it was being used. The majority of the professional development in the schools in District A were organized by teachers within their schools, and held on site so teachers could continue to work on their PLC goals. Participants were finding one school focus would naturally grow out of another, as they got deeper into their goals. This fits with the survey data, which indicated a high level of agreement with statements that inquired about working as a group (statements 16-31 where the overall means ranged from 3.22-3.51). The living systems perspective supports the group power described above as it leads to growth for teachers while they are working within and with their LC. Also supporting the living systems perspective is the natural growth of one focus goal from another. The inherent complexity, interconnectedness, and generativity of living systems, speaks to the action needed behind the contents of the capacity being built (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

**Watching peers.** The power of watching their colleagues teach, to improve their practice, was mentioned by participants at all five sites. For some, comfort with this began with having cohorts of student teachers in their schools. For others, it was a
requirement to observe each other, as part of a district-initiated program that gave money to teachers participating, that got them started. Although the idea of observing each other seemed a little unnatural at first to most participants, they were very pleased they had taken that first step. They saw the power of watching peers as something they would continue with, as they believed they always learned something new when they were able to watch each other. This was especially true if participants were involved in trying out a new initiative, like differentiated instruction. This practice supports the living systems perspective of community and is antithetical to the managed system, where teachers, for the most part, work in their own rooms in isolation.

Assessment. There were many helpful assessment practices that participants at the various sites used, including:

- Marking assessments together.
- Looking at data together to see what was working/not working to help student achievement.
- Looking for common assessments that could help to drive their instructional practices.

Survey data collected supported collaborative assessment. Participants rated statements to do with collaborative assessment higher, with an overall mean of 3.39 for the collective learning and application dimension, and an overall mean of 3.15 for the shared personal practice dimension. Participants also spoke of the power of having more than one teacher involved in the assessment of an individual student, as it was more likely that helpful strategies and instructional practices could be put in place to help that student. “We’ve got three pairs of eyes watching, guiding” (IDI 2 5). Assessment for learning (AfL) was the focus of participant’s discussions at the schools studied, as for teachers, this kind of assessment led immediately to increased student learning.

From a living systems perspective this fits well because of the importance placed on assessment in community, whereas working on assessment in isolation within each classroom would fit more with the managed system where teachers do not discuss their assessment practices with others unless it is mandated. Also supporting this premise is research showing that teacher collaboration has a statistically significant effect on student achievement (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).
**Personal growth.** Participants at three of the five schools (Lakeside, Sunny Brook, and Windy Pines) attended ASCD conferences related to PLCs, prior to implementing them at their schools. They found these conferences to be pivotal for their colleagues and their desire to help create PLCs at their own schools. Participants at all five sites spoke passionately about their desire to continue to grow professionally. One participant stated this was the reason she left her previous school. It had been a non-PLC school and she claimed she was no longer growing as a professional (IDI2 19). All five sites had participants who expressed the desire to continue with experimentation and growth as part of being professional educators. For them, status-quo teaching (more managed in nature) was not a healthy option. They believed, despite their many years teaching, there was still more to learn (more living systems in nature as continued growth is implied). Further to this, teachers who function at a higher cognitive level produce students who function at higher cognitive levels (Hord & Somers, 2008).

**Student Learning – Positive Factors**

Data gathered from the five sites in regard to student learning can be organized around four main themes, which emerged when the data was examined: student achievement results, grouping students, whole child emphasis, and technology.

**Student achievement results.** Participants at all five sites believed their PLC had a positive impact on student achievement. This had the effect of encouraging teachers to continue on with their PLC work. Each site had participants who spent time working on differentiated instruction and AfL, and on developing common formative assessments. Participants reported that the data collected from these common formative assessments showed students were improving academically (IDI2 19). School communities reported that reading comprehension scores were up from before the implementation of their PLCs, as evidenced by their own school data. Participants at all sites believed that their students benefitted from teachers who were learning and trying new ways of teaching. School staffs working together were also seen as a benefit, as there was more articulation from grade to grade. “We know what is going on at different grade levels, we’re articulating more clearly between the grades” (FG 12). By developing student friendly assessment rubrics, staffs were making an effort to involve students in the assessment so that it was more meta-cognitive. Supporting this position is research showing a
substantial relationship between school leadership (positional and non-positional) and student achievement (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003).

School survey data fit well with the above statements. Participants generally agreed with the collective learning and application dimension statements, with an overall mean for this dimension of 3.39. FSA data also indicates that students are doing better in some academic areas than one would expect, given the overall makeup of the student body (e.g., socio-economic, ESL).

**Grouping students.** Participants mentioned regrouping students in order to best meet their needs in three of the five schools studied (Windy Pines, Trillium, and Lakeside). By taking the students from numerous classes and putting them into groups closer to their zone of proximal development, participants felt they were better able to meet the needs of all. By working as a collective to design instruction, participants felt some of the pressure of trying to meet all students’ needs was ameliorated, as there was more than one educator looking after the needs of each student. This regrouping allowed participants to make some groups very small and to provide the extra assistance these students needed. “The kids in this school know that we’re all their teachers” (IDI2 13). This supports the living systems perspective, as it would be difficult to regroup students if the school was operating on the mechanistic systems model where each teacher tends to work with only the students enrolled to their class. It is collegial learning within a shared culture of support that creates professional learning communities, and it is maintaining focus on staff learning that leads to student learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

**Whole child emphasis.** Teachers at all five sites believed that the education of the whole child was the mandate of the school. They saw many connections between helping students to develop academically, and helping them to develop socially, emotionally, and physically. “Academics are important, and we know that otherwise we wouldn’t be teaching. But there’s more to education than just the academics” (IDI2 15). Citizenship was a focus at all five sites. Teachers reported actively modeling this by showing that they cared for others in the building. As a result, participants reported that they saw evidence of students trying to work collaboratively because they saw their teachers working collaboratively. According to participants, students picked up on their teachers’ commitment as well, transferring these attributes to the classroom. Participants
Developing Learning Communities

at all sites noted that, when their students were successful, they felt successful too. “When I do something and it’s gone well, I’m excited about it and want to spread it” (FG 11). A living systems model would support the notion of teachers looking to see and understand all the factors that are having an effect and then deciding what should be done as a result. The living systems model does not separate out discrete parts of the whole, whereas the mechanistic model does.

There is no room for flexible adaptations, learning and evolution in the machine metaphor, and it is clear that organizations managed in strictly mechanistic ways cannot survive in today’s complex, knowledge-oriented and rapidly changing business environment (Capra, 2002, p.105).

**Technology.** Technology was used in varying degrees at each site even though each site had access to technology. Participants at one of the schools (Windy Pines) had found using technology, especially with their boys, had dramatic positive effects. Male students at this school looked forward to showing their reading ability, especially in the area of non-fiction, by using tools such as: iPad apps, iMovie, Comic Life, and PhotoBooth. “Some of the boys are really struggling with reading, and bringing in technology really draws them in” (IDI1 14). Participants at all sites also found they were more likely to use the Internet when planning lessons, as well as in designing more interactive lessons, if they had personal use of a laptop. School survey data support the above, in that respondents agreed with statement 45 (overall mean of 3.31) which asked about appropriate technology availability.

