THE EFFECT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PRINCIPLES ON
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND
READING ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This case study examined the principles of a professional learning community (PLC) in an elementary school setting and their impact on instructional practices and effect on the reading achievement of English Language Learner (ELL) students. The cohort of students in this study was followed from grades three through five. The data sources included a principal interview, a focus group discussion with teachers, classroom observations and the Standards of Learning reading scores for ELL students.

The data from transcripts were analyzed using triangulation and coding techniques. The results of this study are a narrative description of a professional learning community used to impact instructional practices and reading achievement, the perceptions of a principal and teachers, and classroom observations. The data from interviews and the focus group suggest that teacher and principal perceptions of the professional learning community and its principles support their instructional practice. There appeared to be no consistent pattern of performance of individual scores during the study period.

The PLC principles of collaboration, collective inquiry and continuous improvement were identified most often to be perceived as effective in the delivery of instruction. Staff development and providing adequate planning time for teachers are recommended as essential practices to a professional learning community.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1

Context of Study

Establishing a quality teaching and learning environment and sustaining its worth

are leading factors in student achievement and effective school organization. These

factors become even more of an issue when considering the English Language Learner

(ELL). As the ELL student population increases, and accreditation standards are raised,

the achievement of ELL students as measured on state assessments will become a more

urgent issue.

When a Professional Learning Community (PLC) is implemented in the teaching

of reading, then the level of expectation for success becomes an immediate consideration

for all students including the English Language Learner. Through the teacher learning

environment in which the principles of a professional learning community are utilized,

progress in achievement and sustainability in reading achievement for all students can be

observed.

In an effort to effect academic achievement in schools today, the most effective

practices should be identified and developed. Regardless of the direction taken, it is

imperative that improving educational achievement for students, including the English

Language Learner, remain a primary focus of today's educational leaders.

National Context

Several legislative actions worth noting for their dealings with issues regarding

language include Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (The

Bilingual Act of 1968 P.L. 90-247) which recognized the unique educational

disadvantages of non-English speaking students; Title VII established a federal policy

that requires educational agencies to serve these students. Title VII also provides funds for support services for students in addition to funding the professional development of teachers and conducting research activities related to ELL students.

Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1968) provided for an increased state role and modified eligibility requirements under Title I so that ELL students are entitled to services. The Rehabilitation Act, 1973 (P. L. 93-516, Section 504), was passed by Congress guaranteeing the English Language Learner (ELL) the right to an education. Section 504 also required that an appropriate education be provided for students with disabilities of which Limited English Proficient students were categorized at the time. The Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-382) reauthorized Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The 1980s ushered in several movements in education including the excellence movement in response to "A Nation at Risk" (1983) Report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which challenged schools to be more rigorous and intensify existing practices (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). In 1989 President George H. W. Bush held a summit with the nation's Governors and developed the Goals 2000 initiative. This initiative promoted higher standards that would bring about change and improvement to the achievement of American students.

This effort for improvement and change found itself in many schools still based on the factory model which is "inadequate for meeting national goals that call for all students to master rigorous content, learn how to learn, pursue productive employment and compete in a global economy" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 23). A new approach based on research inside and outside education was needed to implement this change.

The professional learning community research was one option, providing a framework as an organizational philosophy within a school that moved from a top down enterprise to a model with the principles of leadership action orientation, shared mission and vision, collaboration, collective inquiry, results orientation and continuous improvement. They all served as cornerstones to school and student achievement.

The reality of today is that schools and school divisions are rated by the progress they are making toward meeting the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). A part of this federal law identifies subgroups of students that must attain academic progress in school. The subgroups are identified as major ethnic/racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities. The data of each sub group are analyzed separately. NCLB (2001) requires states to establish annual benchmarks for student achievement in reading and mathematics with the objective of 100 % proficiency of all students in all subgroups by 2014 (Accountability and Virginia Public Schools, VDOE, 2007).

State Context

The Commonwealth of Virginia in 1995 adopted revisions to the Standards of Learning (SOL) for English, mathematics, history, social sciences, science and computer science. Standards for fine arts and foreign language were adopted in 2000. In 2001 health and physical education, driver education standards were adopted along with revisions to the history and social science program areas. These standards set benchmarks for what teachers were expected to teach and what students were expected to learn. Educators were held accountable for teaching the content of the Standards of Learning as assessed in the SOL tests (Virginia SOL Assessments Technical Report,

VDOE, 2005). The Virginia Department of Education in collaboration with teachers and Harcourt Assessment developed the Virginia State Assessment Program to measure student achievement based on the SOL standards (Virginia SOL Assessments Technical Report, VDOE, 2005).

Schools in Virginia receive their accreditation ratings based upon student achievement on SOL tests in English, mathematics, history/social science and science. Schools in which students meet or exceed achievement benchmarks established by the Virginia Board of Education in these four major content areas are rated as Fully Accredited. Accreditation status is also based upon a number of pre-accreditation factors including, but not limited to, staffing, class size, facilities and safety provisions. Accreditation ratings reflect adjustments made by schools that successfully remediate students who initially fail the test, for those students with limited English proficiency and for those students who have recently transferred to a Virginia public school. Elementary schools must achieve an adjusted pass rate of 70% in mathematics and in grade five science and Virginia Studies. A pass rate of at least 50% in grade three science and history must also be achieved (Accountability and Virginia Public Schools, VDOE, 2007).

States, schools and divisions that meet or exceed all annual benchmarks are rated as having achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward meeting the goals of the No Child Left behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Accreditation ratings in Virginia are based on overall student achievement in all major content areas, while AYP are national ratings based on overall achievement and achievement by student subgroups in reading and

mathematics leading to an objective of 100% proficiency by 2014 (Accountability and Virginia Public Schools, VDOE, 2007).

The annual achievement benchmarks in reading and mathematics established by the Board of Education are part of Virginia's implementation of the NCLB mandates and are known as Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO). For a school or school division to have made AYP in the 2006 - 2007 school year, at least 73% of all students overall and each subgroup must have demonstrated proficiency in reading and at least 71% overall and in each subgroup must have demonstrated proficiency in mathematics.

Table 1 details the combined pass percentage benchmarks required for schools to receive accreditation based on SOL test scores. The table illustrates the accreditation benchmarks for the 2006-2007 academic year. The SOL assessments for grades four, six and seven were introduced in 2005-2006 for reading and mathematics to comply with the federal NCLB Act of 2001 which requires annual testing in grades three through eight (Accountability and Virginia Public Schools, VDOE, 2007). The combined pass percentages for schools increase in 2007 for the areas of science and history for grades three through five and remain the same in English and mathematics in grades three through five for that year. The ELL student is held accountable when considering these scores.

If a school's pass rate falls below the accreditation achievement levels, a school may be accredited with a warning, as a consequence. A school may hold this rating for no more than three consecutive years. The school will undergo academic reviews and will be required to adopt and implement school improvement plans and adopt instructional programs proven by research to be effective in raising achievement levels.

Table 1

Accreditation Benchmarks (Pass Rates) for SOL tests in Virginia

Subject	Grade 3	Grades 4-5	Grades 6-12
English	75	75	70
Mathematics	70	70	70
Science	50	70	70
History	50	70	70

Note. Combined pass percentages for schools to receive accreditation 2007.

A school is denied accreditation if it fails to meet the requirements for full accreditation for three consecutive years. These schools that have accreditation denied are subject to corrective actions by the State Board of Education and the local school board through a signed memorandum of understanding. A new school is awarded conditionally accredited status for one year pending the evaluation of the performance of the students in that school on SOL tests by the end of the first year (Accountability and Virginia Public Schools, VDOE, 2007).

Local Context

Legislation and laws passed at the national and state levels such as the NCLB and the Virginia Standards of Quality establish standards for the local divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Local school divisions have the responsibility for meeting the national NCLB standards and state SOL mandates. "Local school boards shall develop and implement a program of instruction for grades K through 12 that is aligned to the Standards of Learning and meets or exceeds the requirements of the board of education" (Code of Virginia, §22.1-253.13:1, C, p.2). It is necessary to communicate

these standards and mandates to the individual schools within the school districts to ensure that all factors are considered in order to have an appropriate education regardless of the group or subgroups identified.

The performance of subgroups within the population of a central Virginia division is reported as a part of the division report card. All school divisions within Virginia receive this annual report card from the Virginia Department of Education. The school division included in this study serves 2,633 ELL students out of a total school division population of 48,620. The ELL population represents 5.4% of the students in the division as reported on September 30, 2007. This represents approximately 3.1% of the ELL population in Virginia (Report of Limited English Proficient Students, VDOE, 2007). This school division has the fifth largest population of ELL students in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The majority of the ELL population within this school division speaks Spanish as their primary language and is the subgroup targeted for this research. This study will focus on ELL students enrolled in grades three through five within one elementary school within that school division. For the purposes of this study the school is referred to as Bayville Elementary School.

<center>Statement of the Problem</center>

Federal and state legislative mandates have provided guidelines to local education agencies to ensure that all students achieve at a prescribed standard. Moving forward and accomplishing this direction necessitates cultivating a school environment that incorporates identifying areas for change and facilitating the solutions. Most schools can no longer function under the factory model of get it right and keep going. "The concept of continuous improvement with a get it right and make it better and better philosophy is

needed in meeting the performance mandates of today's schools" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p.22).

The professional learning community is one of several means for changing schools and affecting instruction. "There is growing evidence that the best hope for significant school improvement is transforming schools into professional learning communities" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 17). The NCLB mandates have placed an increased emphasis on meeting the needs of ELL students requiring special attention in order for them to meet or exceed the AYP accreditation standard. There is a growing concern as the ELL student population increases the achievement of these students as measured on state assessments will be below the accreditation standard. The importance of school improvement practices utilizing a professional learning community, as identified in the literature, indicated that a positive learning environment can be provided for the achievement of the ELL student.

> Overall the stakes for ELLs have been raised significantly as states and federal programs have restructured their accountability measures. The NCLB Act is an admirable goal but one that requires a specific plan for ELLs. Such a plan must include teachers' use of instructional practices that will facilitate students' academic literacy development so they can meet the high standards in all academic areas. (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006, p. 198)

The demographics of America's schools have changed over recent years. The number of immigrant children has increased. This growth was first observed in California and Texas but is no longer limited to those areas. Since the 1990-91 school year, the non-native English speaking population has grown approximately 105%, while

the general school population has grown only 12%. Over 67 % of all the non-native English-speaking population students were enrolled at the elementary level, where they accounted for more than 11% of the total school enrollment according to the Survey of the States Limited English Proficient Students Summary Report (Kindler, 2002). The data clearly indicate that there is a tremendous growth in the population of ELL students. A national call to action to raise standards in schools for all students will ensure these students gain an understanding and continue to develop their use of the English language.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, it is expected that all students in grades three through eight and specific high school courses will participate in annual SOL assessments. This expectation is inclusive of ELL students in those respective grades. School divisions are required to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, Supreme Court cases and other federal court case decisions that require school districts to rectify language deficiencies of national origin minority children from participating in the educational program offered (SOL Assessment Guidelines, VDOE, 1999). The inclusion of ELL students in the SOL assessments was further supported by the requirement beginning with the Class of 2004, students desiring to earn a standard of advanced studies diploma needed to earn a prescribed number of credits as well as specified units of verified credit. Verified credits are defined in the regulations of the Board of Education as a minimum of 140 clock hours of instruction, successful completion of the requirements of the course, and the achievement of a passing score on the end-of-course Standards of Learning test for that course (8VAC20-131-110).

When considering the impact of the ELL student within the school and in an effort to promote optimum academic achievement for all students, identifying an

effective approach to school organization is appropriate. The concept of organizing

schools as a professional learning community (PLC) is an example of an approach to

bring about positive changes in ELL instruction and overall student achievement. The

effect of the PLC on teacher and leader instructional practices as a bridge to student

achievement has been identified for further research (Taylor & Pearson, 2004).

      The professional learning community concept consists of focusing on specific

principles in the school and classroom by the principal and teachers to create an effective

learning environment. Individuals share their ideas and successes in collaboration with

each other with and without the direct intervention of the school administration. The

principal of the school is guiding and directing by allowing decisions about student

performance to be made by the teachers. "This is the foundational basis of a PLC

characterized by a shared mission, vision and values; collective inquiry, collaborative

teams; an orientation toward action and willingness to experiment; commitment to

continuous improvement; and a focus on results" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 45).

Utilizing the principles of the conceptual framework of a professional learning

community within the school is one approach to school organization. The expectations

for reading achievement of the ELL are established by national and state mandates. The

problem that educators must face is preparing and providing for the most effective means

of impacting ELL achievement.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

      The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the principles of a

professional learning community on instructional practices and on the reading

achievement of a cohort of ELL students in grades three through five as represented by

<div align="center">10</div>

results on the Standards of Learning reading assessment. The setting is a suburban elementary school in central Virginia identified under a pseudonym of Bayville Elementary School. This case study examined the principles of a professional learning community as perceived by the principal and teachers in the selected elementary school and their perceived impact on instructional practice. The students' reading achievement was measured by performance of the ELL students on the Standards of Learning reading test. The reading scores were used as descriptive data by utilizing the pass percentages to examine the effects of a professional learning community on the students' reading achievement over a three year period.

Research by Thomas, Collier and others (1997), indicates that students who understand the English language at an early stage in their education tend to do better academically resulting in high school graduation as opposed to being a high school dropout. With the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, Title III, (2004), school leaders are challenged to find ways of increasing student achievement including those designated as ELL. The concept of a professional learning community (PLC) has shown to be a viable option for school leaders to concentrate their efforts toward meeting this challenge. The PLC principles include: a) strong school leadership, b) shared values, mission, and vision, c) collaboration, d) collective inquiry, e) continuous improvement, and f) results orientation (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). This information was utilized in a qualitative research format to determine the impact of school instructional practices on reading achievement for the years 2006 through 2008, for the subgroup of English Language Learners at this elementary school.

Research Questions

The three questions that guided the research are listed below:

1. How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by school leadership, impact instructional practices?

2. How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by teachers, impact instructional practices?

3. What changes occurred in reading achievement of English Language Learners in grades three, four and five as indicated by the Standards of Learning reading assessment results in a school organized as a professional learning community?

These questions framed the inquiry by exploring the role school organization and instructional practice played in ELL student reading achievement. It also was the researcher's intent to discover to what extent PLC principles proved to be a successful organizational structure to bring about improvement in the instructional delivery for ELL students as perceived by the principal and teachers. The Standards of Learning test scores of ELL students in the selected grade levels were used to depict the effects of reading achievement over a three year period.

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The "systems thinking" framework developed by Senge (1990) depicts a diagram to illustrate a hierarchical level of principles divided into three planes. This diagram has been adapted

from the literature and depicts three levels or planes with double arrows indicating interconnectedness.

Figure 1. The "systems thinking" conceptual framework adapted from Senge, 1990.

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            ┌─────────────────────────────┐
            │         Essences            │
            │    • Holism                 │
            │    • Interconnectedness     │
            └─────────────────────────────┘
                         ↕
        ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
        │             Principles              │
        │    • Structure Influences Behavior  │
        │    • Policy Resistance              │
        │    • Leverage                       │
        └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                         ↕
        ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
        │             Practices               │
        │    • System Archetypes              │
        │    • Simulation                     │
        └─────────────────────────────────────┘
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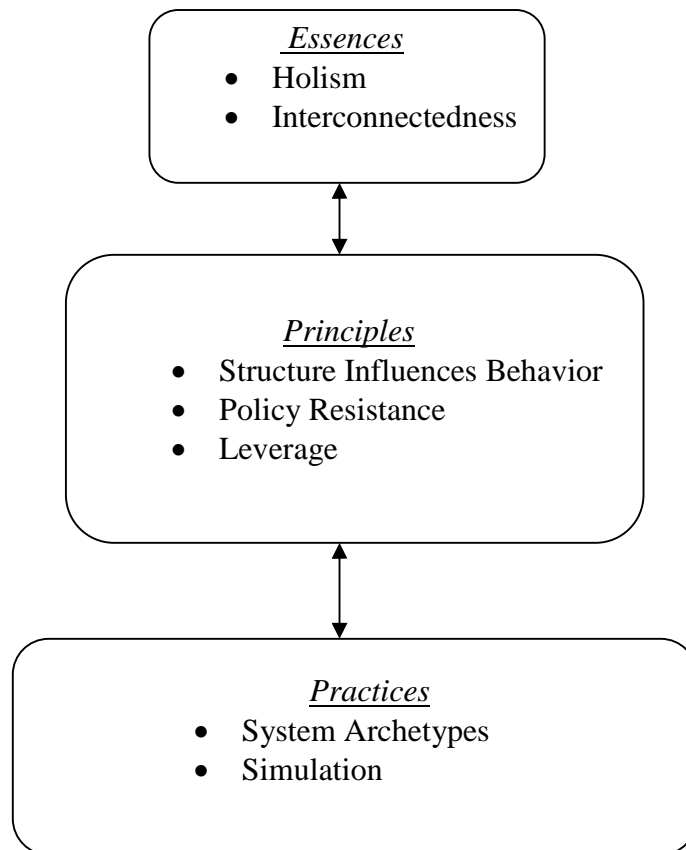
The lowest plane is practice defined as what you do, followed above by principles or guiding ideas and thoughts, and finally at the apex, essences or the state of being of those with high levels of mastery. This "systems thinking" is based on an awareness of the interconnectedness of how things interrelate to one another (Senge, 1990).

A school organized as a professional learning community utilizes the

interconnectedness of the principal, teachers, community and parents to act together in the educational process of the students. Practices within the school are built upon to form principles and develop into the essence, which in this school are improved instructional practice and a positive effect on student achievement as measured by the Standards of Learning reading test.