**Teacher and Student Learning – Negative Factors**

Status-quo learning played a part in the rejection of a PLC in a school, and this was articulated in all five schools studied. There were a number of factors that fed into this notion of status-quo learning. Firstly, there were factors associated with change and the fear of change. “Teachers who were too insular could not see change as a possibility,” (IDI2 15) stated one participant. They were comfortable with what they were doing and saw no compelling need to change. This is why we see PLCs more often in schools that have needy students. Needy students present a more compelling reason for teachers to change. As one participant explained, “Teachers in ‘easy’ schools are not driven to become better” (P 10). There were also teachers who believed autonomy meant
they could do whatever they wanted to do, which was not necessarily what was best for students.

The relocation of teachers also played a part in the collective learning in the school. As some participants stated, teachers who left a school early in implementation due to lower seniority or maternity leave for example, broke the flow of the adult learning in progress. Adding new members to the PLC team each year had the propensity to stall the forward learning momentum as well. Also of concern were teachers who had not transferred often enough. They had the propensity to become complacent, entitled, narrow-minded, and therefore less flexible. Flexibility was important to maintaining the LC, as it was the ability to see new patterns in student learning, and new possibilities for meeting student needs, that allowed for continued adult learning. The importance of flexibility is addressed by Mitchell & Sackney’s (2009) assertion that “a managed system is structured to handle simplified problems and simplistic solutions, but this approach fails to address the inherent complexity, interconnectedness, and generativity of living systems” (p.11).

Participants spoke of the difficulties created when starting a PLC in a school without a clear definition of what it was, or what its purpose was (lack of clarity). Without clear definition, confusion and a lack of purposeful direction was generally the result. As well, the requirement that teachers give letter grades in the intermediate grades (four to seven) was counterintuitive to AfL. PLCs, as they were practiced in this study, generally embraced AfL tools to pinpoint where students were in their learning, and what might be the next best step in order to take students to the next stage in their learning. This brings up another point noted by participants, which was, the difficulty experienced in designing assessments. Participants were finding that there was still much work to do in the design of assessments. They did not feel that their university training prepared them well for this.

Because so much was asked of teachers in a PLC, there was also the possibility of teacher burnout. As one participant noted, it was often the needier schools where PLCs grew and thrived. But in these schools, classroom management was often more difficult and often left to teachers who had less seniority, as those with more seniority gravitated to ‘easy’ schools.
Developing Learning Communities

The above challenges support the mechanistic model in that newer and innovative ways of doing things are not sought out if teachers do not feel the urgency to act. Secondly, if teachers stay in one school for too long, there is a risk they will become more normalized to what is around them, lessening their urgency to act. Thirdly, if government mandates are counter to what is needed within the community, it is possible the mandated (and more managed) will take precedence.

How Does the LC Become Systemic?

All five school staffs in this study showed ways in which they had moved towards making their LC systemic. Participants at all five sites had similar insights into how they tried to do so. These insights can be organized into four main themes: culture, school framework, instructional design, and communication. Factors that work against a school developing systemic ways of becoming an LC will also be examined.

Culture

Participants spoke of the importance of seeing themselves as a team of teachers, rather than as individual teachers engaged in solitary practice. In order to get to this place of ‘team’ there were a number of important considerations. One participant stated that having a ‘hook’ before formalizing the PLC helped to build culture. For three of the schools (Windy Pines, Sunny Brook, and Lakeside) the ‘hook’ was attending the ASCD conferences on PLCs before any implementation occurred within their schools. “So a lot of people had their ‘aha’ moment, like this is where we’re heading. I think that was very powerful and very smart to try to get people on board” (IDI1 11). Having agreed-upon norms for their PLC meetings was also important to those interviewed. Participants at all five sites believed teachers should lead the PLC meetings, and principals should create the conditions for them to occur. Participants who were able to have scheduled time during the week to work on their PLC goals found they were putting more emphasis on student growth through AfL, and spending time discussing learning targets and learning outcomes that were common. They found they were using the assessment tools provided with new resources as they had the time to talk about them with colleagues. Most interestingly, three of the five schools (Windy Pines, Sunny Brook and Lakeside) had
staff that had shifted from collaboration (where teachers met together to talk about common interests within the school) to PLCs (where teachers met together to work towards collaboratively set learning goals meant to improve student achievement). They defined the difference between the two as putting more of a focus on growth for all, with the use of common assessments, and a more inquiry-based focus on lesson design.

Survey data supports these thoughts. Results from the collective learning and application dimension were high (overall mean of 3.39). These also support the living systems framework of LCs, in that teachers were very much connected to each other and to the ‘disturbances within the system’ (Capra, 1996) calling for their attention.

**School Framework**

Participants at all five schools studied spoke of the importance of the framework designed at the school to help facilitate their PLCs. The most important overarching structure was the alignment of the schools’ goals with those of the PLCs. Within their PLCs, three of the five schools (Windy Pines, Sunny Brook and Lakeside) had begun choosing essential student outcomes for curricular areas chosen at their school. All five schools had participants who spoke of the importance of having release time during the school week in order to facilitate this work. Participants generally believed that this work would not have happened if the structure (common release time) had not been provided. “I think that the time is crucial because teachers get so busy. If it’s not in your schedule it’s really easy to push it off, even though you want to do it” (FG 7). Participants believed that examining and using common assessments, collective expectations and common goals were the main drivers for their change in practice.

Similarly, survey data collected indicated the importance of goal alignment and time to collaborate around important issues, with an overall mean of 3.38 for the shared values and vision dimension, and an overall mean of 3.39 for the collective learning and application dimension. The living systems framework is supportive of the above position in that change success depends on the “degree to which the culture of the organization is open and ready to consider what is currently being done and is continually examining ways to improve” (Hall & Hord, 2006, p. 1).


**Instructional Design**

Participants spoke of the importance of seeing all of the students in the school as their collective responsibility. By partnering with those in their grade, they were able to design lessons and problem solve much more efficiently. By regrouping students, or by platooning, they were able to share the curricular load and deliver lessons more in tune with student needs. Participants believed that colleagues who team-taught in grades below them had students who were more advanced the following year. “This is the first year I’ve been able to move really quickly in math at the beginning of the year. The students were really solid and that’s great” (IDI1 6). Participants also stated that having access to district-based teacher leaders was very helpful. The living systems model sees the interconnectivity of all within the system as important. By working together to meet student needs, the participants in this study were demonstrating elements of a living systems approach.

**Communication**

All five sites had participants who spoke of the importance of communication in maintaining their PLCs. Being open and honest about challenges was considered important, as this was how staffs were able to support one another by moving forward, regardless of what the challenges were. All sites used email as a regular way of communicating information so that they could use their PLC time for those issues requiring discussion.

In a living system, communication is important to its members, and honest and supportive communication is crucial in this system. In a managed system, communication tends to be about more general things like how we want students to behave in assemblies. Furthermore, if collaboration results from positive communication it has the propensity to have a positive effect on student learning. “Teacher collaboration was found to have a statistically significant effect on student achievement” (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007, p. 55).

**Negative Factors**

There were many factors discovered during this research that had the propensity to negatively affect the LC. Perhaps this is the biggest reason LCs are so difficult to
Developing Learning Communities

maintain for any appreciable length of time. The following were factors gleaned from participants as to why LCs may not become systemic:

- If there is not enough time during the school day to have meaningful planning time.
- If the scope is too big (you begin too big or too quickly).
- If the district time-line is too restrictive in regard to what must be done and when.
- If the administrator is not on board.
- If LC members do not talk enough about implementation.
- If there are too many job shares, too many people on leave, or members are bumped due to low seniority.
- If members do not understand the research behind LCs.
- If teacher leaders do not have the capacity to help lead.

“We wouldn’t lose as many teachers if we were more supportive” (IDI1 9), is a good quote to consider when thinking about the strength of the LC, as the very nature of the LC is supportive of all within the community.

Overall, culture, school framework, instructional design and communication all play a part in helping the LC to become systemic. Of concern are the myriad of factors that have the propensity to derail the LC, some of which are beyond the control of the system itself.

A Reconceptualization of the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

All of the LCs studied showed elements of living systems and managed systems perspectives. This was not surprising as the overall structure for education in our province begins with provincial legislation that mandates many of our structures and processes. Furthermore, there is a legislated hierarchy within the school system as it is presently structured that is unlikely to change any time soon. For example positional roles like teacher, principal, superintendent and their respective responsibilities are defined in legislation. For those in leadership positions within the mandated structure, understanding where there is flexibility to provide a more living systems perspective is helpful as this research indicates it is more likely to lead to enhanced growth for both students and teachers. Figure 22 shows the reconceptualized framework based on the
research data. Data showed that the managed perspective and the living systems perspective both had influence in BC schools. This messiness occurred because of the reality of the structure of the system. For example, teachers wanted time off and system support (like system consultants) but wanted to manage the choices and decisions for their own learning. Sometimes the people within the system choose to follow one
Developing Learning Communities

perspective or the other, sometimes the perspective was mandated either by the people within the schoolhouse itself or by those who were outside the schoolhouse. For example, some teachers did not wish or were not able to engage in collaborative structures, thereby limiting the ability of the staff to become more living systems in nature, while some teachers embraced working together on issues around student learning, which was more living systems in nature. Furthermore, boards of education and their employees were bound to follow lawful legislation, which was also more managed in nature. The dotted arrows indicate that there is movement between the two perspectives. Furthermore, this movement is not fixed but depends upon the people within the system and their view of what the best perspective to use is at a particular moment in time.

Summary

This chapter presented findings based on analyses of data collected. Findings connected to: leadership, organizational structures, capacity, school design, and school goals were found to shed light on what assisted and encouraged LC development. There were a number of findings that indicated why LCs were discouraged from being developed and sustained. These findings were organized around: finite time, leadership, capacity, school design, and school goals. Data in regard to the positive and negative influence politics, interpersonal relations, trust and budget play were also presented, as were data collected to ascertain whether or not student and teacher learning played a part in maintaining the LC and whether or not there were ways in which the LC became systemic. Finally, a reconceptualization of the theoretical and conceptual framework is presented based on the research data.
Chapter 8: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter presents the conclusions and implications for theory, research and practice based on the research findings.

Conclusions and Discussion

The conceptualization for this study was that a living systems as compared to a managed systems perspective was more likely to develop sustainable learning communities. Based on the findings derived from this study, the following conclusions emerged.

As only five schools within two districts have been examined for this study, comparisons to other schools and districts should be made with caution. Using the context of each school and district when attempting to draw comparisons will help ascertain whether or not comparisons and conclusions drawn are appropriate.

The following eight main conclusions were derived from the data in this study. Each of these conclusions is examined in turn, using literature cited in this study as a basis for discussion of the conclusions drawn.

1. **Leadership.** For an LC to develop, both positional and non-positional (distributed) leadership are required from a school’s staff. The absence of one of these types of leadership is likely to diminish the ability of the LC to maintain itself. When Capra (2002) described a living systems way of looking at communities generally, he was describing the importance of having all within the system working together. It is this notion of “mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire of routines, and tacit rules of conduct and knowledge” (Capra, 2002, p. 107) that defined the community of practice for Capra. Participants in this study agreed with this notion in that they articulated the need for all staff (principals, teachers, SEAs) to work together if they wanted to create and maintain an LC. This research found that connected to leadership, LCs worked best when led by teachers and facilitated by principals. The reason is that teachers are primarily the ones who work closely with students, and are therefore in a position to respond creatively to differences as they evolve. Capra (2002) would call this responding to ‘disturbances within the system’. Capra (2002)
writes of the importance of those within the system having the ability and approval to respond, in ways that make sense to them, to these ‘disturbances within their system’. Participants in this study agreed with the notion of being able to respond to what they were noticing in a way that made sense to them, and this allowed their LCs to develop.

2. **Collaboration.** Participants saw collaboration as an integral part of a developing LC. This collaboration gave teachers the time to focus on: putting professional development ideas into practice within the context of the school, developing common and coordinated assessment tools to help improve student achievement, being affirmed as part of a team, having common school goals around which their LC embedded their work, focusing teacher’s efforts, and improving teacher’s satisfaction while keeping LC goals alive and part of day-to-day life in the school. Finally, collaboration helped teachers discover different perspectives, new methods, and alternate solutions to challenges.

   When teachers collaborate as a team over important issues that help them put professional ideas into practice, they are building capacity from the inside (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2000). By ensuring there is time built into the week for collaboration, capacity building is more likely to happen. Participants consistently stated that this could not happen entirely outside of school hours, that time was needed during the hours when students were in session. This research further showed that participants who watched each other teach found it to be empowering and instructive. Research supports the notion that teachers watching and learning from fellow teachers sustains internal capacity by helping those teachers believe in success, make connections, and practice new ideas (Stoll, Fink and Earl, 2000). District-based support, in the way of time allocation for the release of participants from their classrooms as well as having access to someone with knowledge of LCs at the district level, helped with LC initiatives and with maintaining LCs generally. Support for this concept of district level support comes from Hargreaves (2008) “fourth way” of “building from the bottom and steering from the top (p. 40)”. The fourth way has the district providing a framework in which to operate but allows the school broad control over how to achieve goals appropriate for each school that have been set in collaboration by the
staff within those schools. District A, which did have a more explicit PLC framework in place, had participants who were able to articulate the connection between LC research and their school community’s movement toward PLCs.

3. **Capacity.** According to participants, for an LC to develop, capacity (open-mindedness, forward thinking) must exist in members of the staff. Furthermore, participants in this research believed some teachers had the propensity to become fixated or stuck and were not able to see the necessity for change when they remained at one school for long periods of time. As a result, these long-time-in-one-school teachers did not seek out new school experiences or initiatives and were more likely to embrace status-quo teaching and resist LC development. A conclusion that could be drawn from this is that decreased learning and achievement for both adults and students would be a result (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Waters et al., 2003). As Hall and Hord’s literature shows “change success depends less on whether the source of the change is internal or external and significantly more on the degree to which the culture of the organization is open and ready to consider what is currently being done and is continually examining ways to improve” (Hall & Hord, 2006, p.1). As articulated by participants, it is difficult for teachers to know how to improve if they cannot envision schools different than their own. Of equal importance, a school with a history of staff members changing too frequently had a greater likelihood of stalling the LC, according to participants. This agrees with the premise that internal personnel and leadership changes can adversely affect the maintaining of an LC (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). If principals are changed too frequently, they may not be seen as the schools’ leaders, but instead as the next administrators to be out-waited. Examples of both internal personnel and leadership change stresses were evident in this research when participants spoke of schools that were not doing as well as the one in which they presently worked. It was found that school communities without adequate capacity had difficulty in working together.