The conceptual framework developed by the researcher in Figure 2 describes the professional learning community with the guiding principles that affect instructional practice and English Language Learner reading achievement adapted from Dufour and Eaker, (1998) and Senge (1990). The blocked arrows depict the relationships between and within the system of instruction in the school. The principles are portrayed as a ladder in the center depicting how the elements come together in a professional learning community. Following the "systems thinking" framework approach of principles building on practices, a series of blocks representing the input (ELL students), the process (PLC), and the desired output (effect on reading achievement), are displayed across the top from left to right. The professional learning community principles are the processes acting upon ELL student achievement within the school.

The framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of the teaching and learning process within a school environment. The input enters the system which is the ELL student. The student is impacted by the instructional process directed by the professional learning community principles through teacher practices and the guidance of the school principal. The output of student achievement is measured by the performance on the SOL reading test.

Figure 2. A conceptual framework of using professional learning communities adapted from Dufour & Eaker, (1998) and Senge (1990).

Conceptual Framework for ELL Achievement Utilizing PLCs
A "Systems Approach"

INPUT → **PROCESS** → **OUTPUT**

ELL Student Population → **P**rofessional **L**earning **C**ommunity → **Reading Achievement Effects**

Leadership Action Orientation

Shared Mission and Vision

Collaboration

Collective Inquiry

Continuous Improvement

Results Oriented
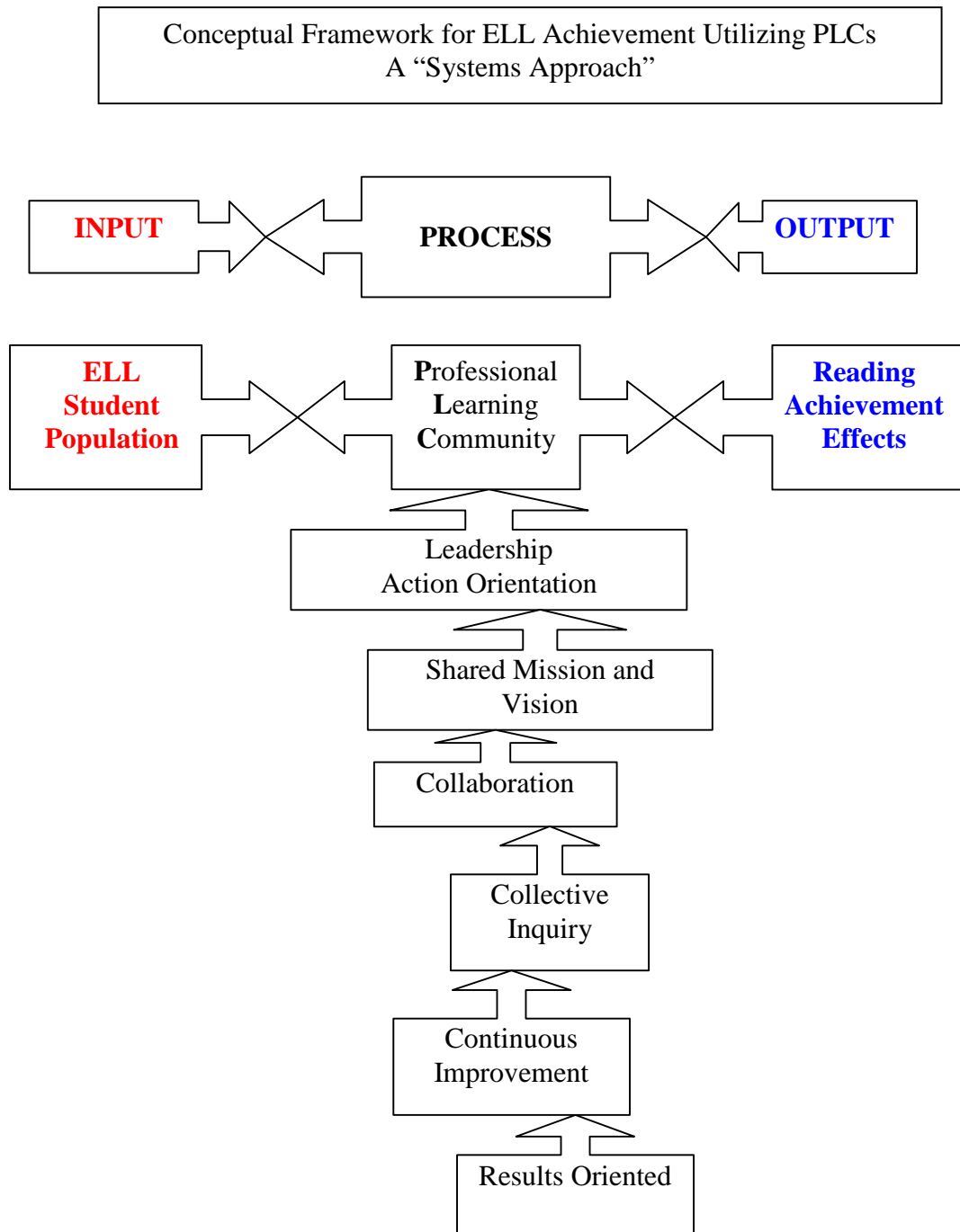
Figure 3. Chronology of the development of a PLC concept with the year, author,

terminology and guiding principles adapted from Blankstein (2004).

Development of the "Learning Community" Concept 1990-1998

Date	Author	Terminology	Guiding Principles
1990	Peter M. Senge	Five Disciplines	1. Systems Thinking 2. Personal Mastery 3. Mental Models 4. Team Learning 5. Shared Vision
1994	Sharon D. Kruse/ Karen S. Louis	School-based Learning Community	1. Reflective dialogue 2. De-privatization of practice 3. Collective focus-student learning 4. Collaboration 5. Shared norms and values
1995	Fred M. Newman/ Gary G. Wehlage	Circles of Support	1. Student Learning 2. Authentic Pedagogy 3. School Organizational Capacity 4. External Support
1997	Shirley Hord	Professional Learning Community	1. Supportive/shared leadership 2. Shared values/vision 3. Collective learning/application 4. Shared personal practice 5. Supportive conditions
1998	Richard DuFour/ Robert Eaker	Professional Learning Community	1. Shared mission/vision/values/goal 2. Collective Inquiry 3. Collaborative Teams 4. Action orientation/ Experimentation 5. Continuous Improvement 6. Results-Oriented

These data can then be used to continuously improve the system of instruction in

this elementary school. To place the professional learning community in a historical

context, a chronology of professional learning community developments and researchers

with their contributions appears in Figure 3. The similarities in the research findings are

indicated. They are also displayed to illustrate the development of the terminology within the research and the progression of the development of the principles of a professional learning community over time.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

This section contains definitions of key terms and vocabulary used throughout this study with appropriate citations.

Adequate Yearly Progress– Annual measurable objectives of proficiency in reading and mathematics, participation in testing, graduation and attendance required by federal education law (VDOE, 2007) retrieved 7/13/07 from www.doe.virginia.gov/ VDOE/src/ayp.shtml.

Annual Measurable Objectives– The annual achievement benchmarks in reading and mathematics established by the Board of Education which are part of Virginia's implementation of NCLB (VDOE, 2007) retrieved 7/15/07 from www.doe.virginia.gov /VDOE/src/vps-accountability.shtml

Bounded System– A case being studied limited by time and place (Creswell, 1998).

ELL- English language learner- A national-origin minority student who is limited-English proficient. This term is often preferred over limited English proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2007), retrieved 7/13/07 from www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/ glossary.html).

Fully Accredited– The accreditation rating earned by a school when students achieve an adjusted pass rate of 75% in third grade and fifth grade English, 70% in mathematics and 50% in third grade science and history/social science. Otherwise, the student results

must meet the adjusted pass rate of 70% in each of the four core academic areas–

English, mathematics, history/social science, retrieved from

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school.report_card/accountability_

terminology.pdf.

Hierarchical Linear Modeling– A quantitative method of completing a regression at

multiple levels. It is a tool for testing theory-based models and for explaining variation

in outcome measures (Taylor et al. 2005).

Language Proficiency– Refers to the degree to which the student exhibits control over

the use of language, including the measurement of expressive and receptive use of

language. Proficiency in a language is judged independently and does not imply a lack of

proficiency in another language. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil

Rights, 2007) retrieved 7/13/07, www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/glossary.html.

No Child Left Behind Act (2001)– This federal legislation, PL 107-110, requires states to

demonstrate progress from year to year in raising the percentage of students who are

proficient in reading and mathematics and in narrowing the achievement gap (VDOE,

2007) retrieved 7/13/07 from www.doe.Virginia.gov/VDOE/nclb.

Professional Learning Community– A school organized utilizing the principles of a)

shared mission, vision and values, b) collective inquiry, c) collaborative teams, d) action

orientation, e) continuous improvement, and f) results orientation to improve student

achievement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Standards of Learning– The Commonwealth of Virginia public school expectations for

student learning and achievement in grades K-12 for English, mathematics, science,

history/social science, technology, the fine arts, foreign language, health and physical

education and driver education. These standards represent a broad consensus of what parents, classroom teachers, school administrators, academics and business and community leaders believe schools should teach and students should learn, retrieved 7/16/07 from www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/superintendent/sols/home.shtml.

Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act– The Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), recognizes the unique educational disadvantages faced by non-English speaking students. Enacted in 1968, established a federal policy to assist educational agencies in serving students with limited English proficiency by authorizing funding to support those efforts in addition to supporting professional development and research activities. Title VII was re-authorized in 1994 as part of the improving America's Schools Act to provide for an increased state role and give priority to applicants seeking to develop bi-lingual proficiency. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2007) retrieved 7/13/07 from www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ell/glossary.html.

<div align="center">Significance of Study</div>

Restructuring the school's organization brings about the opportunity for improvement in achievement. One model for study is a professional learning community. Research has shown the importance of professional learning community principles in raising achievement of students (Taylor et al. 2002). Consistency and sustainability in the implementation of PLC principles provide for achievement of students including ELL. This study centered specifically on classroom instructional practices and the reading achievement of a cohort of English Language Learners in grades three through five, over a three year span, in a school utilizing the principles of a

professional learning community. This study also examined the extent to which PLC principles can affect the achievement of ELL students.

This is a timely issue as the population of ELL students is increasing. The expectation for them to meet the same academic challenges as non-ELL students is a reality as set forth in The Provision for an Equal Education Opportunity to Limited English Proficient Students, U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 1992. Section VIII of the Virginia Board of Education guidelines requires a passing score on an end-of-course SOL test in order to receive a verified credit. The scores of ELL students on SOL tests are included in the pass rate percentages used to determine the accreditation status of a school. All schools and school divisions and state education agencies are required to make adequate yearly progress through grade 12 or the year 2014 (Virginia Report Card, VDOE, 2009). It is imperative that students make progress each year. This study explored the influences of leadership and other factors required to institute the professional learning community at the elementary school level.

<center>Limitations/Delimitations</center>

This case study approach has a limitation of a small sample size restricted to one school located within a Central Virginia suburban school division. Only three students comprised the cohort for all three years. Additional data were collected on those students present for two years or fewer. No control was made for mobility. The transferability of the results of this study are limited to similar schools in demographics, level of implementation of professional learning community and ELL population in grades three through five. The consideration of the teachers selected for this study was based on a

recommendation of the principal and can be considered a limitation. This is not a random sample. It is composed of a purposeful sample of students from a single school.

The findings may be useful for comparing similarly sized school divisions with comparable language groupings and demographics. A detailed description of the school division, school setting and context is provided in Chapter 3. This study examined the school as a professional learning community as defined by specific principles within the literature and examined this school's English Language Learner reading achievement and instructional practices over a period of three years to illustrate the importance of the sustainability of a PLC and its principles.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This chapter includes a review of the literature related to English Language

Learner achievement and the principles and practices of professional learning

communities in order to provide a foundation for this case study. A brief review of the

laws and legislation regarding ELL instruction as well as school reform movements and

research retrieval methods are discussed.

Scope

The demographic composition of the United States has undergone dramatic

change in recent years. The number of non–native English speaking students in the

schools has been on the increase. The number of different languages spoken by the

students has also been on the rise (Improving America's Schools Act, 1994). There have

been numerous laws and legislative actions that affect the schools, especially as it relates

to ELL students and other subgroups in our society. Significant among the different

court decisions is *Lau v. Nichols*, 483 F. 2d 791 (1974). This ruling placed a great

responsibility on local schools to implement new programs or enhance instructional

practices. One of the changes that occurred was the restructuring of the organization of

the school and its impact on the achievement of students. This study focused on the

school organization of a professional learning community and its effects on achievement

in reading for ELL students in grades three through five at a selected elementary school.

The review of literature consists of studies contained within the areas of the PLC

principles, ELL and PLC relationships, ELL achievement, and selected laws and

legislation related to education. These topics highlight ELL student characteristics, the

importance of ELL instruction as demonstrated in the principles of a PLC. The selected studies were retrieved electronically from the Virginia Tech Library database system using ERIC and InfoTrac. The full text search results are summarized in the following section. The importance of each study and the reasons for inclusion and evaluation are identified in the review.

Background of the Issues

Laws and Legislation

The Bilingual Education Act, Title VII as part of the Improving America's Schools Act (1994), was a revision the first federal legislation on behalf of limited English proficient (LEP) students, passed by the Congress of the United States in 1968. This population is also referred to as ELL in some literature. "The Act also known as Title VII did not require school districts to provide bilingual education. It only encouraged them to develop bilingual programs through federal funds." (Fernandez, 1992, p. 119) Bilingual education was highlighted nationally through the ruling of the Supreme Court in the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) case in which the plaintiffs of Chinese descent in San Francisco sued the school system for denial of language appropriate instruction. In this decision, the Supreme Court overruled the previous decisions of the district and appellate courts against the plaintiffs in California, finding a violation of § 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As a result, school districts must provide adequate English instruction to those students whose native language is not English.

Equal Educational Opportunity Act

Later in 1974, after the *Lau* ruling, Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA), which expanded the federal government's responsibility to

enforce nondiscrimination policies in school systems not receiving federal funds (Fernandez, 1992). The EEOA became the foundation on which LEP students now known as ELL and parents could claim the right for language-appropriate services in their schools (Fernandez, 1992).

Vocational Rehabilitation Act

Also during the 1970s, other educational legislation was passed by Congress, including the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504. This required an appropriate education for students with disabilities which included Limited English Proficient students as a category. This Act combined with EEOA provided for more opportunities for ELL students to receive educational support (Fernandez, 1992).

Educational Reform Movements

In the next several years trends in educational reform included the excellence movement and "the restructuring movement which engendered considerable optimism as it grew to become synonymous with school reform in the early 1990s" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p.7) led up to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). All of these reforms had an impact on both school organization and student achievement. Schools were taking lessons learned from corporate America and adapting them to the educational process.

The Excellence Movement

The Excellence Movement attempted to react to the report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education called "A Nation at Risk," which detailed the declining achievement of America's schools as the United States progressed from an industrial superpower to one based on information and technology. The report indicated "Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry,

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science and technological innovation, is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world." (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.1)

Changes and reforms were proposed and educators were again being placed in a position where they were expected to improve learning outcomes and get better results. This direction however, was not a new direction; only one requiring schools to do more. The reforms of the excellence movement simply called for an intensification of existing practices (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

The Restructuring Movement

The restructuring movement developed from the Goals 2000 objectives presented by President G. H. W. Bush, (1989) was a result of the first meeting in history of the National Governor's Summit on Education called by a president of the United States. This meeting was held in Charlottesville, Virginia. "In 1991, the National Center on Education and Economy joined forces with the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh to design a national exam system. Then in 1994, Congress created the National Education Standards and Improvement Council to review and endorse state and national standards" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 5-6). This initiative became the basis of a dual approach aimed at school improvement. The first involved the establishment of national goals and standards for education. The second approach was aimed at providing more local autonomy to achieve the goals through empowerment of aligned schools. The goals developed are listed as they were adopted and passed by Congress in 1994.

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn;

2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent;

3. American students will leave grade four, eight and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning and productive employment in our modern economy;

4. U. S. citizens will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement;

5. Every adult American will be literate and will posses the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;

6. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning (United States Department of Education, 1994);

7. By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued development of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century;

8. By the year 2000 every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children (Goals 2000: Educate America Act P.L. 103-227).

Professional Learning Community

PLC Principles and Practices

      The Goals 2000 objectives generated hope of local control and change within the schools but unfortunately left the reform out of the classroom and leaned toward more administrative and nonacademic issues (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). In this light, research began to concentrate more on improvements needed in the classroom. The works of Darling-Hammond, 1998, Louis and Kruse, 1995 and Brandt, 1995, along with Senge, 1990, advocated schools as professional learning communities (Hord, 2004). With the focus on school organization as a means to bring about improvement in achievement, the professional learning community became a viable option. As the concept evolved and was implemented across the United States, the characteristics of professional learning communities became clear. The gold standard for fostering the development of PLCs comes from the activist work of Richard Dufour and his colleagues (Fullan, 2006). The principles that must be considered to transform a school into a professional learning community are listed as follows and are examined as a process for impacting English Language Learner reading achievement in this elementary school case study.

1. *Shared mission, vision and values* defined as a shared understanding and collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what people in the school believe and what they seek to create.

2. *Collective Inquiry* as the "engine for improvement," growth and renewal. People are relentless in questioning the status quo, seeking new methods, testing those methods and then reflecting on results.

3. *Collaborative teams* that share a common purpose to build a school's capacity to learn both individually and collectively.

4. *Action orientation and experimentation* turns aspirations into action and visions into reality. Not only do they act, they are unwilling to tolerate inaction. The "they" is referring to the members of the school community.

5. *Continuous improvement* in an environment in which innovation and experimentation are viewed not as tasks to accomplish or projects to complete, but as ways of conducting day-to-day business, forever.