According to Mitchell & Sackney (2009), personal, interpersonal and organizational capacity is “mutually influencing and mutually reinforcing and an LC is unlikely to emerge unless capacity is built in all three domains” (p. 31). The opinions articulated by the participants of this study reflect this idea. The participants identified school
sites that lacked the capacity necessary to bring people together to form an effective PLC either because they were unable to develop personal capacity due to their teachers’ unwillingness to seek out new ideas or understandings, or because they were unable to develop interpersonal capacity due to an unwillingness on the part of teachers to work together and to operate in a spirit of trust, respect and psychological safety.

4. **Unions.** Unions were not seen as helpful by participants, for creating or for maintaining an LC at a school. LCs in this study were generally apolitical. They focused on what they felt was best, regardless of what was happening in systems outside their schools (district, province, union). This shows agreement with the living systems framework in that participants were responding to what was ‘disturbing’ them in their own environment (Capra, 2002). This bodes well for union members (Tarnoczi, 2006; Naylor, 2007) who suspiciously view the notion of the LC as another way for management to normalize or establish its intentions. It is evident the school communities studied were not simply complying, but were enmeshed in learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). For participants in this study, LCs were not viewed as a management strategy but as a learning strategy. Some union leaders do not appear to understand the purpose of an LC in the same way that participants in this research did. Perhaps if more union leaders had a better understanding of LCs there would be less resistance to their development.

5. **Similar grade LC preference.** Participants preferred to work in LCs of a similar grade rather than in cross-grade LCs. In this particular instance, learning communities in this study did not exhibit true living systems and ecological conceptions (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009) but showed elements of these. For example, the notion of grade alike does not deal with the holistic aspects of schooling, which are major elements of living systems; in the schools studied most participants would only invest if they got release time. It is likely that the managed system, in which schools for the most part are still enmeshed, was still playing a part. Situating education within a living system systemically is not likely to occur overnight, but has the possibility to develop over time if successes with a more living systems conception are realized.
6. **Trust.** Trust amongst staff members, according to participants, helps LCs to grow and be sustained. Participants at the five study sites all reported high levels of trust; and indicated that a culture of trust was imperative if they were to question old practices and explore new ones. Trust helped participants to be team-oriented, positive-minded and flexible when embracing new initiatives. Participants liked the way their principals kept them focused on their goals, and on what was important. According to participants, changing the principal too often had the propensity to stall LC development, as short-term principals were not seen as long-term members of the staff. Changing key staff (due to seniority, maternity leaves, retirement, and so on) also had the propensity to have an equally negative impact, according to participants.

Participants further articulated that trust could be eroded if negative or counterproductive behaviour by a staff member could not be ameliorated. Negative interpersonal relations at sites participants had previously worked at had a negative impact on the success of LCs. Teachers described as “egocentric, narrow-minded, or status-quo driven” truly did not understand the purpose of an LC. Positive interpersonal relations did play a part in maintaining the LC. Having systemic (both school and district) structures in place to effectively deal with negative, or counterproductive staff behaviour, would therefore help establish conditions for LCs to develop and grow. Participants also mentioned that it was worth noting how differing levels of the system can impact the individual school. For example, the province and the district both have an impact on the school because of the nature of their connectedness through structure. Erosion of trust between these levels can have a negative effect on the school.

7. **Focus on learning.** Participants in the LC schools studied had a whole-child emphasis, and saw the needs of all students as the collective responsibility of all staff. They saw that a team approach to teaching helped both student and adult learning. Taking into account the process of learning, as well as measurable results (Hargreaves, 2008), seems to fit well with the living systems perspective in that the people within the system itself must take the diversity inherent in each school into consideration. As shown in this study, each school community had its own sets of complexities, and its own way of trying to maintain cohesion (Hargreaves & Fink,
Developing Learning Communities

Within each school this required the participants to take into account all that they were seeing, hearing, experiencing and measuring in order to make the best choices. Doing exactly the same thing in each school (more managed in nature) would not accomplish this.

By making group decisions that positively influenced their teaching and learning, the staff supported one another. One participant described this as differentiated learning for adults. Because of this support, participants found that one school-wide focus would grow from another, as they got deeper into their goals. Watching each other teach was also seen as a powerful adult learning tool. Participants who watched one another always learned something new. In terms of assessment, when participants worked together to plan, and look at data to see what was working and why, they became better at pinpointing where to go next with instruction. They also felt more able to pinpoint specific teaching and learning strategies for students whose learning needs were a little different than the rest.

In terms of student achievement, participants used data to help them differentiate their instruction, and to make plans for further instruction. They had noticed this was having a positive impact on student learning, which was mirrored in the AfL results they were seeing. Furthermore, participants grouped and regrouped students in order to continue to differentiate instruction. This also gave students the benefit of having more than one teacher watching their progress, and also helped them to move forward in their learning. With participants seeing the whole child’s development as their mandate, students were able to grow socially, emotionally and physically, as well academically, as these were seen to be inextricably intertwined, with each naturally impacting the others. Technology was seen to be a positive tool in the quest to help students learn, especially for boys. Participants at the study sites spoke of the energy derived from continuing to grow professionally and how this energy helped to keep them positive and creative in meeting their students’ needs.

8. **Communication.** Professional and ethical communication and communication systems help maintain developing LCs when they deal with inevitable changes in education, as articulated by participants. Further to this, it is helpful if school communities understand the change process. When writing about change, Hord &
Sommers (2008) recommend using visioning to develop a plan. In this research, school staffs that were examples of developing LCs had a clear vision of where they were going, why they were going there, how they were planning to get there, and what they needed to pay attention to along the way. All of these steps however, required people within the system to be able to trust each other, and to be ethical and professional during the journey. According to participants, unethical and unprofessional behaviour did not lead to growth. It instead encouraged the narrow minded behaviour described by participants in schools that were not doing well, which had the propensity to lead to classroom doors being closed (a retreat to the managed system perspective).

In summary, although professional learning communities have been talked about and studied in the educational context for over ten years, leading educators continue to find them exceedingly difficult to implement and maintain (Huffman & Hipp, 2010). This research showed that developing and maintaining learning communities was a very messy process that required the entire school community to come together around issues of vision, values, learning, and practice. To help schools with declining school achievement, it is necessary to give school leaders considerable latitude while navigating a turnaround (Leithwood & Strauss, 2008). Coming together (around vision, values, learning, and practice) and navigating a turnaround both require a certain level of ‘messiness’ in that there are no set steps that will necessarily lead to success. This notion of ‘messiness’ also fits well with a living systems definition of an LC approach where “a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward the mysteries, problems, and perplexities of teaching and learning” (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009, p. 9). Messiness however, is often a difficult thing for the school system (as it is presently structured) to support, as it requires senior management, boards of education, and the ministry of education to understand these complexities at a level that is deeper than what is currently being practiced or understood.

**Implications**

This next section presents implications flowing from this research. These implications are organized under the headings of implications for theory, practice, and
A leading implication of this study is that LCs enacted within a more living systems framework show promise of developing and being maintained. Therefore, it would be helpful for those within the education system to understand the phenomenon of LCs, their usefulness, what supports them, as well as what does not, and their propensity to fade in schools over time if not given adequate attention and support.

For Theory

This research provides support for the view that a living systems approach is more conducive to the development and maintenance of learning communities than is a managed systems approach. Schools that were able to foster a more living systems approach to the creation and maintaining of their LC were experiencing shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive relational and structural conditions, and the ability to operate within the BC educational context in a healthy way. This led to enhanced learning and growth for students and teachers alike within these school communities.

In recent years there has been a paradigm shift by some researchers when considering the development of learning communities. This has been a shift away from a more recipe-driven way of looking at learning communities to a more living systems (or ecological) way of looking at learning communities. The theoretical framework for this dissertation came from the work of Mitchell and Sackney (2009), who have spent the last two decades exploring school learning communities and their complexities, using Capra’s (2002) work as a lens. They claim that “the LC is failing to live up to its promise of energized learning and revitalized teaching, not because of a flaw in the concept, but because of a deep, structural defect in the system in which schools are immersed” (p. 1.).

The school communities studied in this research did see themselves as strong and positive LCs, and while they did exhibit many traits that could be associated with a living systems perspective, they also exhibited signs of being situated within the managed system that is currently in place in BC. This is not surprising. There currently seems to be a desire on the part of the government, to look for alternative ways to ensure greater numbers of students are having their learning needs met. This is being manifested through an interest and focus on learning frameworks with names such as 21st century learning, project based learning, critical thinking, increased student choice, and so on.
Whether or not this will lead to a system more conducive to encouraging learning communities remains to be seen. From this research it appears there are some structures currently in place that do not help LCs to develop and be sustained (more managed in nature), and some that do help (more living systems in nature).

**For Practice**

Developing LCs holds great promise for improving schools, yet they continue to be difficult to maintain. Each level of the system has the ability to impact the health of the school’s LC. The following are implications from this research that may be helpful for practice.

**Implications for the Ministry of Education.**

1. Having an overwhelming number of prescribed learning outcomes for each grade (BC Ministry of Education website) has implications for curriculum design and implementation, and does not lend itself well to frameworks like project-based learning, 21st century learning practices (like critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration across networks, curiosity and imagination) and so on. Of the schools studied, three were already spending time choosing “essential learning outcomes” as the prescribed curriculum was too dense, and not suited for individualized learning. Taking current thoughts regarding teaching practices into account, including current requirements for assessment and reporting to parents, would be helpful. This implication connects to the BC context portion of this research, by encouraging the ministry to work with educators in the system in a less hierarchical (managed) fashion.

2. Continuing to show an interest in frameworks such as project based learning, would be helpful as these practices fit better with the living systems view of PLC design, than with the managed view of LCs. 21st century learning practices show promise for helping the entire system to change in ways that may be helpful in moving towards making LCs more systemic, authentic and sustainable. This last implication connects to the BC context portion of this research, and would certainly go a long way towards having the ministry seen as more in touch with schools.
Implications for School Districts.

1. Districts that wish to capitalize on the power of the LC should understand that there is a financial component to this support. Participants in one of the districts studied were very appreciative of the support given to LC initiatives by their board. Having someone on the senior management team devote part of his or her time to guiding this initiative was helpful. Providing a small amount of teacher release time to each school for collaborative meeting time was also helpful. All of the participants in this study thought release time was essential for maintaining LCs. This implication connects to the supportive structural conditions portion of this research design, by encouraging districts to put structures in place that encourage LCs to develop. Data from this research indicated that by having supportive structural conditions in place, it was more likely that LCs would develop.

2. If teachers were engaged in professional growth that encouraged or required them to move every so often, not only would this provide for continued broadening of a teacher’s experience base, but all teachers within the system would benefit from the cross pollination of ideas. Creating such a framework would also help school districts avoid concentrations of status-quo or negative-minded teachers at individual school buildings, as was pointed out by participants in this study. Having a positive framework for teacher growth and movement would naturally encourage shared personal practice (an attribute of the living systems perspective) to occur. This further connects to this research by encouraging collective learning and application (living systems perspective) as opposed to learning and application done in isolation (managed system perspective).

3. Creating an LC takes time. Participants in this study felt that at least three years were needed in order to choose a path and then work toward it. According to participants, by changing the school’s leader prematurely it would be difficult to realize the vision set in the first year. If this was repeated regularly, it was more likely that the teaching staff would no longer see the principal as the school’s leader. For some in these kinds of schools, they instead saw the principal as the next administrator in a list of many to be out-waited. Having principals in place for longer periods of time would help keep
Developing Learning Communities

balance and continuity within the attributes of shared and supportive leadership (attributes of the living systems perspective).

4. It would be helpful to provide collaborative time tied to LC goals. Participants in this study who had moved from the idea of collaborative time to PLC time articulated the difference as time to meet to work on agreed upon LC goals rather than time to meet to discuss whatever was most pressing. Participants who worked on agreed upon LC goals felt that their practice was enhanced and that the school community benefitted as a result.

To help with this, districts could provide some teacher release time to each school participating in an LC in order to release teachers during the school day on a more regular basis. Without the ability to meet during the school day, participants felt that it would be difficult to maintain generally longer-term LC initiatives, as the more pressing (short term) issues tend to take precedence. Having collaboration time connected to LC goals in place would help keep a positive focus on collective learning and application (attributes of the living systems perspective). Teachers willing to provide some of their own time in order to collaborate around their LC goals would also be helpful.

5. It was found that districts that had a structure in place to support LCs had more schools involved in trying to create and maintain LCs. For this reason, it would be helpful to have someone at the district level who is able to help lead the LC initiative and provide needed in-service to teacher leaders. It was found that teachers, with the support of their principals, should lead the LCs within their schools. However, teachers may not have the expertise or knowledge required for this leadership. Participants in this research expressed the belief that supportive conditions, both in terms of relationships and structures, were important for maintaining their LCs.

Having some kind of reporting out process for teachers to use with their principals would be a helpful structure to keep LC goals on track, as well as giving the principal timely information regarding what a group might need in the way of time and resources. This connects with the shared and supportive leadership attributes from this research, as it encourages both the positional and non-positional leaders within the school to lead together.
Developing Learning Communities

Implications for Schools.

1. It would be helpful for school communities to develop and keep their LC goals for a number of years, as this would allow school staffs the time needed to implement any desired changes, and to evaluate their impact. According to participants, changing goals more frequently can lead to frustration and is more managed in nature. By pushing too quickly, depth of discussion is not allowed, the ability to explore parallel goals is hindered, and there is a propensity for teacher burnout as a result. Participants in this study mentioned all of these hindrances. The connection here is to divergent thinking (living systems perspective). Without time to allow the iterative process of planning, evaluating, and adjusting to take place, the depth required for divergent thinking may not occur.