6. *Results orientation assessment* based on results rather than intentions (Dufour & Eaker, 1998 p. 25-29).

Peter Senge, with the publication of his book, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization (1990) provided a link from corporate America in emphasizing the "systems approach" to learning and teaching. "Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past 50 years, to make the full patterns clearer and to help us see how to change them effectively"(Senge, p. 7). The researcher examined the systems in a school and their interconnectedness in terms of improvement, they developed a professional learning community concept which embraces shared mission and vision, collaboration among teachers and innovation. This "systems thinking" framework described as the fifth discipline also requires the disciplines of building a shared vision, mental models, team learning and personal mastery to realize its potential (Senge, 1990).

English Language Learner in Context

Minority groups including ELL student groups are becoming the majority in more and more school divisions across the country. The level of academic achievement for ELLs has lagged behind that of their language-majority peers. "The achievement gap of these students is slow to improve, and research shows that ELLs have high dropout rates and are more frequently placed in lower ability groups and academic tracks" (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006, p. 196). The PLC and its principles are an instructional practice that can bring about positive results to these students beginning in elementary school.

The English Language Learner student population in Virginia from 1995 to 2005 grew by 196.1% as compared to an overall enrollment growth of 11.5% (U.S. Department of Education's Survey of States, 2005). In the 1995-1996 school year, the ELL population in Virginia was reported to be 22,716 students. This number grew to 84,344 by the 2007-2008 school year, according to the Virginia Department of Education Report of Limited English Proficient Students (2007). Nationally, the total foreign born population passed 34 million in 2004 according to the U. S. Current Population Survey (2004). This is more than three million higher than in 2000 and more than triple the figure of 10 million in 1970. With sustained high levels of immigration, this population may reach 42-43 million and account for 13% of the population by 2010. By 2000, immigrants represented one in nine of all U. S. residents, but their children represented one in five of all children under the age of 18. The share of children of immigrants among the school age population has grown from 6% in 1970 to 19% in 2000. There

were approximately 11 million children of immigrants out of 58 million children nationwide enrolled in PK through 12th grade (Capps, et al., 2006).

Since 1977 the U. S. non Hispanic white population grew by 7.6%, whereas the population of individuals from racial minority backgrounds grew by more than 90%. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1997) predicted that by the year 2010, there will be an increase of 50% or more in the numbers of Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native students who attend public schools. During this same time, the monolingual English-speaking white population is expected to decrease by more than 10% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

This growth rate warrants attention for study in achievement for this growing population of students. In addition to the growth of this population, school reform must be studied to identify organizational structures that enhance the teacher's ability to effectively teach this population. The professional learning community conceptual framework model of collaborative teaching is being used as a vehicle to affect student achievement and professional practice.

Review of Research Studies Addressing English Language Learner

Reading Literacy and ELL Students

The No Child Left Behind Act Title III (2001) challenges schools to be accountable for the academic achievement of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) and the English Language Learner (ELL) students among others (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel & Herwantoro, 2006). This landmark federal law holds schools and states accountable for the academic performance and English proficiency of limited English speaking children and other groups that include children of immigrants (Capps et al.,

2006). Further, every bilingual and ESL classroom, just like other classrooms must have a highly qualified teacher, one who is credentialed and holds a degree or significant expertise in the subject areas he or she teaches (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Federal legislation refers to students who are not fluent speakers of English as LEP students. In practice the term ELL is used more commonly. The term ESL or English as a Second Language, refers to a type of class, instructional program or curriculum (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006). The term ELL will be used throughout this study unless otherwise specified within the actual study.

As English Language Learners become more of a presence in schools according to the research, many schools have become linguistically segregated as more ELL students are identified and included in the instructional environment. Over half, 53% of LEP students as termed in this study, attend elementary schools and secondary schools where over 30% of their classmates are LEP; conversely, 57% of English proficient students attend schools where less than 1% of all students are LEP (Van Hook & Fix, 2000). These students are entering school with a wide range of language proficiencies (in English and their native language) and of subject-matter knowledge. ELL students differ in their education backgrounds, expectations of schooling, socioeconomic status, age of arrival in the United States and personal experiences coming to, and living in the United States (Waggoner, 1999). All ELL students are not necessarily immigrants to the United States. These students may be children of immigrant parents, but born in America. The native language is spoken in the home by parents and these students are expected to comprehend English and achieve in school.

Other immigrant ELL students arrive in the United States schools with limited formal schooling, perhaps because of war or the isolated location of their home (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006). Ruiz-de-Velasco and Fix, (2000) found that 20% of all LEP students at the high school level and 12% at the middle school level had missed two or more years of schooling since age six. These students were found not literate in their native languages and have not had schooling experiences such as changing teachers by subject or taking standardized tests. In terms of ELL students, they need basic literacy skills, English language development instruction as well as content area knowledge (Boyson & Short, 2003).

This is the nature of the problem facing educators across the country. No longer is ELL education a border state, inner city or an urban issue in areas prone to high immigration. Although large urban centers are home to the majority of ELL, smaller metropolitan, suburban and even rural areas have experienced significant increases in their ELL population and often do not have the programs or teachers to adequately support their needs, especially in this age of educational reform (Echevarria, Short & Powers, 2006).

The ELL enrollment for the nation is primarily concentrated in the early elementary grades. Over 44% of ELL students are enrolled in pre-K through grade three with a decreasing number in the succeeding grades. Mexico is the largest source country for U. S. immigration currently. In 2000 over half of the foreign born elementary school children were born in Mexico or other Latin American countries. A quarter were born in Asian countries and 17% were born in Canada, Europe or Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) with smallest share born in Africa at 4%. This is a departure from the historical

patterns of previous waves of immigration from the late 1800s to early 1900s where the vast majority of immigrants were from Europe (Capps et al., 2006).

Review of Research Studies Addressing Professional Learning Community

When examining studies for this review, the elements of professional learning communities as presented by Dufour, were used to organize the literature into themes. Each study was selected to fit into one or more of the criteria of either achievement or professional learning communities. In some cases the boundaries became blurred and a study fit into more than one criteria. This review places the ELL achievement in a PLC framework of school improvement.

The Thomas and Collier study (1997) is a premiere, on-going collaborative research study that was designed to assist local school divisions in making decisions regarding English Language Learner students. The research was gathered from five large urban and suburban school districts geographically dispersed across the United States. The goal of improving long-term student achievement was the objective of ELL instructional programs. The objective was to prevent them from dropping out due to the lack of language acquisition. Thomas and Collier's study emphasized the importance of longitudinal analysis and was conducted between 1982 and 1996. Individual student data were collected for this study rather than using summary analyses and district-wide data. Qualitative case studies were summarized from each of the participating school districts. Particular attention was paid to a wide range of conclusions and to both internal and external validity issues. A large sample size of over 700,000 was utilized from a variety of sources, not just classroom-sized samples. This study is cited in the literature as

evidence of the influences of various factors on the length of time necessary to learn academic language (Moore & Zainuddin, 2003).

A study conducted by the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) indicates there is a basis for understanding the relationship between effective teaching and learning in reading and the national, state and district school policies context that mediate classroom practice (Wixson & Yochum, 2004). The CIERA Schools That Beat the Odds project (Taylor, Pearson, Clark & Walpole, 2000) highlights the complex interactions between teaching/learning and the school context that enables successful school reform (Wixson & Yochum, 2004).

> The most effective schools were characterized by greater teacher collaboration and more effective instruction. School effectiveness was significantly related to the factors of the strong links to parents, systematic assessment of student progress and communication, and collaboration within schools....This study also found that "the most effective schools used a collaborative model involving regular teachers plus Title I, reading resource, special education and ELL teachers who worked together to provide small-group instruction. (Wixsom & Yochum, 2004, p. 229)

Research indicates that reading instruction reform is a complex undertaking that requires changing classroom practice and facilitating school-wide collaboration (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). This research highlights the continued relevance of the reform movement at the school level and supports a PLC organizational structure to improve reading achievement. Several researchers have stressed the importance of teachers learning and changing together over an extended period of time while they

reflect on past practices and implement new teaching strategies (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow & Easton, 1994; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Langer, 2000; Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Schools that have had successful school improvement efforts typically operate as strong professional learning communities, with teachers systematically studying student assessment data, using the data to modify their instruction and working with colleagues to refine their teaching practices (Fullan, 1996). Langer, Kruse and Louis (1993) added, "reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, and collaborative efforts all enhance shared understandings and strengthen relationships within a school" (p. 2).

A blocking strategy of classification was used instead of an ANCOVA test to group students using categorical or continuous variables that are potential covariates. The groups were used as another independent variable in the analysis. Interactions between the new independent variable represented by the blocked groups and other independent variables were investigated. Sampling restriction was also used to control for unwanted variation and precise analysis. A conscious focus on school divisions that were experienced in providing special services to language minority students was used to remove large amounts of variability in student achievement caused by poor program implementation. Large sample sizes were used to increase the statistical power of the study as well as using multiple student cohort groups over varying time periods to effectively model a typical school division (Thomas & Collier, 1997).

The Thomas and Collier (1997) study was built around an emergent model of language acquisition developed by the authors known as the Collier PRISM model. The title prism was used because the model is shaped like a prism with elements arranged in a

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triangular shape. The study provides an outlook which highlights student achievement across the curriculum. The educational standards and goals established for language minority students in *Castaneda v. Pickard* (1981) are presented in the Thomas-Collier test for school districts to self-assess their performance in providing long-term equality of education to English language learners. This case was decided in the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals and its tenets are not binding in Virginia which lies in the jurisdiction of the 4th Circuit.

Success is defined when the English Language Learner reaches parity with native-English speakers after a period of 5– 6 years. Data-mining techniques were used in addition to quasi-experimental research techniques with an emphasis on action and decision-oriented research rather than conclusion-based research. A need for wide replication of the findings was strongly encouraged by the authors of the study. A theoretical foundation and a basis for continued development of the research for the next 5– 6 years was provided (Thomas & Collier, 1997).

The conceptual PRISM model was put forward as a means of understanding how the majority of English Language Learners fail in the long-term to close the initial achievement gap in all school subjects when compared to the age comparable native English speakers. In their model, there are 4 major components that drive language acquisition for school: socio-cultural, linguistic, academic and cognitive processes. There exist inter-relationships among these components as the multifaceted surface of a prism that has many dimensions which are interdependent and complex.

The findings of the Thomas and Collier study are categorized into two basic areas identified as the characteristics of effective programs and academic achievement patterns

of language minority students. The characteristics studied included Level 1 (L1) and

Level 2 (L2) instruction, interactive discovery learning and other approaches to teaching,

sociocultural support and integration with the mainstream. The achievement patterns

were studied from the amount of L1 support and the type of L2 support, the teaching

style, sociocultural support, integration with the curricular mainstream and the interaction

of the other five program variables mentioned. The influence of secondary school ESL

program on ELL achievement was also examined.

The results indicated that students, who experienced well implemented programs

for English Language Learners in the elementary years, including those who spend five

or more years in U.S. schools, finished their school years in the 10–30th percentile,

compared to the 50th which is the average for native English speakers.

The students, who receive well implemented pull out instruction, typically finish

school in the tenth to 10–18th percentile or do not complete high school. It was

further found that the students who receive enrichment through bi-lingual

instruction typically finish at or above the 50th percentile when they complete

their schooling which is a significant improvement in achievement. (Thomas &

Collier, 1997 p. 9)

The Thomas-Collier test of equal educational opportunity is presented for school

districts to analyze how well their system is allowing English Language Learners to

achieve parity in long-term achievement with native English speakers. This test has four

steps:

Step 1) examine district-wide test results (norm-referenced,

criterion-referenced or performance assessment) in the last grade

in which tests are given. Step 2) separate out scores of students

who have attended the system for five years or more and set aside

those of less than five years. Not included here are those of

former ELL students arriving in the upper grades with no previous

interruption of schooling. Step 3) separate out the five year groups

into three groups: those who were previously ELLs, those who are

language-minority (LM) but not ELL and those who are native-

English speakers. Step 4) Compute the average eleventh grade

test scores for each group. Use raw scores or scaled scores but not

the grade- equivalent scores or percentiles since these are of equal

interval and can be misleading to make inferences. The goal was

to assess the closing of the initial achievement gap through the use

of effective instructional practices. (Thomas & Collier, 1997 p. 74)

Teachers and students are partners in the discovery process of learning.

Interactive classes using collaborative learning strategies through group work and

interdisciplinary study can tap into the multiple intelligences of the student. Language

and academic content are acquired simultaneously, with oral and written language

viewed as an on-going developmental process (Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Thomas and Collier's approach to the issue of bilingual education was

comprehensive. It was a collaborative effort between the National Clearinghouse for

Bilingual Education and the U. S. Department of Education. The George Washington

University Center for Education Policy Studies also contributed to this report. The

organization is clear and concise and the objectives are clearly stated as are the research

questions. The need for the study is thoroughly examined using supporting research. The study findings and implications are presented in a manner easy to read and understand. Limitations to short-term studies are described as well as common misconceptions of educational research to give the reader an idea why choices were made regarding the methodology. Internal and external validity concerns are addressed and a description of the magnitude of the study is put forth. The findings are communicated effectively and a model is developed to further understand ELL instruction. School effectiveness was also studied with an accompanying evaluation test for educators to assess their progress in meeting ELL needs.

Thomas and Collier's study is one of two phases in a longitudinal study. At the conclusion of the first phase, recommendations and design components of the phase two component are discussed. A "call to action" section n identifies the urgency of educators to use the data to address the issue of ELL instruction. The scientific analysis utilizes data from school districts which were examined separately. The study's generalizability was established through the use of a large number of student cases and not random sampling. A blended strategy of case-study and cross-sectional longitudinal analysis combined for conclusions aimed at providing the maximum decision making benefit. The study lacks the tables and figures from a statistical analysis but provides clarity in the narrative for ease of understanding by the informed reader. The reader must take the author's word in the analysis but the soundness of the design compensates adequately.

The Fleischman and Hopstock study (1993) is a multi year study conducted for the United States Department of Education that utilized information from schools across the nation to determine the levels of Limited English Proficient (LEP) student services

and to determine the size of the population of these students. The term LEP is synonymous with ELL for purposes of this study. Qualitative methods were used including the utilization of mailed survey instruments and follow-up telephone calls. Copies of all these are included for review in the appendix section of the study.

The Fleischman and Hopstock study has four main objectives, which are to 1) describe the types, content, duration and intensity of special education services provided to LEP students, 2) describe the administrative procedures associated with these services, 3) identify the numbers, types, qualifications and training of those on staff working with LEP students, and 4) identify the costs of providing these special services to LEP students. Thirty-two study questions were developed which were expanded to 36 following the initial study. The questions were grouped into 8 major categories which included students, special instructional services, entry and exit procedures, staffing of LEP services, school environment, parent and community involvement, student outcomes and a general designation that includes any other factor that may be determined as a result of the research.

The expanded set of 36 study questions provided the framework that guided the research. The final report consisted of four volumes and three additional special issue papers. Data were collected by mail and telephone surveys, a review of case studies and Title VII study instruments. Questionnaires were distributed and interviews conducted along with individual classroom observations of instructional practice. All documents developed for data collection and analysis are provided for review. Each instrument was pre tested and approved for use by the Office of Management and Budget, U.S. Department of Education (Fleischman & Hopstock, 1993).

The findings of Fleischman and Hopstock, (1993), indicate that the majority of LEP students are concentrated in the West, but the concentrations are increasing in other geographic regions of the United States. Approximately 6,400 of the 15,000 total school districts in the United States have an LEP student population. This population ranged from 1 student to 242,000, in Los Angeles California alone. The findings show that 24% of districts serving LEP students had enrollments of nine or fewer students. Only 8% of districts served populations of 1000 or more ELL students. This factor highlights the difficulty of providing quality programs across the country where in some instances LEP student impact is minimal. LEP students are more concentrated at the lower grade levels. The Spanish language group dominates the LEP population at 73% percent. The socio economic status of LEP students is lower collectively as a group than the general school population. LEP students tend to be educationally disadvantaged particularly in the upper grades. In the average middle school which was studied, 12% of LEP students had missed more than two years of schooling since age six. High school students were assigned grade levels at least two years lower than the age/grade norm in some cases.

Finding commonality between schools and school districts in terms of identification and service provision for the LEP student population was indicated as an area for further study. Schools and school districts use a variety of methods to identify LEP students and their assignment to special programs. This fact can affect the number of students included and the characteristics of this population. Multiple regression techniques were used to examine the factors that predict the number of data types used by districts for LEP identification. The results showed that the two strongest predictors for identifying LEP students were the percentage of students receiving services under Title

VII and students receiving support from special state LEP funding sources. Where more than one type of instructional service was available, districts and schools typically used more than one data type to make assignments of LEP students to services. There also existed a lack of standardization of policy and practice regarding the exit of students from LEP instructional programs to regular school programming.

The Fleischman and Hopstock descriptive study contracted through the U. S. Department of Education was designed with the goal of providing information regarding the reauthorization of the Federal Title VII program. The objectives were clearly stated, which ranged from an analysis of special education services, administrative procedures for LEP students and the training and certifications of staff including the costs of these services. Thirty-six study questions were developed which were grouped into eight general categories for study. The final report consisted of four volumes and three special issue reports. The descriptive study included all survey instruments used, case-study analysis involved site visits and interviews as well as a review of the provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title VII. Survey responses were weighted to be representative of the country as a whole. A comprehensive discussion of the methodology was presented along with a separate volume of technical appendices containing all of the supporting documentation and analysis. The main issue with this study was not with design or interpretation but with length. The size of the document required shifting between volumes and reports to understand the key points. The findings and conclusions are placed in volume I and the results and data analysis are found in seven separate documents.