2. It is helpful to document LC growth and needs. By finding a way to document growth and helpful processes, these structures can be maintained, and structures that are not helpful can be adjusted. Participants in this study consistently spoke of the need to have ways to keep the LCs accountable in the school so that pressing short-term crises or jobs requiring immediate attention did not become all consuming. Participants felt that purposeful structures and planning were required in order to allow the goals set by the LC to continue to progress and to allow LCs in schools generally, to grow in a positive way. This is a supportive structure that can help maintain an LC.

3. LC growth that is tied to professional growth is helpful, as articulated by participants in all five schools studied. Professionals are an integral part of helping a school LC form and develop. Because of this, school communities should find ways to engage all professionals in the school in the forming and informing of the LC. Professional growth plans that are tied to the professional’s participation in their LC is one way of doing this. Professionals that stand in the way of the formation or growth of an LC within a school are problematic according to participants. Perhaps they should be encouraged or required to move to another school to broaden their outlooks, so as to avoid the ‘waiting until they retire’ syndrome spoken of by participants. This is tied to the following attributes described in the living systems framework used for this study: collaboration, mutuality, divergent thinking, and interrelationships.
Implications for Unions.

1. The union has the power to encourage or discourage the creation and growth of LCs. According to participants, it would be helpful if their union recognized, and stated in some way, that it is generally in the best interest of teachers to work in and towards developing a positive-functioning LC. Although there will occasionally be times when teachers and principals must be separate, it is in the best interest of teachers to work with their principals in fostering LCs according to participants, as this supports beginning teachers, and empowers those teachers with the experience and desire to act as teacher leaders, to do so within the school’s culture and structure. For those teachers who are not novices or experienced, participating with others in the growth of their school communities helps to keep what is important in the forefront, so a school’s staff does not spend precious time on initiatives that may not be helpful or sustainable. Participants did articulate that it was not helpful to have stated goals that no one really worked on as a team within the school. The schools that were functioning well as LCs in this research did not see unions as helpful. This is an implication that ties in well with the BC context portion of this research.

2. According to participants, there should be a balance between autonomy and community obligation. Autonomy to practice comes from acquiring a body of specialized knowledge. This however, should not be seen as the sum requirement of a true professional; it is only the beginning point. A teacher, by virtue of being a professional, has the obligation to help foster the growth of knowledge within the profession. According to participants, this cannot happen if teachers work in isolation within their classrooms, or even if they simply share only the facets of their profession that they wish to. By purposefully working alongside their peers to keep current, question practice, and shape it to meet the needs of the students in their care, they will continue to help the professional knowledge base to grow. According to participants, this focus on professional growth not only is more likely to lead to teacher satisfaction but also helps students to grow. This implication ties in well with the BC context in that the research participants working in schools perceived as functioning well as LCs, did not see unions as helpful. They instead saw unions at best as benign and at worst as unsupportive of their initiatives.
3. Be mindful of the potential harmful effect of politics. The province of B.C. is known for its political polarity. This phenomenon has the propensity to have a strong negative impact within the education system as a whole, as education is often the arena where politicians choose to take a stand. Educators at all levels in B.C. (including teachers) generally want what is best for students, and this politicizing of educational programs, systems, and personnel is often harmful, according to participants. It is possible for unions to protect the individual school environment, while still making their point within the larger political arena. This action would be a great service for students, teachers, parents and society at large, as articulated by participants in this study. It is recognized however, that this is not an easy task. This again connects well to the BC context and teachers’ views of the helpfulness of union policies generally.

**For Research**

There are a number of implications for research that flow from this study. This next section describes implications for further research based on this study.

1. This study looked at five schools in two districts, and therefore the results are not generalizable. It would be interesting to examine a greater number of schools and school districts to see if schools in districts other that the two examined produced similar results.

2. Examination of current research indicates that LCs do not have lasting power. It would be informative to follow a group of strong learning communities over a longer period of time to see if they were able to maintain themselves and if so why they were able to do this. If they were not able to maintain themselves, it would be informative to find out what factor(s) led to their dissolution. Retroactive studies going back one year, three years and five years might shed light on this phenomenon.

3. It would be informative to do a meta-analysis of assessments being used in schools developing as LCs. The schools studied in this research were all using assessments (both formative and summative) to determine if their LCs were effective in terms of student learning. Participants designed some of these assessments and some were commercially produced. None of the schools used the same assessments at the same time each year, other than the government mandated FSA. This made a straight test-
by-test comparison of student learning between schools impossible. A meta-analysis of assessments being used in developing LCs would give greater insight into how much of an effect a school’s LC has on student learning.

4. The focus in this study was on teachers and their understanding of LCs. Including students and/or parents in a data set would give a wider view of the success of an LC within a school.

**Concluding Comments**

As a child I had the opportunity to attend eight different elementary schools within the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. As an educator, I have had the privilege of working at twelve different elementary schools within two Greater Vancouver school districts in BC. This has given me the opportunity to experience first hand a number of differing school communities and their cultures. It was apparent to me, as a child, that some schools were fabulous places of learning to go to each day, some, although not fabulous, were good, and a few, unfortunately, were not effective places to learn. This has been my perception as a professional educator during the past 25 plus years as well.

Although most schools fit somewhere between the best and the worst, I am concerned that there is very little that is done in a systemic way to address the poor practices in those schools that are clearly not functioning well as communities of learning. From both my own observations and from the observations shared by the participants in this study, it appears that there is reticence on the part of some schools and school districts generally to deal with these concerns in a supportive and cohesive way. Part of this stems from the inaction of educators (positional and non-positional leaders), who typically believe that it is better not to ‘rock the boat’ in these communities, preferring to ‘wait it out’. Participants in this research were unaware of any way to effectively deal with ‘stuck communities’, other than waiting for those who held the power either to retire or to leave of their own volition. This kept these school communities from developing positively. Given the ineffectiveness of this approach to nurturing the well-being and learning of both students and adults, perhaps it is time to consider encouraging a more living systems framework of a PLC, as this is more likely to be effective in ensuring positive growth for all in schools.
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“Windy Pines” Staff List 2009-2010.
Appendix A: Cover letter for District level

SFU Letterhead

Research Request
Title of research:
Why do Learning Communities flourish in some elementary and middle schools while not in others? A Study of selected schools in greater Vancouver

Cover letter for District level
Dear __________,
I am a principal in the Delta school district, currently pursuing a doctoral degree with a focus on Educational Leadership (in particular - Senior Leadership in School Districts) through Simon Fraser University (SFU). This letter is a request on my part to find a school within your district that would be suitable for a research project I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. The title of my research is Why do Learning Communities flourish in some elementary and middle schools while not in others? A Study of selected schools in greater Vancouver. The intent of this study is to assist schools and districts who wish to pursue the development and maintenance of professional learning communities. You have been identified as a district level leader who would be able to help me identify a school that has already developed a professional learning community.

I am seeking your assistance in approaching a school that would be appropriate for my research. The school’s involvement would include: (1) interview of two teachers (approximately 40 minutes to 1 hour); (2) a 1 hour focus group interview (with approximately 6 staff); and (3) an online survey that would take about 15 minutes. Anonymity and confidentiality are assured; however, confidentiality cannot be assured in the focus group interview. At the conclusion of the study a copy of the finished report will be sent to you. I can be contacted at 604-314-1853 or by email at jml21@sfu.ca. The supervisor for this project, Larry Sackney, can be contacted at 778-782-8623 or by email at lsackney@sfu.ca. I hope that the findings of this study will be a useful tool to all those who participate. I will phone you some time next week to answer any questions you may have.

Please find attached for your reference:
- a school selection guide – which indicates some broad attributes of Learning Communities that may be helpful when you are considering schools that may be good choices.
- a copy of my focus group questions
- a copy of my interview questions
- a copy of my school staff questionnaire

Thank you very much for your consideration of my request.
Janet Lauman
2546 Wilding Court
Langley BC
V2Y 1E5
Appendix B: School Selection Guide

School Selection Guide

The following are broad attributes distilled from research in the field that can be used to currently define professional learning communities. Which elementary or middle school in your district most closely matches the descriptors below?

In sum, the term ‘professional learning community’ suggests the following attributes of the adults working within the school:

• professional learning that is collaborative in nature rather than adult learning that is carried out in isolation
• a cohesive group that works together regularly to help improve both individual student learning and group instruction
• the collective knowledge of teachers as well as the individual knowledge of teachers being used system-wide to improve learning
• creating and sustaining an ethic of interpersonal caring and collaborating that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders
• acquiring and using a variety of data to help inform a course of action meant to lead to the improvement of learning for all: staff and students
• developing and nurturing a sense of vision and mission for school improvement
Appendix C: Focus Group Questions with prompts

Focus Group Questions with prompts

I will introduce myself and my reasons for holding the focus group session. I will spend a few minutes identifying with the group what a PLC is – so that we are all on the same page. As I take notes during the session, I will also make an audio recording of the conversation so that I can then fill in my notes, transcribing the conversation from the tape as needed afterwards. The following questions with areas of inquiry will be asked in order to facilitate discussion about certain issues surrounding my topic. After each bullet is listed the staff survey questionnaire areas that align with the area of inquiry.

1. What is it about this school that sets it apart from other schools? Areas I will inquire about are:
   • teacher collaboration (Shared & supportive leadership, shared personal practice, relationships, BC context)
   • data collection (collective learning and applications, shared values & vision)
   • provincial/district/local politics, (shared values & vision, BC context)
   • Assessment for Learning (AfL), (collective learning and application, shared values and vision)
   • systemic initiatives (shared values & vision, shared personal practice, BC context)
   • teacher leadership (shared personal practice, shared & supportive leadership)
   • available resources (structures, statements, BC context)

2. Describe the perceived strengths and weaknesses of your Professional Learning Community. Areas I will inquire about are:
   • student successes (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values & vision, collective learning and application, BC context)
   • teacher/staff successes (supportive conditions-relationships & structures, BC context)
   • effect of politics (provincial, district, union [BCTF], union [local]) (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision)
   • effect of technology (BC context, supportive conditions-structures, assessment practices (shared and supportive leadership, BC context, shared personal practice, collective learning and application)

3. Describe what this school staff does in order to maintain and nurture a professional learning community. Areas I will inquire about are:
   • helpful/hindering structures that are in place (shared values and vision, collective learning and application, supportive conditions-structures, BC context, shared and supportive leadership)
   • challenges experienced in maintenance of the Professional Learning Community (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, supportive conditions – relationships & structures)
   • natural responses to disturbances in the system and the effect of these (BC
Developing Learning Communities

classification, collective learning and application, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership)

- how is this school different than others in the district (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, supportive conditions)
- scheduled/unscheduled meetings (collective learning and application, shared and supportive leadership)
- AfL (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, supportive conditions)
- use of technology (BC context, supportive conditions)

4. Describe the attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits that you feel are helpful in the development and maintenance of a Professional Learning Community.

Describe the attitudes, beliefs, and personality traits that you feel would hinder the development of a professional learning community? (Has the community had to deal with difficulties? Has the community had any champions?)

- (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)

5. If you could change aspects of your PLC what would they be?

- (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
Appendix D: Focus Group consent

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<tr>
<td><strong>Title of research:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do Learning Communities flourish in some elementary and middle schools while not in others? A Study of selected schools in greater Vancouver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Cover letter and Consent form for school staff**
SFU Research number [2010s0121]

**For Focus Group Session**
I am the principal of a Kindergarten to grade 7 school currently pursuing a doctoral degree through SFU. I have permission from your district to be conducting this research. This interview is part of my research into determining why professional learning communities (PLCs) are flourishing at some elementary school and some middle schools. The intent of this study is to assist schools and districts who wish to pursue the development and maintenance of professional learning communities. Your school has been identified as one that has already developed a professional learning community. I would like to ask this group some questions that may help me to determine what your school is doing that makes a difference. The interview should take approximately 40 minutes to complete. Your confidentiality within the report will be assured – however, confidentiality within the participating members of the group cannot be assured. A copy of the finished report will be available through your school principal when the study is complete. If you should have any questions or comments regarding this research please contact me at 604-314-1853 or by email at jml21@sfu.ca. You may also contact the supervisor for this project, Larry Sackney, at 778-782-8623 or by email at lsackney@sfu.ca. If you should have any concerns please contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research and Ethics, at 604-782-6593 or by email at hal_weinberg@sfu.ca. All data (paper and electronic forms - on a memory stick) will be securely stored for two years in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator’s home office. You may withdraw from participation in this focus group at any time without any prejudice.

I hope that the findings of this study will be a useful tool to all those who wish to maintain or create professional learning communities of their own.

Thank you very much for your assistance. Janet Lauman

I consent to being interviewed for the above described research.

signatures date

______________________________ _________________
______________________________ _________________
______________________________ _________________
______________________________ _________________
______________________________ _________________
______________________________ _________________
Appendix E: In-depth interview questions

In-depth interview questions (prompts in brackets)

Background (initial) Questions
1. How long have you been a teacher/E...?
2. How long have you worked in your current School District?
3. How long have you worked at your current school?
4. How would you describe your job satisfaction at your current school?

Main Section (After each bullet is listed the staff survey questionnaire areas that align with the area of inquiry.)