The Fleischman and Hopstock study produces usable information for the educational decision-maker and is a blending of both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods for making conclusions. A large sample size also provided for more generalizability of the results. Tables and figures are incorporated throughout the document and required multiple readings and reviews to see the broader perspective of ELL instructional needs. Specific recommendations and reference to the follow-up of phase two are included to give the study a practical significance.

The Short and Echevarria study (2004) indicates increasing numbers of the LEP population in schools over recent years. The lagging behind in achievement these students experienced as compared to their language majority peers is evidenced. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act now known as the Improving American Schools Act, (2004) calls for all students to meet rigorous high standards. A selected quote from the study emphasizes the achievement problem by stating that "Most schools are not prepared to handle this challenge of linguistically and culturally diverse student populations" (Short & Echevarria 2004, p.196). Most ELL students in the U.S. are of Hispanic origin and recent NAEP scores in reading and writing show that these students performed at the below-basic level as compared to their white and Asian/Pacific Islander counterparts.

Policy and Federal guideline changes in recent years including the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), have focused mainly on core academic areas meaning that the highly qualified teachers in these areas have a strong concentration of knowledge but little if any training in ELL instruction.

Short and Echevarria (2004) state the following:

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It is not uncommon to find untrained para-professionals acting as ELL instructors in schools today. ELL students are instructed in large part by those who have not had appropriate preparation or professional development to address their second language development needs or to make the content understandable. The focus of ELL instruction must be more than learning to speak and understand English. The students must have a mastery of conversational and academic English. (p. 196)

This research supports the need for school leaders to recognize the importance of providing adequate instruction to ELL students thus reducing the achievement gap in order to be compliant with increased standards of achievement. Improving underachievement in the ELL population begins with school leaders and teachers.

The Kruse and Louis study (1993) identifies five constructs or dimensions to a professional learning community used to transform and restructure school organizations. These primary dimensions are described as 1) reflective dialogue between teachers, 2) de-privatization of practice, 3) sustained and collective focus on student learning, 4) collaboration between teachers and administration related to pedagogy and curriculum, and a 5) shared base of norms and values according to the authors. The research presented here is part of the work of the Center for the Organization and Restructuring of Schools on how this restructuring affects teachers work over a three year period. The design examined eight schools comprised of two alternative high schools in New York City, two elementary schools in Chicago, Illinois, two city middle schools located on the east and west coast and a rural high school and middle school in the same region of the mid-west.

Qualitative data gathering and analysis techniques were utilized in a comparative case study method along with a secondary ethnographic case study method. A cross-case analysis was not based on direct personal observation or field notes of the researchers directly. It was based on material gathered by colleagues and informal comments, feedback and discussions of interpretations of the data provided. Each school included was at a different developmental level related to their restructuring and attainment of professional learning community status. Each of the schools was first described independently and then contrasted, based upon the dimensions (principles) of a professional learning community. This provided a brief glimpse of the individual schools (Kruse & Louis, 1993).

The participant schools were examined in relation to a constant nominal ranking that identified either the presence or absence of a dimension and its relation to the schools norms and values. A secondary description provided the opportunity to contrast the school's progress by linking the structural, social and human resource condition of the professional learning community to subsequent attainment of this restructuring. Four cases were selected for analysis and contrast. Each of the four schools was rated on a scale from 1–3 with 1 indicating high, 2 indicating medium, and 3 meaning low levels of attainment. The first rating of the schools evaluated the degree to which the dimension was present within the school at the time of examination. The following structural conditions of 1) time for teachers to meet and talk, 2) the physical proximity of the teacher and the classes, 3) interdependent teaching roles, 4) communication structure and networks, along with 5) teacher empowerment and school autonomy; these were then assessed on the same scale. Supporting data for each of the designations was also

provided in table form for each of the structural conditions. Tables were also included

showing relationships between dimensions and conditions of the professional

community. The social and human resource conditions were evaluated in a similar

manner along with a detailed explanation of supporting data. The following social

conditions were rated in terms of a professional community: 1) school's openness to

improvement, 2) faculty and staff trust and rapport, 3) teacher cognitive and skill base, 4)

supportive leadership, 5) socialization, and 6) sense of efficacy (Kruse & Louis, 1993).

The individual analysis of the schools provided benchmarks and references from

which barriers and facilitators to the formation of a professional community can be

drawn. One school, for example, managed to integrate reflection throughout its entire

approach to education which is understood as a hallmark of the inquiry method of

instruction which incorporates a focus on the creation of knowledge. Schools that were

found to be moving closer to the professional learning community structure tended to

have a higher level of importance placed on the creation of knowledge with teachers

contributing to the collective intellectual understanding of the practice of teaching. This

in turn brings maturity to the group of professionals working toward a shared set of goals

and values which are conducive to collaboration. The development of the individual

within the community is also essential, as a focus purely on student learning alone is not

sufficient. It was found that each dimension must be built upon and is not able to stand

separately, and support the foundation of the learning community. Academic and

institutional staff activity must be concentrated on the normative structures of the school

to bring about improved change. The position of the school within the shared value base

was also essential to the creation of school-wide community (Kruse & Louis, 1993).

Three main conclusions are drawn regarding the supportive structural conditions: 1) the absence of structural supports impedes the growth of a professional learning community, 2) strong presence of supportive structures is not sufficient alone to sustain growth and 3) the creation of a professional learning community is not an automatic consequence of teacher empowerment or school autonomy. Schools run the risk of becoming static if attention is not paid to both the structural, social and human resource factors (Kruse & Louis, 1993).

The social and human resource supports that are most central to the growth of professional learning communities were found to be teacher experience related to cognitive and skill outcomes for classroom practice and the leadership support of teacher efforts inclusive of cognitive skill acquisition. Additionally, strong social support alone is not enough to create and sustain professionally based community structures. Staff must be able to mature and build upon previous successes in order to develop and maintain community.

In order to progress beyond that of a fragmented structure the researchers state that the creation of a strong cognitive and skill base provide the following benefits to a school: 1) a foundation for the development of trust and respect among staff, 2) a sense of efficacy and increased openness to improvement, and 3) a mechanism to socialize newcomers to the school culture and practice. The supportive leadership component must operate in tandem with the cognitive skill base. This leadership element contributes in three ways to the development of a professional learning community by 1) improving instructional efforts, 2) creating an environment open to improvement and success, and 3)

encouraging a sense of efficacy through the successful efforts of staff toward improved student learning (Kruse & Louis, 1993).

These structures set forth the foundation for teachers and leaders to develop the necessary social ties, rapport, trust and respect for the learning community to mature. The advantages of successful professional learning communities include all of the following characteristics: 1) the development of collective responsibility of teachers for the learning of students, 2) the instructional performance of teachers, 3) an increased personal commitment of professionals to the work, 4) the establishment of values, norms and belief structures as control mechanisms rather than rules and regulations, and 5) the establishment of flexible boundaries that lead to greater organizational learning (Kruse & Louis, 1993). The authors maintain that this process is complex and elaborate. The construct of a professional learning community is relational in nature to a number of factors and dimensions and is an obtainable and reachable goal according to this research. The collective forces of professional skill are complementary to school structure and social-human relationships. When viewed as a part of, and not separate from, school culture, the development of mature communities becomes a positive outcome.

Developing a professional learning community within schools to improve student outcomes was the emphasis of the Kruse and Louis study. Five constructs or dimensions were identified by a qualitative analysis. The primary objective was concentrated on restructuring schools and the nature of the teachers' work. The case-study analysis techniques of comparative and cross-case methods in addition to ethnographic procedures were used to collect data. Descriptions of effects were given individually and in a contrasting manner to control for differences in developmental levels of a professional

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learning community. Tables were included to provide the reader with a key for coding

the characteristics and levels rated on a scale of 1–3. The tables were organized in a

matrix format for ease of understanding and clarity. The generalizability of the results

are questionable due to the fact that only eight cases are thoroughly investigated,

however care was taken include a wide variety of school levels, to ensure the validity of

conclusions.

Structural conditions, social and human resource factors of the schools were

evaluated by observation and reported to draw conclusions as to their place in the school

reform process. The interrelationships of these factors were emphasized in the data

analysis. The conclusions describe recommendations for improved practice by teachers

and practitioners in the classroom but provided no guidance for further research. This

study indicated a large amount of collaboration and peer review which was viewed as

strength of the research. On the other hand, none of the questions, survey instruments or

any other tools were included for the reader which is a weakness. The conclusions of the

study are presented clearly which facilitates implementation of the findings by local

districts if the leadership of the school explores how to restructure into a professional

learning community.

ELL and PLC Relationship

The Taylor, Pearson, Peterson and Rodriguez (2004), study entitled "The CIERA

School Change Framework: An Evidence-Based Approach to Professional Development

and School Reading Improvement" reports on school reform and classroom practice to

improve reading performance for students. The authors describe school reform as the

core of today's educational policy conversation in the United States, and most of all the

emphasis is about changing primary school reading programs in order to raise student achievement. This study is included here to emphasize both the continued need for school improvement and raising student literacy achievement. The focus of the study is on research-based practices that endeavor to educate teachers of the current literature findings to improve their teaching practices. The school change framework is an internet-based approach to improve reading with support of relevant research and professional development which is a key component of a PLC. An additional feature is described as

> It complemented these external connections to research with an internal focus on evidence. Teachers and administrators were asked to examine not only student performance data but also data describing classroom instruction and their overall school improvement effort as they planned and implemented their reading instruction. (Taylor et al., 2004, p. 43)

The literature for effective schools was reviewed in the context of school reform and parallels the research of a PLC by listing six key elements: a) improved student achievement, b) strong building leadership, c) strong staff collaboration, d) ongoing professional development, e) sharing student assessment data, and f) strong efforts within schools to reach out to parents (Taylor et al., 2000). This study emphasized the link between "effective schools" research and the professional development of teachers that was also a critical principle of a PLC. Schools that have had successful improvement efforts in the past typically operate as strong learning communities, where teachers systematically analyzed student assessment data and used the data to modify their teaching practices (Fullan, 2002). Professional learning community principles are also

cited including the importance of reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice and collaborative efforts all enriching shared understandings and strengthening the relationships within a school (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Schools aspiring to significantly improve students' reading achievement must be aware of the research on effective school improvement and professional development (Taylor et al., 2002). To improve instruction and performance, schools must also adopt and foster an attitude of continuous improvement in teaching and learning (Fullan, 2002). The tenets of professional learning community are noted throughout this study for increasing reading achievement and warrant its inclusion.

This study also examined the research of effective reading instruction in both curricular and process variables and adds the transfer of the research to the teacher as a specific component of the success of students. The National Reading Panel (NRP) received attention for specifying content of the "what" of reading instruction, (Taylor et al., 2003) contending that "to significantly improve students' reading achievement, teachers must also consider the broader scope of research summarizing the pedagogical practices of teachers of reading–the "how" of reading instruction"(Taylor et al., p. 273).

The purpose of the study was twofold: 1) "determine the effectiveness of the School Change Framework as a structure for school reform and professional development in reading, and 2) determine the specific classroom or school-level factors that accounted for students' growth in reading and writing achievement in schools that were attempting to improve their teaching of reading" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 45). Thirteen schools were chosen for this study. Eight schools were chosen in their second year and five in their first year of implementation of the framework. "Schools were high-

poverty sites with a mean of 81% (range of 70-95%) of their students qualifying for subsidized lunch. Seven of the schools were in large urban areas, three schools were in cities of fewer than 100, 000 people, and three were in rural areas. Across the 13 schools, 20% of students (range of 0 – 78%) were English language learners (ELL) and 71% of students (range of 48-92%) were students of color" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 45). Three measures were assessed as part of this study including fluency, reading comprehension and writing performance in grades two through five. The assessments were given twice a year in October and May. The total number of participants was reported as 92 teachers and 733 students. The assessments comprised "complementary measures of written language growth emphasizing a different aspect of this complex phenomenon which included a standardized reading comprehension test, an index of fluency (words correct per minute-WCPM) on a common passage and a directed writing assessment" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 46). The researchers provided a specific description of the population and well organized method of data selection that focused on effective school reform.

The activities of reading reform practices were documented and included the formation of a leadership team comprised of the principal, teachers and in some cases an outside facilitator to coordinate both large and small scale activities based on the national research and the annual school report. Regular study groups of teachers committed to work within and across grade levels to develop action plans and evaluate their success.

The CIERA School Change, a website developed by researchers, contained summaries of research on effective reading instruction, effective schools, and computer downloadable resources. The teachers could conveniently access and

view short video clips of exemplary practices to improve their own teaching and discuss in their groups. Technology and access to the internet became a valuable and powerful tool to the teachers in this study. (Taylor et. al., 2005, p. 47)

School characteristics, reform effort and classroom practices were documented throughout the study. Teachers were interviewed for 30 minutes in the fall, winter and spring to document the features of the reading program and record participant beliefs which are connected to the shared mission and vision principle of a professional learning community (Dufour & Eaker 1998, Hord, 1997). A rubric for coding the interview responses contained five factors based on effective schools research and are described as "a) building collaboration in the delivery of reading instruction, b) links to parents, c) reflection and change pertaining to reading instruction, d) collaborative professional development and, e) building strong leadership and the extent to which this leadership was invested in the teachers as well as the principal" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 47). A rubric was also developed by the researchers to evaluate reform implementation, and the commentary was included in the study findings. All the codes for recording classroom observation, samples of observation notes, and descriptions of classroom observations were categories for data analysis with tables of statistical data presented and explained (Taylor et al., 2005).

Variability in the implementation of each element of the School Change Framework was experienced among the schools in the study which included the meeting of study groups for one hour three times monthly, meeting in cross-grade study groups selecting substantive topics for study, working on parent relationships and having an effective internal leadership team. A scale was created by the researchers to indicate the

level of implementation of the various components of the program to create a "reform-effort" score for each school. For the evaluation of "reform-effort," one observer rated the schools on implementation and a second member of the team reviewed the rating using the Pearson correlation rating of -1.0 to +1.0 to compare the scores and the rating was .92 which indicates a high level of association. This process of inter-rater reliability obtained scores from 1.0 – 7.0 on a scale of 10. The mean (M) was 3.54 and the standard deviation (SD=1.76). The researchers commented "this variability, which we anticipated from the outset, allowed us to evaluate the relationship between reform effort and student growth" (Taylor et al., 2005, p.48). This phenomenon of reform and achievement is the conceptual basis for the proposed study.

The classroom practices of selected teachers were also observed by a researcher for an hour of instruction three times a year. "The observation system combined qualitative note-taking with a quantitative coding process. The observer took field notes for a five-minute period, recording what was happening in the classroom, including what the teacher and children were saying. Then, the observer coded the three or four most salient literacy events" (Taylor et al., 2005, p.49). There were a total of seven levels of total coding. An expert observed and reviewed the findings. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used to analyze the variance and impact of school-level and classroom-level characteristics on students' reading growth (Taylor et al., 2005).

In this study "the focus is the amount of variation explained and effect size for relevant variables, rather than a significance standard for exploring issues related to classroom and school practices and gains in reading ability" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 52). The interpretations of the effect sizes were 0.1 – 0.3, small; 0.3 – 0.5, moderate, and 0.5

or more, large. The researchers also extended the conventional p-value beyond 0.05 to p< 0.10, which was described as "consistent with current HLM research practice and prior evidence in the literature" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 53).

An analysis of results was conducted across grades two through five as these levels were given the same measure in both the fall and spring. The reform-effort rating of schools was found to be positively related to a students' spring standardized reading comprehension score which accounted for 17% of the variation between schools. Essentially, for every 1 point increase in reform-effort score, a school's mean on the Gates-MacGinitie comprehension (NCE)-normal equivalent score increased by 1.34 points. Reform-effort was found to account for 35% of the between school variances of reading fluency scores. "For every one point increase in reform-effort, the students' mean oral reading fluency (WCPM) score increased by 4.87" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 54). In total, reform-effort scores explained 65% of the variation, across 2 years, between schools, which is a significant amount of variation in growth curve slopes according to Taylor and her colleagues. The researchers found that across a single year, impact of reform-effort was relatively small when examining effect size. This finding was expected and not surprising given the nature of school reform as a gradual process. This research was found to extend and corroborate earlier work on school improvement and effective schools. A consistent group of influential practices accounted for this, including teachers learning and changing together over time, reflection and dialogue between teachers regarding practice and implementation of research-based teaching strategies. The works of (Byrk et al., 1998, Fullan, 1999 and Louis & Kruse, 1995) were cited supporting this conclusion.

It was further found that the use of higher level questioning techniques contributed to the between teacher variance in the fluency scores of the students. A negative relationship in fluency and comprehension was attributed to the use of rote comprehension skill practice by teachers. Coaching techniques used by teachers were also found to be positively related to writing growth in grades two through five. The researchers further examined reform-effort differences by analyzing low reform-effort schools (LRE) and high reform-effort (HRE) schools by examining the mean scores in this category. Leadership teams rated as effective were found to make the difference in the reform effort achievement of HRE schools. These teams were led by knowledgeable and respected teachers. They encouraged meeting in study groups and met regularly to discuss progress and solve problems. These schools were also found to have supportive and enthusiastic principals regarding the reform efforts. These factors directed the results toward the support of a professional learning community concept in both the leadership and professional development principle context. The continuous improvement principle of a professional learning community was demonstrated by this research in that "even in the schools doing the best job of implementing study groups, there was still more that schools could do to become collaborative learning communities in which teachers were reflecting on practice and collaboration to improve instruction" (Taylor et al., 2005 p. 60).

This study highlights the CIERA School Change Framework as a school improvement tool. It is included in this review to further demonstrate the importance of sustained school reform improvement efforts. The effects of this study show a "moderately large" 65% variance between schools in reading achievement. "Growth in

students' reading achievement scores as well as change in classroom teaching practices came in small increments from one year to the next" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 56). Unfortunately, about one-third of the schools in this study were not as successful as hoped in implementing the CIERA reform effort, due to a lack of commitment and perseverance. The key to success was found to be staying focused on effective research and the data of their schools as well as effective study groups and improved teaching practice. The researchers concluded "It is encouraging to note that in an organization as complex as a school faculty, individuals were able to come together as a community to use data on their teaching practices and participate in focused study group activities to improve reading instruction" (Taylor et al., 2005, p. 65).

The limitations of this study include the relatively small sample size of 13 schools and resource constraints that limited the investigation to only 2 years. Also, only randomly selected teachers, who agreed to participate, were included in the study and observations were limited to three 1-hour reading lessons per teacher. Teacher judgment was used to separate students into groups rather than a preferred method to test all students to determine their reading ability. Even with these acknowledged limitations the data collected is analyzed in a precise manner and questions for further study are presented. This study supports a professional learning community through principles of collaboration, staff development, continuous improvement, strong leadership, collective inquiry, and results orientation. The limitation of time was a well taken point in that true educational reform is a slow and methodical process. A fact from this research indicated that the principles of a professional learning community, when implemented systematically over an extended period of time, improve reading achievement.

Research by Echevarria and Short (2004) developed the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model (SIOP) to facilitate high quality instruction for ELLs in content area teaching. The SIOP model promotes strategies for improved teacher development and instructional practice.(Echevarria & Short, 2004). Language and content objectives were systematically woven into the curriculum of one particular subject area.

> Accomplished Sheltered Instruction teachers modulate the level of English used with and among students and make the content comprehensible through techniques such as the use of visual aids, modeling, demonstrations, graphic organizers, vocabulary previews, predictions, adapted texts, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, multicultural content, and native language support. These teachers also make specific connections between the content being taught and the students' experiences and prior knowledge, focusing on expanding the students' vocabulary base. (Echevarria and Short, 2004, p.8-9)

The SIOP was designed to be used in a number of ways for educators. "School personnel wanted and needed an objective measure of high quality sheltered lessons and the SIOP operationalizes a model of effective sheltered instruction" (Echevarria & Short, 2004, p. 10) This model allows administrators to provide clear, concrete feedback to teachers they observe. The features of SIOP allow it to be used as an observation instrument and a planning guide for teachers.

In 1996 the National Center for Research in Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE) was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S.

Department of Education, and included a study of sheltered instruction in its research program. "The purpose of this research project was to develop an explicit model of sheltered instruction that could be implemented by teachers of students with limited English proficiency in order to improve the academic success of the students" (Echevarria & Short, 2004, p. 11).

This project utilized settings that included traditional ESL classes, content-based ESL classes and sheltered content classes. The teachers were trained content specialists and ESL specialists. A wide range of levels was evident among the students from beginning to more advanced. A professional development component of the project was also included as part of the study. Professional development institutes were conducted over the summer to explore the project goals and provide practice on the implementation of the model. Video taped classroom lessons were analyzed using the SIOP to facilitate teacher growth and significant development in specific areas of instructional practice. Field testing and refining continued to establish validity and reliability of the SIOP instrument.

The SIOP, that can enhance and expand teachers' instructional practice, provides 30 items grouped into three categories including preparation, instruction and review/assessment. There are six items under preparation that examine the planning process including learning objectives both language and content and the use of supplementary materials. Instruction is divided into six categories of building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, and lesson delivery. This category includes 20 items emphasizing critical practices for ELLs from making connections with students' background experiences, adjusting to teacher

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speech, emphasis on vocabulary development and providing hands-on materials. Review and assessment is comprised of four items including whether the teacher reviewed key vocabulary and content, assessed student learning and provided feedback to the students on their work.

The SIOP is scored using a five point scale with scores ranging from 0 to 4. A rating of N/A is also included to distinguish between the presence of an item or the fact that it was not part of the lesson. A zero would indicate that a feature should have been present but wasn't. It would be expected that each item would be addressed several times over a week's instruction. SIOP also provides an opportunity for qualitative input in the form comments by the observer. These comments are reviewed with the teacher as part of a post-observation conference with the observer.

This research also presented case study scenarios of some ELL student experiences and the experiences of teachers utilizing the sheltered instruction techniques. This provided insight into how the SIOP model can be effectively utilized to evaluate teaching and learning. Scoring of the scenarios was explained, and the responders were advised that not every element would be present in every lesson although some were considered essential. The consistency of the observer was essential and videotaping was found to enhance professional growth in the post lesson discussions. Graphing the progress of teachers over time was suggested as important to professional growth. It was explained that scores should be used with caution as many factors can influence the outcome of a particular lesson on any given day. One observation is not enough to give a complete picture of the implementation of SIOP. Several lessons over time can give the fullest picture of sheltered instruction.

Summary

The studies and literature reviewed in this chapter were selected to provide a research base for English Language Learner achievement and instruction in schools and to highlight the needs of this growing population. School reform initiatives such as professional learning communities provide the mechanism for schools to change their cultures and to shift their instructional strategies to prevent this population from being left behind native English speakers.

It is essential that educators look to research to solve the problems of language acquisition and literacy of non-English speaking students and that these studies provide support and methodology for school districts to employ in this task. An increased level of accountability for achievement in today's schools and districts on all levels is a catalyst for change. These studies indicate the methods and skill sets necessary for teachers and leaders to better organize, set priorities and collaborate on solutions for improving not only achievement for English Language Learners but for all students in our schools. Every educator, no matter whether they are a classroom teacher or administrator must view their role as that of a facilitator of learning. The SIOP model is a method that can be used to evaluate sheltered instruction of ELL students for effectiveness and provide targeted professional development for teachers. A professional learning community provides the principles to support teaching and learning.

Several recurring themes emerge from these studies which include the need to provide more preparation for both practicing teachers and those in training to meet the needs of the non English speaking students. Teachers must be equipped with the tools and knowledge to be effective in the classroom. School structure reforms are necessary

to address these needs by school and district leaders. Attention must be paid to collaboration, the sharing of best practices and the implementation of sound instructional methodologies in schools to increase student achievement. Schools must change the way they do business to meet the needs of the ever increasing numbers of ELL students. This change must start with school and district leaders who must chart the course direction and establish the needed instructional and programmatic changes.

These changes may involve supporting bilingual educational classes to improve student comprehension, an assessment of special education placements along with ESL courses and objectives, and a change of staff development practices to improve the effectiveness of ELL instruction. It must be understood that the use and practice of language is an academic activity. Students must learn to communicate without a language barrier in order to demonstrate their achievement. Schools must provide a balance of meeting the diverse needs of students at varying levels of language proficiency while at the same time closing the achievement gap of these ELL students as compared to native English speakers. The success of these students through graduation from high school and becoming productive citizens is an essential goal of schools or else these students face the strong possibility of failure in school by dropping out altogether. The commitment of school divisions to meet the needs of ELL students must be elevated as the population of these students continues to rise.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In recent years, some school leaders have organized their schools into professional learning communities to increase collaboration of staff across grade levels and specialties, to share best practices of teaching and learning, and to assist less experienced teachers in teaching ELL students effectively. It is in this environment of focused methodology of practice and teamwork that this study was conducted, specifically in an elementary school organized as a professional learning community.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the principles of a professional learning community on instructional practices and on the reading achievement of a cohort of ELL students in grades three through five as represented by results on the Standards of Learning reading assessment. The setting is a suburban central Virginia elementary school. A case study approach was determined most appropriate because a single school was explored as a "bounded" system (Creswell, 1998). The classification of this case study was an instrumental case study that illustrates a professional learning community and its effect on the reading achievement of ELL students.

The qualitative approach of this case study combined an interview with the school principal, a focus group of teachers, classroom observations and an examination of SOL reading scores. This was done to answer the research questions regarding professional learning communities and ELL reading achievement. The interview provided a leadership perspective of the PLC. The focus group provided an opportunity for practitioners' feedback to the researcher on the effectiveness of a professional learning

community. This approach provided a balance of information in terms of numbers and impressions of professionals to be used by administrators and decision makers regarding the enhancement of instructional approaches for English language learners. Teacher and staff feedback was an important consideration in determining the role of a PLC component affecting reading achievement of ELL students. Classroom observations of ELL instruction provided the researcher with firsthand knowledge of the experiences in the classrooms of a professional learning community school.

Triangulating the data gathered from all sources including transcripts, classroom observations and field notes provided rich information from which to draw conclusions. The sample cohort group remained the same year to year. Even though some students moved and others came into the school they were also considered. Those ELL students who were present throughout the three years were considered as a cohort first. Then those students present two years or fewer were examined next. The achievement level of the students was examined as it related to the change over a three year period. The passing percentage was used to display the Standards of Learning reading scores for a three year period of a cohort of ELL students in grades three through five to show the performance over time as professional learning community principles were implemented.

The qualitative analysis provided non-empirical data to support the efforts of restructuring the learning environment which was translated into the effect on reading achievement. This process also allowed for conclusions to be drawn regarding the varying degrees of professional learning community development within the school. The literature reviewed revealed that a professional learning community has a positive impact on learning, and this study attempted to discover to what extent gains can be made by

ELL elementary students in this learning environment. For the purposes of this study,

only ELL students were selected and were a cohort for the case study over a three year

period. The passing report for a cohort of students present for two years was also

presented. The findings of the literature reviewed indicated if sufficient gains could be

made early in an ELL student's educational process, there is a greater chance for later

success in middle and high school years, which in turn translates to higher graduation

rates of ELL students (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Early intervention through structural

improvements to the learning environment, realized through professional learning

communities and its principles, was supported in the literature and was the basis for this

study.

The researcher chose a single case study approach as appropriate after examining

the literature and discovering that results can not be generalized in qualitative research

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Further, a study of more than one case dilutes the overall

analysis (Creswell, 1998). The decision was made to examine one school's effort in

greater depth and detail and to thoroughly examine that school's efforts to implement

professional learning community principles to increase reading achievement for all

students including ELL students.

The researcher was interested in the "PLC effect" (Figure 4 in appendix A) on

ELL student reading achievement. It was difficult to measure statistically or place

numerical significance on the level of implementation of professional learning

community principles. By examining in depth, one school's efforts, the study provided a

connection to the effects of change and the implementation of PLC principles on ELL

student reading achievement. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the

principles of a professional learning community on instructional practices and on the reading achievement of a cohort of ELL students in grades three through five as represented by results on the Standards of Learning reading assessment. The research questions conveyed the scope of the proposed study and are restated: a) How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by school leadership, impact instructional practices? b) How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by teachers, impact instructional practices? c) What changes occurred in reading achievement of English Language Learners in grades three, four and five as indicated by the Standards of Learning reading assessment results in a school organized as a professional learning community?

The conceptual framework was designed to emulate a systems model approach in which the ELL student is the input, a professional learning community and its six principles act as a process to increase reading achievement as the output. These principles are similar to rungs on a ladder. The principles are implemented and a professional learning community is built on each step. These principles implemented together can affect ELL student reading achievement. A feedback loop provided connections between the principles and the output in both directions, depicting the relationship of continuous change and the adjustment needed to keep the school moving toward its goal of improved learning. The nature of the model reflects the principle of continuous improvement in that no one is satisfied with past successes. "A clear vision of what a learning community looks like and how people operate within it will offer

insight into the steps that must be taken to transform a school into a learning community" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25).

Assumptions and Rationale

Qualitative research methods are based on knowledge constructed as interpretive in nature (Creswell, 1998). The researcher gained meaning and made sense from what was learned as the study progressed. The fidelity of the implementation of a PLC was interpreted through an interview with the principal. The level of principle implementation at the school was interpreted through a focus group of teachers. The fidelity of the principles in the classroom was interpreted through classroom observations. The student achievement descriptive data were presented in table form.

The focus of this study was on an elementary school using PLC principles to improve instruction and affect ELL student achievement. The challenge for today's educators is to find ways to improve passing percentage rates on reading SOL tests for these and all students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the principles of a professional learning community on instructional practices and on the reading achievement of a cohort of ELL students in grades three through five as represented by results on the Standards of Learning reading assessment. The elementary grades have been found to be crucial in preventing ELL students from falling behind in school through retention, which can lead to frustration and dropping out of school altogether (Thomas & Collier, 1997). The study utilized qualitative case study methods to describe the perception of the principles of a PLC in practice designed to affect reading achievement. This was accomplished by identifying and describing a PLC environment, selecting the themes that emerged as affecting reading achievement for

ELL students, and observations and interviews. Artifacts from the school included the PLC reflection cycle, the study group cycle and outcomes of participation in a PLC. These were examined to determine how they provided support for sustained school change and improved instructional practice.

The role of the researcher in this study was one of an observer examining the implementation of a PLC by conducting an interview and a focus group, observing instruction and reviewing the level of student achievement on SOL reading scores. As an experienced educator of more than 20 years at the secondary level, the researcher has limited knowledge of elementary education beyond that gained by being a parent. As a secondary teacher, opportunities were made available to participate in school level programs sharing many of the principles in common with a PLC including shared mission and vision, continuous improvement, collective inquiry and collaboration. This experience evolved into an interest of the researcher to explore these principles in another educational setting. When it was discovered that a local school division was utilizing PLC principles in some of its schools and focusing on ELL achievement, the idea for this study evolved.

<div align="center">Population/Setting</div>

The setting for this study was an elementary school located in a suburban school division in central Virginia. The school participated in a pilot program of professional learning community implementation and at the time of this study was in its third year of implementation. The principal was highly engaged and motivated to increase the ELL achievement scores in the school. The school was located in a highly diverse neighborhood with a significant number of ELL students. This setting was chosen

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purposefully and not at random because of the population and the reform-minded leadership of the school. The school principal and teachers identified the improvement of ELL reading achievement as a strategic goal written into their annual plan and were eager to meet the challenge. The participants included those teachers trained in utilizing PLC principles in their teaching with experience in grade levels three through five. Classes that included ELL students were observed during the course of one school year.

To gain access to the site for this study after receiving Institutional Review Board approval at Virginia Tech (Appendix B), a gatekeeper was identified at two levels within the school division to allow this study to take place. A representative in the research and planning department and the school principal served this role. Permission to conduct the study was sought and granted through a research request proposal submitted to the central administration. The school division request for a consent letter was also signed and returned to the researcher (Appendix C). The proposal to conduct the study was approved, and a copy of the approval letter is included (Appendix D). The researcher was also required to get the approval of the school's principal and this was done by telephone. Once these approvals were granted, an ethics protocol/participant release agreement form was given to all participants, detailing the purpose of the study, the right to withdraw at anytime, a statement of confidentiality protecting the respondents, a statement of known risks of the study and an explanation of the benefits of the study to participants (Creswell, 1998). These forms (Appendix E) were signed by both the researcher and the participants before the start of the study.

The strategy of utilizing a peer de-briefer and member checking (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) to enhance credibility and rigor was used by the researcher. A peer de-

briefer (critical friend) was used to assist the researcher in interpreting the data from the interview and focus group. This technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Creswell, 1998, p. 201). Triangulation techniques using the interview transcript, the observation report and the focus group transcript were used to support findings with multiple sources of data and methods to provide a corroborating body of evidence. As a researcher and educator the goal was to observe and record accurately the events of student learning and achievement in a "just the facts" manner.

This study setting is on a level not directly experienced by the researcher, and the observations and interviews were new experiences. There were no pre-conceived notions about a PLC except when compared to the conceptual framework and reviewed research. In terms of reciprocity, the faculty, staff and school division will be given a full report of the findings of this study. Observations were conducted in a manner that would be as unobtrusive and non-disruptive to the operation of the class and school as possible. They were scheduled well in advance with the flexibility to reschedule if necessary. All observations were announced to reduce anxiety of having an outsider in the room. The researcher responded to the needs of the school whenever possible and maintained open lines of communication. Electronic mail was used to schedule and maintain contact with the principal, teachers and school division.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

The sampling techniques selected for this study were purposeful (Creswell, 1998), and not random. The selection of the school was based on its participation in a pilot program of PLC implementation and a continued commitment to its principles.

Table 2

Data Collection Techniques for Study Subgroups

School study subgroups	Data collection method(s)
Principal	Open-ended interview
Teacher teams	Focus group discussion
ELL students	Classroom observations
	SOL reading scores

The students selected for study were ELL students and represented a homogeneous sample as they met the accepted criteria for this classification. The teachers participating were a purposeful sample consisting of a group with experience teaching grades three through five.

Table 2 describes the data collection techniques used for each sub-group within the school. The principal was interviewed as suggested by Creswell (1998). The questions were open-ended and the interview was semi-structured to allow elaboration by the interviewee. The session was digitally recorded and stored electronically and subsequently transcribed. The recordings were secured in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after the dissertation has been defended.

The teachers were asked the same questions in a focus group setting as the principal interview to facilitate consistency and open discussion and dialogue regarding the fidelity of the principles of a PLC and their implications for educators. Prompts were used by the researcher to guide the depth of the discussion within the interview. The instructional implementation of PLC principles was observed in actual classrooms with

the researcher taking field notes and documenting classroom activities. Information from the teachers and the principal included student handouts, and staff development materials were gathered to show evidence of PLC principles in the school and classroom.

The date was set for the principal interview, and two teachers who were recommended for the focus group were also introduced to the researcher. The remaining two teachers for the focus group were identified as those who were participants in the pilot program.   The classes for observation were determined in consultation with the principal. After examining the calendar, the date was set for the focus group. A letter of invitation and introduction for the teachers selected for the focus group (Appendix F) was sent electronically for verification.

The observation notification letters (Appendix G) were copied and sent home to the parents in the selected classes by the school. As a result, one call was received by the researcher questioning what was going to be happening as the study was conducted. The parent desired a more detailed explanation of what would take place in the classroom during these visits. The interesting fact here is that the child initiated the call for the parent who had a language barrier as well. After a brief conversation regarding the process and a reassurance that it was only an observational visit, the parent was satisfied and thanked the researcher for answering her questions. An offer was made to the parent to have a meeting at Bayville Elementary with the principal to discuss it further. That offer was subsequently declined. That was the only parental inquiry as a result of the classroom observation request.

The first classroom observation was completed and summarized using the protocol. A two column format for recording was used documenting descriptive and

reflective notes of all classroom observations. A diagram of the classroom was also included on the protocol. A protocol was used to record the teacher actions and the activities of the students. A layout of the classroom was drawn on the protocol. The observations are found in Appendices H, I, and J. These are the field notes documenting the teaching and learning in a professional learning community as observed by the researcher. The ethics protocol/participant release agreement was signed by the teacher upon arrival to the classroom and the observation was conducted. At the conclusion of the observation, the schedule for the principal interview was verified.

The ethics protocol/participant release agreement was signed by the principal at the beginning of the interview. The protocol was used to record the responses. During the interview a compact cassette tape recorder and a digital recorder were utilized to record the conversation for later transcription. The two recorders were used to back up each other in case of a failure of one of the devices. Two meetings were held with the principal to discuss the research study. The first was an organizational meeting to explain the purpose of the study and the requirements. This meeting lasted an hour and a half. Several teachers were introduced as potential participants. The second meeting lasted an hour to discuss the progress of the study and to conduct the interview. The interview was conducted and lasted 25 minutes. The tape and the digital memory card were secured in a locked storage cabinet separate from the other study materials. The tape was used as a backup and the digital file was downloaded to the researcher's laptop for transcription. The digital file enabled a precise tracking and playback of the interview as the researcher transcribed the interview using headphones while typing what

was recorded. The process of member checking was used while the principal was sent the transcript for his review. One minor change was made to one word.

The teacher focus group meeting was held at Bayville Elementary in a multipurpose room arranged around a conference table. The researcher supplied a light breakfast for the four teachers as they arrived. The consent documents were signed and a discussion of the ground rules for the session was held. The teachers were a bit nervous at first but they relaxed as the session progressed. The surroundings were comfortable and familiar to them and they shared from their heart and their experiences. The session lasted approximately one hour and a mini cassette and digital recorder were used to record what occurred. The researcher downloaded the file from the memory and followed the same transcription process as the principal interview. The members of the focus group were sent the transcript electronically for the purpose of checking the accuracy of their responses and this feedback was used to make adjustments where indicated.

The two remaining observations were scheduled and conducted following the same procedures as outlined for the first. This information was compiled on the protocol sheets and compared as an element of the data analysis. The test scores were obtained for the students from the department of research and planning and are summarized in the next section. The school division and the principal as well as the entire faculty involved in this study were extremely cooperative in all matters and accommodated every request in a timely and efficient manner.

Data Analysis

Data gathered during this study were managed by several methods. The interviews were recorded digitally and on magnetic media. Responses during the process were placed on the interview protocol (Appendix K). Each tape was categorized and transcribed for archival purposes. The focus group activities were recorded and transcribed for coding analysis and common theme identification from the teacher responses according to the focus group protocol (Appendix L). Careful field notes were taken during the site visits to document all meetings and presentations. A journal was kept by the researcher documenting activities related to the investigation. A master calendar was developed by the researcher and the principal to ensure scheduling, and notice of research activities were confirmed so the activities did not conflict with scheduled school events. An automated system of meeting notification was employed for communication in addition to the electronic mail system shared by all participants.

The three classroom observations involving four teachers, in which one classroom was a collaborative session with the ESL teacher, were conducted on a scheduled basis in January. The activities of the teachers and students were documented on a researcher-developed observational protocol (Appendix M). The completed protocol was converted to a digital format on a computer and stored in multiple secure locations by the researcher. A dedicated filing system was developed to accommodate all written materials and artifacts obtained during the investigation. A master list of the contents and other related information was maintained in a secure location.

Confidentiality and anonymity was assured by masking over names on documents where appropriate, and pseudonyms were used to identify each participant. Color coding

was employed to sort information obtained by source, type of data including interviews and observation notes to assist in organization and retrieval of items at the desired time of analysis. A journal was also kept by the researcher documenting activities related to the conduct of this research.

The analysis of data was guided by the systems model conceptual framework that was developed by the researcher. When examining a professional learning community as a system, the input was represented by the ELL students in this case study. The students were influenced by the teachers, administrators and peers through a professional learning community and its principles. The feedback allowed the teacher in the PLC to continually monitor the course of the learning in the school and make corrections in emphasis to create additional objectives toward increased achievement.

Tesch (1990) advocates "the first step in qualitative analysis is to review all information often in the form of jotting down notes in the margins of the text (observational field notes and transcripts) to obtain a sense of the overall data" (Creswell p.140). A prepared written summary of the field notes along with reflection notes was developed. Words or themes were then examined carefully by the researcher translating ideas into metaphors and visual displays of the information in tables, figures or graphs. Codes or categories of the data were designed by the researcher to sort text and convert visual images into categories (Creswell, 1998). Creswell also recommends narrowing the categories to five or six to make the coding task manageable. Additionally, the researcher created a picture of the data by organizing responses into themes, and identifying crossing themes to assist in writing the narrative and reporting segment of this study. The researcher captured common phrases or context of a particular word from the

transcripts to develop themes within the data. A matrix was used as a comparison table to illustrate the levels of categories within the analysis.

The data were analyzed holistically according to techniques suggested by Yin (2003), in the context of an entire case to capture the complexity of a professional learning community. The principles of professional learning communities as developed by Dufour, Eaker, Senge and others, were examined as the themes of improving reading achievement for ELL students. The other factors included how well the principles were perceived to be implemented and revised within the school as well as the perception of an improved quality of the instruction within a PLC structure. The data analysis loop (Creswell, 1998), or spiral was the process to move in "analytical circles" versus a fixed linear approach to the data analysis.

The analysis of the case study data further consisted of making a thorough description of the case and its setting (Creswell, 1998). From the literature review this researcher used four forms of analysis and interpretation which included a) categorical aggregation in which issue relevant meanings emerged from a collection of instances; b) direct interpretation in which a single instance was examined for meaning; c)established patterns to look for a connection between two or more categories; d) naturalistic generalization developed from the data to inform others what could be learned from the case; and e) description which was a detailed view of the aspects of the case being studied (Stake, 1995, Asmussen & Creswell, 1995).

Table 3 describes the technique of analysis and what actions were involved throughout each stage of examination of the PLC principles and ELL reading achievement. The left column identifies the data management technique recommended.

Table 3

Data Analysis Framework for case study of professional learning community

Data analysis and representation	PLC/ELL case study
Data management technique	Create and organize files for data
Reading and memos	Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes
Describing	Describe the case holistically and its context
Classifying	Use categorical aggregation
	Establish patterns of categories (principles)
Interpreting	Use direct interpretation
	Develop naturalistic generalizations
Representing and visualizing	Present narrative augmented by tables and figures

note: adapted from "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design" by J. W. Creswell, 1998. The right column indicates the actions of the researcher as the case study research was conducted. Creswell (1998) recommends this framework to guide and assist the presentation of data as it is collected and compiled.

Several strategies for quality assurance were implemented during the study to ensure credibility and rigor as adapted from Rossman & Rallis, (2003). Triangulation

involving multiple sources of data (interviews, focus groups, documents and other artifacts) and a variety of methods (focus groups and observations) to gather the data ensured that the entire complexity of the problem was studied. Transcripts, tape recordings and direct observation data were gathered by the researcher of teachers and teacher-leaders to establish multiple points of view. An interview with the principal was conducted to add additional data for study. Prolonged engagement or "being there" and spending an appropriate amount of time at the site making observations established a clear picture of the phenomenon of PLC and instructional practices.

The researcher included participant validation or member checks to allow the participants to verify their comments as they emerged to elaborate, extend or discuss the results of interview transcripts or observation notes for accuracy to maintain validity. The procedures described here are suggested by Creswell (1998). A "peer-de-briefer or critical friend" was identified to serve as a person to assist in the explanation of the phenomenon. A "community of practice," helped engage the researcher in critical discussions in a setting of trust to examine emerging ideas and new directions for the research.

Summary

This qualitative study explored the principles of a professional learning community and its connection to improved instructional practice and ELL student reading achievement. The methodology employed several forms of data collection including interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. The interview and focus group sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The researcher triangulated the results using observations, artifacts from the participants, field notes and

recordings of interviews and focus groups as well as transcripts of these sessions. Careful reading and interpretation identified themes and common threads to be interpreted and reported. The goal was to investigate the impact of the principles of a professional learning community on instructional practices and on the reading achievement of a cohort of ELL students in grades three through five as represented by results on the Standards of Learning reading assessment. The researcher compared the scores of a cohort of the eligible students over a three year period.

The site was not randomly chosen but was selected for its participation in a pilot program utilizing the principles of a PLC in its instructional program. The semi structured, open-ended interview method was chosen to gain as accurate as possible picture of the levels of PLC implementation at the site as is reasonably possible from both school leaders and teachers. Participant checks and peer review strategies were employed to ensure accuracy of the report of the findings. A single cohort of three students was followed from third through fifth grade to show progress in reading over time up to the transition to middle school. Students who were present for two years were also included. Tables are presented to express the results in actual reading achievement over time of the cohorts of ELL students.

CHAPTER 4

Report of Findings

The data collected from this case study formed the basis for answering the three research questions established for the purpose of this paper. They are restated here;

1. How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by school leadership, impact instructional practices?

2. How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by teachers, impact instructional practices?

3. What changes occurred in reading achievement of English Language Learners in grades three, four and five as indicated by the Standards of Learning reading assessment results in a school organized as a professional learning community?

Case study methods were used to gather data from the principal and teachers on their perceptions of a professional learning community. A principal interview, a teacher focus group and classroom observation comprised the data-gathering methods. The passing percentage of ELL students on the Virginia Standards of Learning reading tests were used over a three year period to examine the effects on achievement. These data were used to determine which principles of a professional learning community are perceived by educators to have the most effect on the reading achievement of ELL students and what are the implications for educators.

The School

The setting for this study was Bayville Elementary School (fictitious name) located in a public school division in central Virginia. The school has been involved with the implementation of professional learning community principles since 2006. In this effort, administrators, teachers and staff have sought to share and act on what they learn from one another in the classroom, school and community.

The selection of Bayville Elementary School was made because the environment was already supportive of a professional learning community as they were in their third year of implementing and exhibiting the professional learning community principles in practice. At the time of the study, Bayville Elementary had a diverse population of 441 students in grades kindergarten through grade five. The demographic description indicating the sub-groups served was Asian (15.4%), Black (18.7%), Hispanic (7.6%), and White (42.3%) and others which included American Indian, Hawaiian and unspecific ethnicity (16.1%). This school has been recognized for its outstanding achievement by being awarded the Governor's Award of Educational Excellence and the NCLB Blue Ribbon. Programs offered include Title I, Exceptional Education and English as a Second Language according to the Elementary School Profile generated by the school division (updated 2008). This school has met full Virginia accreditation for an elementary school and AYP benchmarks as indicated in Table 1 on page 6 of this paper.

Case Study Data

The researcher utilized multiple methods to gather data. They included interviewing the principal, conducting a focus group of teachers, documenting classroom observations and maintaining field notes. The effects and impact of a professional

learning community provided a basis for this case study relating to achievement of ELL students in reading as indicated by passing percentage on the Standards of Learning scores for grades three through five for 2006–2008.

The interview with the principal was conducted after receiving informed consent (Appendix E), using an approved protocol and a predetermined list of questions (Appendix F). It was conducted in his office and he was aware of the topic. He was willing to participate and enthusiastic to have his school involved in a research study regarding the professional learning community and its principles. The session was recorded and transcribed. The responses and comments were organized by utilizing the principles of professional learning community. The six principles of professional learning community include leadership and action orientation, shared mission and vision, collaboration, collective inquiry, continuous improvement and results oriented (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). The principal quotations are cited using a capital P followed by the line numbers of the transcript.

The teacher focus group was comprised of four teachers and was conducted at the school in a multipurpose room. The researcher utilized an approved protocol and received a signed consent from each teacher before the session began. The focus group responses were recorded digitally and transcribed. The teacher quotations are cited using a capital T and a participant number followed by the line numbers of the transcript.

Three classroom observations were scheduled electronically. The selection of the teachers was based on a recommendation from the principal. The observations were completed over a two day period. The teachers had been at the school all three years.

The ESL resource teacher who worked collaboratively during one observation was new to the school at the time of the observations.

<div align="center">Principal Interview</div>

The leadership provided by the school principal in his sharing of the values and vision to carry out the implementation of a PLC was evidenced by the actions taken including staff development for teachers and a willingness to participate in a pilot program by the school division. The focus on instructional successes for all the students and the need to promote the principles of continuous improvement and collaboration for appropriate results were evidenced by the current level of achievement reflected at the school.

The principal stated, "They weren't really looking at a professional learning community in the sense of the instructional power that it would have. One of the things I helped them talk about was the instructional conversation and instructional cycle involving the reviewing of student work to determine where the holes are" (P, lines 16-19). "It came to me that so much of their time was spent on the daily housekeeping. They were worried about who's going to do the newsletter, and who's doing the next homework assignment" (P, lines 13-15).

A research base of a professional learning community was brought to the faculty from DuFour and Oliver by the principal. As a part of the staff development program over the summer, teachers selected what their focus for instruction would be for the coming school year.

I think one of my roles has been to honor the hard work the teachers have already done in the building. Not try to introduce this as the latest greatest thing that is

going to save them from being a horrible school. It is the next thing that with time, is going to help them move from good to great as Collins would say. (P, lines 25-28)

Staff development was used as a tool to examine the instructional cycle to keep the staff focused on student learning. This was the third full year of working with the professional learning community principles at Bayville Elementary. The principal encountered difficulty early in the process with program development. In reference to the training his faculty received, he commented, "Great learning in terms of the conversational cycle, the instructional cycle of a PLC, but the actual training that the lead teachers participated in was really kind of sad" (P, lines 35-37). The training methods were viewed as lacking and gave a weary feeling about a professional learning community to the faculty. However, additional information from other sources helped develop a positive view among the teachers and staff. The principal indicated,

> I tried to help them understand that it was not a PLC, it was specifically their training. The PLC was really a good thing. I used some of the training program information, and I had an opportunity learn more with Bruce Oliver and *Just Ask*, who had done a summer workshop for the Virginia Staff Development Council. I was able to bring work back from him on a professional learning community and get the staff thinking about what a professional learning community looks like.
> (P, lines 39-45)

"This is our third full year of working with professional learning communities. My first year, I came in and adopted the cycle and the schedule of the previous principal. The summer after my first year, I was fortunate again to see a PLC discussion with Bruce

Oliver" (P, lines 131-135). The principal further stated, "I knew about a PLC with the

work of different ones especially the Dufour's. It was their way of presenting a nuts and

bolts way of doing a PLC that made sense to me" (P, lines 135-137).

The progress has been gradual according to the principal,

It's gone more slowly than I had anticipated. I am not willing to be that guy to

come rushing in and say I am going to save you when the ship doesn't need

saving. We have a good strong program; we have a great school, great students,

and a fabulous staff. I want to introduce what is going to make us even better.

You don't introduce it (PLC), by throwing away what you have always done.

(P, lines 211-216)

Comments from the faculty were made to the principal such as "what do you

mean; you are coming into my classroom." "I have not been observed in eight years" (P,

lines 198-199). "Overcoming the feeling of a coup" (P, line 198) reflected in comments

from the faculty as stated to the principal. "I had to do a good bit of work with the

teachers on that one" (P, line 200).

The principal stated that he has always looked for continuous improvement even

with respectable scores on standardized tests by saying, "Well there is always that extra

8–12% of kids who are not succeeding. A good number of them are our minority

students and English Language Learner's. There is always a population that needs some

extra support" (P, lines 31-33).

It was necessary to focus on a specific concept and maintain the emphasis on PLC

to avoid getting lost in the day to day operations of the school. In response to the

question, *What changes have occurred as a result of a professional learning community*? The principal indicated,

> The PLC works but we're so hodge-podge that we never quite know or have sense that everybody is pulling in the same direction. This year they advocated for what we wanted, one focus. I said, what is that focus? What's our weakest area? Look at our data, and identify what's our weakest link? They all came up with reading. If the children can read the test, science and social studies scores will be better. Math, may or may not have a reading component to it, so they said we really need to focus on reading and we did. I think part of that has come as a result of PLC. (P, lines 151-158)

The principal further stated, in reference to what his role has been in implementing the professional learning community at Bayville:

> For each grade level, I asked them to focus on a content that they really needed and also focus on an instructional strategy for each group. Once they did that, they divided into teams and we had folks going in different ways. This is the first year we've had the whole school focused on one particular content area (reading). We have the whole group focused on the same PLC. They've done word study this first half year focusing hard on that during the identified PLC time. During the second half of the year we are going to switch our focus on maintaining the impetus we have for word study, but also looking at small group reading instruction. What we've done since my third year was identify the fourth Tuesday of every month as our PLC time. They have an hour set aside specifically for their specific learning communities. (P, lines 52-62)

Parent communications created some challenges but these were overcome by keeping them informed of what the students were doing in terms of instructional methods. When the principal was asked, *what have been the benefits to the professional learning community?* The principal stated,

> Parents seem to be pretty happy with it. There was a lot of confusion at first. They said this isn't the way we did spelling when I was in school. I don't understand. What are these sorts? What is this homework that they are doing every night? We had some of the usual bumps in the road in terms of communication with parents and making sure they were clued in as to how we were doing this. I think the kids enjoyed that piece of it. I think one of the benefits of a PLC is I see better instruction in the classroom. (P, lines 173-179)

In the third year, the teachers decided to focus on one strategy as a professional learning community. This enabled more time to be set aside for everybody to work on a common thread. This year the focus was on reading. This made it easier to break into small groups and still maintain the focus. "In the past years, everyone had a chance to do their own PLC– choose a topic, but still have the PLC. They were here and there. I really wasn't able to hit as many of the meetings as I would have liked. This year with our focus on reading, it has made it easier for us to meet as a whole group and model a PLC piece" (P, lines 140-144).

According to the principal, when asked what have been the strongest and most effective principles in place? He stated

> One of things that helped was to begin with a clear focus on what's important. Why are we having professional development? Why are we talking about

instruction? It all goes back to student learning. It has really helped us focus on that. The data, we talk a lot about the data, they are what they are, and they're not good they're not bad, they are data. (P, lines 67-71)

A time for collaboration was set aside one day a month in order for the staff to plan the next month's lessons. The focus on having monthly time to devote to a professional learning community was viewed as critical for everyone involved at Bayville Elementary. Staff meetings provided an opportunity for teachers to share among themselves. Instructional and conversational cycles allowed for the identification of data, discussion about strategies and understanding of the process on how to acquire the data. When asked which principle(s) need to be expanded the principal stated

They are good now at identifying the data. They're good at talking about strategies of how to get to that data. Now it's that next piece of once you implement a strategy, how are you going to collect student samples? What other sources of data are you going to collect? Then how do you analyze that data? What are you looking for? What are you going to do with it? It is a really big piece for them. Coming back and re-visiting that cycle of inquiry is going to be critical for us. (P, lines 114-120)

A professional learning community format enabled the ESL teacher to work in collaboration with the classroom teacher. The SIOP model combined with the inclusive model of ELL instruction, identified language goals in addition to content objectives resulting in a reduction of pull-out time for students. When asked specifically, what have been the benefits to ELL students the principal indicated

One of our focal points was on the SIOP model. Our previous ESL teacher was really strong in SIOP. She had seven or eight folks trained and working with her. Discussing once a month how to keep kids in the classroom in an inclusive model, working with them in terms of building vocabulary and giving them an opportunity to practice their language before they perform it. Identifying those language goals in addition to the content objectives for ELL students helped. I think our ELL students did do better because they were able to stay in the classroom for longer periods of time and not be pulled out to work with that content. (P, lines 97-104)

The principal discussed his efforts to provide opportunities for instructional conversations by teachers in reviewing student work. The identification of learning gaps and identifying data to determine the extent of the effectiveness of the instruction and the strategies used to ensure student success allowed for the instructional cycle to continue at Bayville. The principal stated, "For example this year when we focused on reading, I have about four or five folks who are phenomenal with word study. So they were able to rise to the front and lead our discussions on word study and model for folks and teach them how to implement it in their own classrooms and then serve as sort of mentors to others." (P, lines 166-170)

Continuous improvement in instruction was noted through the process of moving forward. Being mindful of past successes without throwing away current practice, just to improve, the principal proceeded in a slow and methodical pace. He stated that "Change doesn't happen overnight. If we want to build this thing the right way then we take our time and do it very methodically and purposefully. We make sure the change we are

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making is the change we need" (P, lines 219-222). "For me to have that realization of …
although all the research out there tells you to do it this way, there is no problem with
taking it slow and making sure what you're doing fits with the way you want to do
things" (P, lines 222-224). In consideration of the data that were collected regarding
student achievement the principal said in the interview

> The data, we talk a lot about the data. They're not good, they're not bad. They
> are data. We looked at the data and started to dig through the many reports that
> our research and planning department provided. We tried to figure out which
> groups performed poorly, which ones performed well and which sub-topics did
> they get or not get. I think that has been a really important piece of it.
> (P, lines 70-75)

The principal stated "In regards to student achievement, a professional learning
community has made us focus more on how our students' achieve. We definitely watch
our test scores. It is one indicator of student success. It is another piece we can look at
for student success." (P lines 88-90) The principal further notes,

> What are our student's demographics? What do they look like? Student test
> performance whether it is on the SOL, the Stanford or another standardized test,
> what are the grades in the classroom? What are our students telling us? What are
> our parents telling us? We can look at all of that information. (P, lines 92-95)

A professional learning community has resulted in better instruction in the
classroom including more differentiation. "For example, when a group was working on
that (differentiation), I saw some amazing differentiation in the classroom. I would have
them bring that out to a staff meeting" (P, 179-181). The principal further stated, "As I

visit classrooms, I am seeing engagement. I think as we continue to shift from that paradigm of sage on a stage and get away from teacher lecture and into the engaging activities, I think that is important" (P, lines 188-191).

The instructional model SIOP or Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria & Short, 2001), was used to focus on the strategies used to implement the principles of a professional learning community. This alternative to pull-out instruction was used as a mechanism allowing the teacher to instruct students effectively while providing those students needing special assistance the best instruction possible. New teachers received staff development in the implementation of a professional learning community and its principles. This enabled them to be as prepared as the existing faculty.

Professional development was a critical element in facilitating the process as guided by the school's principal and other school leaders. An element of this school's staff development plan was a professional learning community reflection cycle. It was adopted by the division as a tool to assist schools in their transformation and was utilized in teacher's planning and instruction.

Teacher Focus Group

In the discussions that prevailed in the teacher focus group, the principles of a PLC were evident in their planning and instructional activities for the students. Collaboration was a main focus among the teachers as was the need for involvement from everyone at Bayville. One teacher stated, "It allows us to work with others that we may not ever work with. I had the opportunity to work with second graders and the ESL teacher that you wouldn't see on a normal basis. It's wonderful to see their input and

their ideas" (T3, lines 98-101). Another teacher stated, "You don't get the chance. You don't have the opportunity very often in the elementary school. You are in your own little world with your grade level, but you don't get to interact with a lot of other people. I think that has been a wonderful part of a professional learning community" (T4, lines 182-186).

The development of a professional learning community began at Bayville Elementary. According to one teacher

It's been discussed within different committees in the school specifically, the instructional leadership team which includes the grade levels. That is where it starts and where the principal brings up ideas. He asks for input from teachers and others in the school and works out a general direction we want to work towards. It was not something we were told to do, we had choices.

(T1, lines 14-20)

The teachers could choose their particular area of focus. This was the practice during the early stages of implementation of a professional learning community. One teacher stated

With SIOP, we planned together with the ESL teacher on a regular basis. Whether it was planning to take the kids out separately, splitting up the kids or coming in and doing whole group lesson plans. It was all about focusing in on their language skills and not just the ESL kids but, everyone benefited from having those extra language skills brought in. (T3, lines 27-31)

Staff development in the form of classes during the summer acted as an introduction to what the PLC is, as well as school and school division-sponsored events.

Meeting teachers once a month and planning for the upcoming month is especially important. "I took a summer class in SIOP, the summer before we started. That's where I learned the methods to use" (T2, lines 68-69). "When you had your PLC time each month that was when you got together with the teacher and planned for the coming month" (T1, lines 74-75).

Scheduling was a major obstacle when trying to balance working with students and those who need one-on-one instruction. Managing small groups and having time to work and plan with other teachers, grade levels and teaching styles was also challenging.

> I can say from my point of view the biggest obstacle is scheduling and trying to find the balance of working with the kids that need one on one or small group instruction, but also allowing for time and energy to work with teachers and collaborate on lesson plans and grade levels. I'd like to do more of the collaborative, but it really does involve the whole school level figuring out a schedule for the ELL learners and the teachers. (T1, lines 31-36)

The climate of the school is positive with parents that are supportive and appreciative of the teacher's efforts. Parents feel comfortable coming into the school. A PLC has had a favorable impact without a negative connotation from the community. One teacher stated, "It has enhanced what has already been done. The school is diverse and a professional learning community has helped" (T4, lines 236-237). One teacher stated, "Because it was taught from a different perspective and different terms were used sometimes. The PLC made it easy for the students to gain a greater understanding" (T4, lines 33-35). "We have a positive school climate and I think the community is very appreciative of all that is done at school with them. The ESL teacher has a very positive

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relationship with parents and is open minded. The parents feel comfortable coming into school and they appreciate the things they see coming home" (T4, lines 231-235).

Most, if not all of the teachers indicated the staff remained open to doing what it takes to have the students succeed. "The students are used to having diverse cultures among their peers. They just grow up much more tolerant and accepting of differences" (T1, lines 244-246). "The older they get, they want to share more of their background with the rest of their class. They absolutely love learning about other cultures" (T3, lines 247-249). Another teacher stated, "

> ESL kids, like other students in general, will not always raise their hand and say,
> I don't understand what you are saying. Especially, if they feel everyone else
> does understand, who has been speaking English all their lives. If the teacher is
> checking in more often, then you focus on the students who are not getting it and
> not saying anything. (T1, lines 284-288)

The focus group of teachers felt that it was better to be on the same topic and that they could reach more children with different teaching styles. "Probably it opened our eyes. One of the best things about a PLC is that we focus on one thing that we may not have thought about before. We have an opportunity to do that. So, I thought it was a great, great thing" (T2 lines 79-81). When the resource teacher was asked what the benefits to students were in a professional learning community, she said,

> This year, we're focusing on reading and small group reading. The PLC is nice
> because instead of dividing up by grade level, we're dividing by where we feel
> we are. In this process, you are interacting with all different grade levels and
> departments. As an ESL teacher, I get more sense of exactly how and what they

95

are doing in the classrooms. That can only help me reach the students better even

if they are a small group pullout. I am more aware of what they are doing in their

classrooms. I can support that instead of doing something completely different.

(T1, lines 221-228)

Interaction between different grade levels and different departments was useful

and important. It was highly regarded at Bayville Elementary to work with others and

share their expertise.

I think working with the different grade levels helped them on things that they

need. Being a third grade teacher, if a fourth grade teacher was saying to me,

they're having a difficult time with this. What are you doing with this? How can

we make this better? How can we support them so next year, the teacher is not

struggling to teach the same thing over again? (T3, lines 196-201)

Comments such as this supported the cross grade planning and collaboration.

The teachers agreed on the importance of inclusion, "Definitely, when she would

come into the room and we would do stuff, they would automatically focus on her and be

much more in tune with what was going on with the lesson" (T4, lines119-121). The

ESL teacher supported instruction by being in the classroom and assisting the teacher

with word study. The teachers said, "In general, it's better for the ELL students to be in

the classroom learning with all their peers instead of being pulled out" (T1, line 123).

"There are times where pulling a student out is necessary. As much as possible, it is

preferred to have them all together in one room. It is more beneficial to all the students"

(T2, lines 124-126); on this they all agreed.

The teachers further agreed that collaboration is an important component of a professional learning community. "Their understanding, you could tell at the end of the year, was greater than it had been in the previous year. It was because of the collaboration between the ESL Teacher and the classroom teachers" (T4, lines 107-109). "It is always good to have that other person that they haven't learned from yet. Sometimes they would focus more on someone else than having to focus on their classroom teacher" (T3, lines 114-116). "I would agree that the collaborative model in this case works very well, for both yourself and the students" (T4, lines 216-218). "I wish we had more of it, but scheduling is…"the big problem" (T2, line 218, T3, line 219). "I'd say I have a deeper understanding of explaining things and not assuming that students know. I really loved working with another teacher. Having her come in and help me get the point across benefited not only me but, the kids who were trying to learn" (T2, lines 211-215). These teachers would like to see more collaboration on all grade levels and across grade levels with the ESL teacher but, recognized scheduling as a problem. There was a need to improve the scheduling process in a professional learning community.

Working with different grade levels can assist in teaching and learning. Cross grade level experiences can answer questions about what are you doing. How do you do it? How do you support the students to help them without having to re-teach the next year? One teacher stated, "Being able to have interactions between the grade levels and go down, or go up to see who's teaching, it how. It gives you a better idea of how it may work better in your classroom" (T4, lines 207-209).

Teachers indicated several benefits to a professional learning community. "It also gave the opportunity to have more hands-on experience.

> When the ESL teacher and I split our classes, for half the time, she would take
> half the kids and I would take half the kids and then we would flip-flop the
> second part of the period. We did several things more hands-on. We built
> volcanoes together to show eruption or talking about Pompeii or Rome. We
> actually got a pool full of sand to show a camel's adaptations to the desert. That
> was just something that was amazing. (T3, lines 55-60)

"Because it was taught from a different perspective and different terms were used, it made it easier for some of the students, to gain a greater understanding" (T4, lines 33-35). Having another person in the classroom gave a deeper understanding of explaining concepts and making critical points that benefited both students and teachers.

> She (resource teacher) got them up and moving around doing different things that
> kept it interesting. She thought of different ways. I never would've thought to do
> social studies as moving around studying goods and services, wants and needs. It
> just got to them in a different way. (T4, lines 159-163)

Flexibility with teachers in terms of having others come into their classrooms to share time with another teacher was emphasized at Bayville Elementary. The lack of flexibility among some teachers did pose some initial problems. The teachers recognized that everyone teaches in a slightly different way and they can learn from each other. This created an atmosphere of interdependence in the classroom and was viewed as a good thing. "There needs to be flexibility with teachers to have someone else come into their classroom and to share that time with somebody else. Sometimes it can pose a problem

for different teachers not wanting to be flexible" (T3, lines 137-140). "For those of us who are flexible, everybody teaches in a different way, it worked" (T2, line 141).

Resource teachers can gain a better feel of exactly how and what is going on in the classroom and help reach the students better. "Definitely, when she would come into the room and assist, they would automatically focus on her and be more in tune with what was going on with the lesson" (T4, lines 119-121). It provided an increased awareness of what is going on in the classroom and provided appropriate support to the classroom teacher. "From a teacher's standpoint, it allows us to work with others that we may not ever work with. I had the opportunity to work with second graders and the ESL teacher that you wouldn't normally see on a routine basis. It's wonderful to see their input and their ideas" (T3, lines 98-101). In terms of ELL students, they benefit as well as lower-achieving students in the class. Having another teacher in the classroom (ELL) at the same time as the regular teacher enhances teacher instruction and student learning. "I agree and I think it helped not only the English language learners, but also the lower achievers, the lower achieving children benefited from our breaking it down, and not teaching it like we normally would have taught it before" (T2, lines 110-113).

The professional learning community provides different ways to teach in order to benefit children. "We became very careful about how we said things to these children. I think that was really eye opening to me when I had a lot of ESL kids last year. I was really careful to define what I said better than I had in the past" (T2, lines 51-54). "We come from such a hard set of this is the way it always has been and we have to really think it through again. And really put a fresh set of eyes on the things that we're asking kids because they may think about it in a totally different way" (T2, lines 275-278).

The professional learning community assists the teachers with self-evaluation and self-questioning about teaching to not base learning on assumptions and modify pacing of material. "I also think it helps you self-question when you teach. Before I would have assumed that they knew exactly what I was talking about in the same instance. It helps me slow down and actually question if everybody understands what this means. Does that make sense? How do you see that wording? What does that mean to you?" (T3, lines 280-284).

The teachers indicated they had an increased awareness to recognize American themes and assumptions used as learning tools in their teaching. This was an unforeseen obstacle to ELL or non-English speaking students. "We'll have a story about baseball and the ESL kids will not know anything about baseball. It is a cultural thing. They may understand the language but they don't get the concept of what the game is" (T1, lines 307-310). "There are quite a few things that come up in the classroom that are very American and you have to remember there are some kids that don't know what that is" (T1, lines 312-314).

The professional learning community concept helped to improve communication with students and parents. An example of this is described as relating to a school-wide can drive for the local food bank.

> We had a can collection drive and the ELL students understood they were just
> supposed to bring in cans. The students brought in empty cans, which was not
> what we were looking for. The parents thought they were doing the right thing,
> and it had to be re-explained. (T1, lines 324-327)

The teachers agreed that this had been an eye opening experience with examples used in the classroom having different meanings to different cultures. "It brings you back to the whole idea that not everybody is going to have the same perception of every word or every phrase or concept that you're teaching or learning" (T4, lines 264-266). A baseball field resembling a fan is one example of word meaning and usage that was used to illustrate this point. "I think this was very eye opening. I remember a math test that we gave and the child had to pick which object was bigger and it was a picture of a baseball field. The baseball field was supposed to be the bigger object. They chose that and I asked them what it was. The ELL students said it was a fan. To them it was a fan and to the American kids it was a baseball field. They had not seen a baseball field" (T3, lines 40-44). As a result of this lesson, "We also did a poster in the teacher's lounge of ELL of American terms that might be confusing for kids" (T3, lines 43-44). Some students have difficulty understanding terms in context and this was addressed through the utilization of a professional learning community.

> We have to be careful about how we said things to these children. It was really eye opening to me when I had many of ESL kids last year. I was careful to define what I said better than I had in the past" (T2, lines 51-54).
> We put out a flyer for the international dinner asking, what dish are you going to bring? I thought these parents were going to look at that and bring a dish, a bowl or a plate from their county. You have to re-train yourself to ask what that would mean. We just changed the word dish to food, because that's clearer. Little things like that, also trickle to the parents who are trying to be involved in their kids' education but also have the language barrier. (T1, lines 327-334)

Professional learning community principles have benefited instruction throughout Bayville Elementary. In learning games and physical education classes the importance of word usage and definition is critical to the ELL student understanding. "I remember another example, it just amazes me. They're learning how to play kickball and you run to first base, you run to second, you run to third and you run home. The child goes to first, goes to second, goes to third and the PE teacher, yelled run for home, run for home. She starts running across the field to run to her own home, not to the home base. We have to think about the things that we say that they just might go. Think of it literally. I'm running home" (T2, lines 315-322). "It definitely has had a positive impact but I don't think there was a negative connotation before we started. I think it's enhanced what we already had" (T4, lines 235-237).

Classroom Observations

The researcher observed three selected classrooms of varying grade levels. They were chosen in consultation with the principal. These were scheduled electronically at the convenience of the teachers over a two day period. A two column protocol was used to observe and record the interaction of the teacher and the students in a descriptive and reflective manner. The protocol also was used to document the layout of the classroom.

The researcher's observation of classroom teacher number one was a third grade class with 18 students.   The observation lasted 75 minutes. The student desks were arranged in pods of four with specific areas designated as reading tables, carpeted activity area and student storage. A calendar and day planner page was posted along with Accelerated Reader charts, an "All About Me" word study station and an alphabet wall. It

was obvious that the teacher had knowledge of the principles of a professional learning community by the way the instructional environment was maintained.

The principle of shared mission and vision was evidenced through the posting of student expectations on the board which included the following directions respectfully, work quietly, keep hands and feet to self and walk in line. A class constitution was also posted on the board. The SOLs were listed in the classroom for each content area. The students raised their hands and were well behaved as they followed the direction of the teacher. They gave themselves a pat on the back for doing well.

The principle of leadership and action orientation was evidenced by the teacher maintaining excellent transitions between activities with specific directions and voice level monitoring. Students were excited to share knowledge about what they had read and were anxious to respond to the teacher's questions. The students were assisted by the teacher in making predictions.

There were opportunities for collective inquiry by the modeling of reading selections and using guided questioning for individual and group discussion. Students were excited to share knowledge about reading and were anxious to respond to the teacher's guided questioning. Knowledge tickets were given to students as a reward for participation. The class was in order and controlled. Students self-monitored their progress on assignments and listened well to each other and the volume in the class was appropriate.

Collaboration was observed to exist between teacher and student as well as student to student. The students working in teams were given a handout to complete. The teacher gave specific time limits to speed the completion of the assignment. The students

followed directions independently and moved to various locations around the room to work. The teacher moved from group to group to assist the students and interpret reading passages. The ESL resource teacher collaborated with the classroom teacher in the class and was actively involved with the ELL students. She provided language support clarifying word definitions and reinforcing directions for the reading assignment while moving around the classroom.

Students used notebooks as organizers for their research project on civilizations. They were specifically studying universities and libraries. The teacher emphasized higher order concepts of interdependence and asked the students to read aloud for clarity. The teacher modeled the use of gestures to emphasize instruction with positive comments and to reinforce previous lessons. These were observed efforts of the principle of continuous improvement.

The researcher's observation of classroom teacher number two was a second grade class and with 20 students in this class. The observation lasted 65 minutes. The class was arranged with desks in a square with open corners. Various activity areas included a carpet, computer tables, a round table and student bookcases. The students in this class inquired who the researcher was and she answered that "he was here to see what exciting things are happening."

The teacher and students demonstrated the principle of shared mission and vision through their actions during the opening announcements. They honored the patriotism of the moment through singing God Bless the USA and reciting the pledge of allegiance. The classroom rules were posted on the wall as a reminder to the class. The school division's mission was also posted in the classroom. The teacher demonstrated

leadership and action orientation by implementing and monitoring previously established rules of the class.

The principle of collaboration was evident as the students were working in teams in a game called spelling soccer. The students found partners to match words on slips of paper. Students were helping each other to score a goal. The teacher interceded with appropriate instruction and support. A timer was used to maintain a schedule of 10 minutes for this activity. The students appeared to enjoy this activity and had fun. They worked on the floor in their teams. The teacher moved around the room from group to group encouraging the students. This allowed for continuous improvement to occur as the lesson/activity progressed.

Additionally, the principle of continuous improvement was also observed as the students were encouraged to complete assigned tasks. The daily objective was posted on the board, and the students worked on language activities from the previous day. In a reading lesson, the boys and girls alternated reading aloud. This competition between boys and girls encouraged collaboration within the groups. They were encouraged each time to make the words clearer. The students then shared the words in a sentence and attempted to define them.

Collective inquiry occurred during the discussion of a story selection that was being read. Students asked questions ranging from simple to complex. This questioning would go back and forth between students and the teacher. This activity encouraged comprehension. One student researched the glossary to find definitions to share. The students were asked to restate sentences to show understanding. Results could be

observed immediately as the student was given a word, asked to write a sentence and then define the word.

The implementation of the principle of results orientation was observed in the reading lesson and language activities that followed. The class responded well and transitioned appropriately between subjects. The teacher utilized techniques such as counting down from three to one to have the students look at her and gain the students' attention. The class enjoyed their learning activities as evidenced by the responses given. A positive attitude prevailed in the students' willingness to participate individually and as a team working in groups. This could be attributed to the leadership and action orientation of the teacher.

The observation of classroom teacher number three was a fourth grade class and lasted 65 minutes. There were 24 students in this class. The class was arranged with desks in four pods of six. Various activity areas included a carpet, computer table and student book case. There was also an aquarium with fish and a live rabbit in the classroom. The principle of a shared vision was evidenced by the classroom jobs and daily schedule posted on the wall. The students were already quiet and engaged in activities at their desks.

Attention to the principle of continuous improvement was observed during the reading activity, as the teacher would not allow a student to give a wrong answer and move to the next student. A correct response to the questions was a requirement before the teacher would move to the next student. The principle of collaboration existed between the teacher and student in working to identify the correct response.

The principle of collective inquiry was observed through frequent questions asked by the teacher. The students followed along as the reading lesson progressed and were prepared to take their turn when called. The students listened to each other as they read. The teacher was patient with each student's response to questions making sure that they understood. The teacher provided definitions of vocabulary words to the students, and then they were asked to guess the word. The students raised their hands and were called on individually by the teacher.

The principle of collaboration occurred as the students were seated at tables arranged in pods of six. Groupings were mixed by gender and ethnicity. The class transitioned well to math activities. Students interacted well with each other and worked cooperatively on their assignments. Students graded each others' papers in math and participated in a group discussion of measurements. Students worked together to make a chart to assist them with conversions. They assisted each other in cutting and pasting measurements in place. The teacher was available to assist students as they raised their hands and checked each one before final gluing.

The principle of leadership and action orientation was obvious in that the students moved freely between different areas of the room. Project-based learning was observed and the students were enthusiastic about the activities through their comments and their movements. The students were also encouraged to recycle their used paper when they finished an activity.

The researcher gained a broad perspective of the professional learning community at Bayville Elementary while interacting with the teachers involved in this study. Four teachers participated in the focus group and three teachers were observed. Two of the

teachers observed were part of the focus group for continuity. The grade levels observed included second, third and fourth. The second grade was chosen because the teacher had changed grade levels from fifth to second this year. She was involved and received the training from the beginning of the professional learning community efforts at Bayville Elementary.

From an interview with the school principal, he noted that leadership and direction was provided whereby the impact of the professional learning community principles could be identified. The teacher focus group allowed for input and discussion on the effects of these principles on ELL teaching and learning from the teacher's perspective. The SOL reading scores were used to indicate effectiveness of the principles of a professional learning community on ELL student reading achievement. The classroom observations provided additional information to support the effects of the principles of a professional learning community on instructional practice. The perceptions of the school principal and the teachers provided insight for continuous improvement. Examining the school through principal and teacher perspectives provided a comprehensive view of the effort to effect reading achievement in reading for ELL students.

<div align="center">Field Notes</div>

Field notes for this study were kept by the researcher to maintain a journal of the activities required to complete the interview of the principal, the teacher focus group and the classroom observations. These notes also provided documentation of the events that occurred during the planning and implementation of the study activities. A file of

electronic communication with the participants and all related meetings and discussions was also maintained. The following summary is a description of these activities.

The initial contact with the principal at Bayville Elementary was scheduled to discuss the scope and purpose of the study as well as scheduling the meeting dates and times for the interview and focus group. During the initial meeting, the principal requested a contact letter to be given to parents to notify them that a research study would be conducted at this school and observations would be made of various classrooms. A draft of this letter was developed and contact was made with the committee chairman to determine the need for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix B) from the University. This board reviews research conducted involving human subjects. An addendum to the IRB application was made and the continuation letter was submitted which is included (Appendix N). The researcher was informed IRB approval was not required as the letter did not significantly affect the initial permission to conduct research. The school division that agreed to host this research also had a process in place for requesting research conducted in its schools. This permission was granted only periodically throughout the year. The process included a copy of the IRB approval in addition to specific information regarding the school and the purpose of the research. This process was completed and approved permitting contacts to be made at Bayville Elementary School (Appendix C).

<center>Report of SOL Test Scores</center>

The ELL student reading scores on the SOL test were gathered for a cohort of three students beginning in 2006 through 2008. Test data were available for all three years and were expanded to include students present for two years with total N of 29 ELL

Table 4

Cohort Percent Passing SOL Reading Test

	3rd grade 2006 (N)	4th grade 2007 (N)	5th grade 2008 (N)
3 Year Students	100 (3)	100 (3)	100 (3)

students. Table 4 describes the passing percentage for students present at the school for three consecutive years beginning in 2006. The reading SOL passing rate for the cohort of ELL students present all three years at Bayville Elementary is 100% for each year for the years 2006 through 2008.

Table 5 represents the cohort of students and their scaled scores on the SOL reading test from 2006 through 2008. The test scores reported in this study were over a three year period and show the students progressing to the next grade level and being tested at that level. Different tests were given each year to the ELL students.

The scaled scores ranged from a low of 410 to a high of 552. The scores for student one ranged from 410 to 500, with the highest score occurring in grade four for 2007. The scores went up from grade three in 2006 to grade four in 2007 from 410 to 500. The scores decreased from 500 in grade four in 2007 to 431 in grade five for 2008. The scores for student two ranged from 456 to 552. The highest score for student two was 552 and occurred in grade three for 2006. The score for grade four in 2007 was 500 and decreased to 456 in grade five for 2008. These scores indicate a decrease during each year of the study period. The scores for student three ranged from 426 to 466, with the highest score of 466 occurring in grade five for 2008. The scores for student three indicated a decrease from 441 in grade three for 2006 to 426 in grade four for 2007.

Table 5

ELL Cohort SOL Scaled Reading Scores

Cohort Student Number	SOL Score 2006	SOL Score 2007	SOL Score 2008
1	410	500	431
2	552	500	456
3	441	426	466

A high score of 466 in grade five occurred for 2008. All of the scores were above 400, which is considered passing. No discernable pattern emerges from these scores.

The reading achievement two year cohort passing report of students at Bayville Elementary is described in Table 6 with the total number (N) of 29 ELL students taking the test by grade and year. The examination of passing data was expanded beyond the cohort of three students to include a cohort present for two years. This provided a broader perspective of the impact a PLC has on ELL student reading achievement. The reading SOL results are reported as pass/fail and cover a two year period beginning with 2006 and ending in 2008 for grades three to four and grades four to five. These data are included to examine the impact of a PLC on ELL reading achievement for multiple years.

There was one student in 2006-2007 in grades three to four who passed both years. There were seven students who passed both years in 2006-2007 in grades four to five. The next group of students in 2007-2008 in grades three to four with n=12, had mixed results. Seven students passed both years; three failed, one moved from fail to pass and one moved from pass to fail. The report of nine students in 2007-2008 in grades four to five indicated that five students passed both years, three failed and one moved

Table 6

Two Year Cohort Passing SOL Reading Test

2 year students	Grades	N=29	Reading SOL results reported as pass/fail
2006-2007	3 to 4	n=1	passed both years
2006-2007	4 to 5	n=7	passed both years
2007-2008	3 to 4	n=12	7 passed both years
			3 failed both years
			1 moved from fail to pass
			1 moved from pass to fail
2007-2008	4 to 5	n=9	5 passed both years
			3 failed both years
			1 moved from fail to pass

from fail to pass.

Table 6 shows that the number of students present for two years fluctuated since in 2006-2007 in grades three to four there was only one student and in 2007-2008 in grades four to five, there were 12 students. In 2006-2007, there were seven students in grades four to five and there were nine students in 2007-2008. Of the total number of students, n=29, there was a total of 20 students who passed both years. Six students failed both years with two moving from fail to pass and one moving from pass to fail. The desired results for these students would reflect a higher number of students passing with a reduced number of students failing the SOL reading assessment. Appendix O contains the complete data set and results of all ELL students tested during the study period.

Emerging Themes

The implementation of the professional learning community principles began in 2006 at Bayville Elementary. A division-wide initiative was started in 2007. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model was first utilized at the school to assist teachers with ELL learning as an initial measure to build a professional learning community. This method of inclusive ELL instruction and collaboration prepared the faculty for implementing the principles of professional learning community in this school.

The comments and data collected from the principal interview, the teacher focus group and classroom observations, referred to all of the principles of a professional learning community. These themes were coded from the transcripts of the principal interview, the teacher focus group and the protocols as observed by the researcher while visiting classrooms within Bayville Elementary and were based on the principles of a PLC.

Many themes aligned with the principles of a professional learning community and are listed on Table 7. Table 7 represents the principles and a frequency assigned to indicate the number of times the principle appears in each method of data collection. In the instances where the total occurrence of a response was the same in reference to a particular theme, the listing is in alphabetical order for the purpose of organization. The identified principles of a professional learning community appear at the top of the emerging theme listing within the table. The code abbreviations the researcher used to code each theme are also included. The intent of the frequency count is to show how often the principles of a professional learning community occur within the school setting

Table 7

Principles, Codes, Occurrences and Frequency for PLC

Principles	Code	Principal	Focus Group	C. O. 1	C. O. 2	C. O. 3
Leadership/Action Orientation	LAO	5	2	1	3	1
Shared Mission/Vision	SMV	2	1	1	3	1
Collaboration	COLA	5	22	2	1	1
Continuous Improvement	CIM	14	10	2	1	1
Collective Inquiry	CIN	8	9	2	1	2
Results Orientation	RO	13	4	1	1	1

Note. C.O. indicates classroom observation and number.

as a result of both observation and conversation. The principal emphasized the principles of continuous improvement 14 times, results orientation 13 times, and collective inquiry 8 times.

Teachers referenced the principle of collaboration 22 times, continuous improvement 10 times and collective inquiry 9 times. These were the principles that were mentioned most often by the principal and the teachers.

Continuous improvement is described as "discomfort with the status quo and a constant search for a better way" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p.28). Collective inquiry is characterized by the importance of the process of "searching for answers is more important than having an answer (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 26). Collaboration is the ability to learn from one another to create momentum to fuel continued improvement (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 27). Results orientation is an ongoing assessment on the basis of tangible results (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 29).

Table 8

Other Themes, Codes, Occurrences and Frequency

Themes	Code	Principal	Focus Group	C. O. 1	C. O. 2	C. O. 3
Improving Achievement	IA	14	13	2	2	3
Inclusion (ELL)	INC	3	6	1		
Co-Teaching	CT	1	7			
Parent Communication	PC	3	5			
Scheduling	SC	2	6			
Staff Development	SD	6	2			
Flexibility	FL	3	4			
Common Planning	CP	2	4			
Consistency	CON	3	3			
Teamwork	TW	1	2			

Note. C.O. indicates classroom observation and number.

The references that were made to other themes are recorded on Table 8. Table 8 indicates improving achievement occurring 34 times as the most frequently identified other theme by the principal and teachers through the combined data collection process.

These emerging themes are identified to describe how multiple methods were used to illustrate data that were important to each of the groups studied and observed at Bayville Elementary. The themes demonstrated the interconnectedness between the principal and the teachers in the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community impacting instructional practices.

CHAPTER 5

Summary of Findings

This chapter contains the findings and implications for educators to consider. Recommendations for further study are also included. Research is cited as part of the findings and implications for practice and the findings of this study are listed as follows along with supporting documentation from the data collected and from previously cited studies.

Findings

1. Teachers and the principal perceived that the professional learning community principles helped to maintain a focus on ELL reading instruction. At Bayville Elementary school the principles of the professional learning community concept were used to "identify gaps in student learning and strategies to fill those gaps," (P, line 20) as stated by the principal. The change was not immediate and takes time to develop within a school. The principal and the teachers indicated that a professional learning community has helped them to maintain an emphasis on student achievement. "It also allows us to work with others who we may not ever work with. I got the opportunity to work with second graders and the ESL teacher that you wouldn't normally see on a normal basis. It's wonderful to see their input and their ideas" (T3, line 99).

     Classroom observations of teachers showed the principles of a professional learning community evidenced by a shared mission, a common vision and collaboration. The professional learning community enabled the teachers and the principal to emphasize specific instructional practices throughout the entire school.

At Bayville all classes were focused on reading. Research by Dufour & Eaker (1998) suggests that when the principles of a professional learning community are applied in a school setting, improved teaching and learning can be the result. The teachers' perception of their teaching did improve while the cohort passing percentage remained constant. The works of Darling-Hammond, 1996, Louis & Kruse, 1995 and Brandt, 1995, along with Senge, 1990, all advocated schools as professional learning communities (Hord, 2004). This support for a professional learning community through the research indicated that achievement can be improved. In this case, by implementing the principles in the classroom with trained teachers and a supportive administration the achievement level was not improved but maintained.

2. Time to collaborate and plan for instruction was valued by teachers. The professional learning community concept provided time for teachers to meet together on a regular basis and plan collectively. These groups were comprised of classroom teachers and resource teachers of varying grade levels. "I think they (ELLs) did as well. Even just their understanding at the end of the year was greater than it had been in previous years because of using the collaboration between ESL and the classroom teachers" (T4, line 107). "Yes, I agree with that and I think it helped not only the English Language Learner but also the lower achievers" (T2, line 110). "The lower achieving children benefited from our breaking it down and not teaching it like we normally taught it before" (T3, lines 111-113).

The principal provided the flexibility for teachers to meet and develop their lessons collaboratively. He stated, "This year with our focus on reading it has made it easier for us to meet as a whole group and model the PLC piece. It has also made it

easier when we break into smaller groups that we still