1. What do you see as this school’s biggest strengths?
   • learning – student/teacher (BC context, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • AfL (assessment for learning) (BC context, shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, supportive conditions)
   • union (BC context)
   • politics (BC context, shared values and vision)
   • sense of efficacy/success (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • relationships/culture (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)

2. What are this school’s biggest limitations?
   • learning – student/teacher (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • AfL (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • union (BC context)
   • politics (BC context, shared values and vision)
   • sense of efficacy/success (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • relationships/culture (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)

3. Does maintaining a PLC require certain things of its members? If so, please describe what they are.
   • learning – student/teacher (BC context, shared values and vision, shared
Developing Learning Communities

and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- AfL (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- union (BC context)
- politics (BC context, shared values and vision)
- sense of efficacy/success (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- relationships/culture (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)

4. What ability does the PLC have to respond to emerging needs? Describe what this looks like at your school?
- learning – student/teacher (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- AfL (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- union (BC context)
- politics (BC context, shared values and vision)
- sense of efficacy/success (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- relationships/culture (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)

5. What hinders your PLC?
- learning – student/teacher (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- AfL (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- union (BC context)
- politics (BC context, shared values and vision)
- sense of efficacy/success (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
- relationships/culture (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions)
Developing Learning Communities

practice, supportive conditions)

6. What hinders the formation and sustenance of PLCs at other schools?
   • learning – student/teacher (BC context, shared values and vision, shared
     and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared
     personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • AfL (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive
     leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal practice,
     supportive conditions)
   • union (BC context)
   • politics (BC context, shared values and vision)
   • sense of efficacy/success (BC context, shared values and vision, shared
     and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared
     personal practice, supportive conditions)
   • relationships/culture (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and
     supportive leadership, collective learning and application, shared personal
     practice, supportive conditions)

7. How does technology help/hinder your PLC? What evidence do you see?
   (BC context, supportive conditions)

8. How does politics help/hinder your PLC? What evidence do you see?
   (BC context, shared values and vision)

9. How does your PLC affect teacher success? What evidence do you see?
   (BC context, supportive conditions, shared and supportive leadership,
   collective learning and application, shared personal practice)

10. How does your PLC affect student success? What evidence do you see?
    (BC context, supportive conditions, shared and supportive leadership,
    collective learning and application, shared personal practice)

11. Is there anything I should have asked you about that would be useful for me
    to know about?
    (BC context, shared values and vision, shared and supportive leadership,
    collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive
    conditions)
Appendix F: In-depth interview consent

Research Request
Title of research:
Why do Learning Communities flourish in some elementary and middle schools while not in others? A Study of selected schools in greater Vancouver

Cover letter and Consent form for school staff
SFU Research number [2010s0121]

For In-Depth Interviews
I am the principal of a Kindergarten to grade 7 school currently pursuing a doctoral degree through SFU. I have permission from your district to be conducting this research. This interview is part of my research into determining why professional learning communities (PLCs) are flourishing at some elementary school and some middle schools. The intent of this study is to assist schools and districts who wish to pursue the development and maintenance of professional learning communities. Your school has been identified as one that has already developed a professional learning community. I would like to ask you some questions that may help me to determine what your school is doing that makes a difference. The interview should take approximately 40 minutes to complete. Your confidentiality will be maintained. A copy of the finished report will be available through your school principal when the study is complete. If you should have any questions or comments regarding this research please contact me at 604-314-1853 or by email at jml21@sfu.ca. You may also contact the supervisor for this project, Larry Sackney, at 778-782-8623 or by email at lsackney@sfu.ca. If you should have any concerns please contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, director, Office of Research and Ethics, at 604-782-6593 or by email at hal_weinberg@sfu.ca. All data (paper and electronic forms - on a memory stick) will be securely stored for two years in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator’s home office. You may withdraw from participation in this interview session at any time without any prejudice.

I hope that the findings of this study will be a useful tool to all those who wish to maintain or create professional learning communities of their own.

Thank you very much for your assistance. Janet Lauman

I consent to being interviewed for the above described research.

________________________________________  ______________________________
signature                                      date
### Appendix G: Staff Questionnaire and consent

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<td><em>Why do Learning Communities flourish in some elementary and middle schools while not in others? A Study of selected schools in greater Vancouver</em></td>
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<tr>
<th>Staff Questionnaire</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assessing Professional Learning Communities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>SFU Research number [2010s0121]</td>
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#### Cover letter and consent form for school staff

I am the principal of a Kindergarten to grade 7 school currently pursuing a doctoral degree through SFU. I have permission from your district to be conducting this research. This survey is part of my research into determining why professional learning communities (PLCs) are flourishing at some elementary school and some middle schools. The intent of this study is to assist schools and districts who wish to pursue the development and maintenance of professional learning communities. Your school has been identified as one that has already developed a professional learning community. I would like your assistance in completing this survey. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Confidentiality of individuals, schools and districts participating in the study will be maintained. A copy of the finished report will be available through your school principal when the study is complete. Please complete the survey on line by (date to be determined) by inputting the link given to you in the sealed envelope by the member of your staff who is handing out each individual url link. If you should have any questions or comments regarding this research please contact me at 604-314-1853 or by email at jml21@sfu.ca. You may also contact the supervisor for this project, Larry Sackney, at 778-782-8623 or by email at lsackney@sfu.ca. If you should have any concerns please contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, director, Office of Research and Ethics, at 604-782-6593 or by email at hal.weinberg@sfu.ca. All data (paper and electronic forms - on a memory stick) will be securely stored for two years in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator’s home office. I hope that the findings of this study will be a useful tool to all those who wish to maintain or create professional learning communities of their own. Thank you very much for your assistance. Janet Lauman

#### Directions

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about how the people work together in your building - based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices that occur in some schools. Read each statement and then indicate in the grid beside each question the descriptor that best reflects your personal level of agreement with the statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement. Comments after each section are optional. Confidentiality of individual responses will be protected. You may withdraw from participation in this survey at any time without any prejudice. If you are choosing to complete the electronic version of this survey and wish to withdraw – simply go to the beginning of the survey and click on “withdraw” in order to withdraw. By filling out this survey you are consenting to participate.
# Assessing Professional Learning Communities

## Staff Questionnaire

### The BC Context

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<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not/Applicable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>There is a strong PLC (Professional Learning Community at this school.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Provincial policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>District policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Union policies have a positive impact on our PLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Our PLC positively affects student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Our PLC positively affects adult learning.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Technology helps us in sustaining our PLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>This school is a desirable place to work in our district.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Parents see this school as a good place.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>The community speaks favourably about this school.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>This school handles challenges in a healthy way.</td>
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Comments: (Please feel free to add additional comments regarding your school or PLCs in general here)

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### Shared and Supportive Leadership

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<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not/Applicable</th>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Staff members have accessibility to key information.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.</td>
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Comments:
Developing Learning Communities

**Shared Values and Vision**

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<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not/Applicable</th>
</tr>
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<td>19</td>
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19. Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.
20. Decisions are made in alignment with school’s values and vision.
21. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.
22. Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision.
23. Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.
24. Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.

Comments:

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**Collective Learning and Application**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Not/Applicable</th>
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<td>25</td>
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25. Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.
26. Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.
27. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.
28. Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.
29. School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.
30. Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.
31. Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.

Comments:

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267
Developing Learning Communities

**Shared Personal Practice**

32. Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.
33. Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.
34. Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.
35. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.
36. Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall student improvement.

**Supportive Conditions – Relationships**

37. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.
38. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.
39. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.
40. School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.
41. Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.

Comments:
Developing Learning Communities

Supportive Conditions – Structures

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<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Not/ Applicable</th>
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<td>42. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.</td>
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<td>43. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.</td>
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<td>44. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.</td>
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<td>45. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.</td>
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Statements

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<td>46. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.</td>
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<td>47. The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.</td>
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<td>48. The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.</td>
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<td>49. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>50. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.</td>
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Comments:

Survey adapted from: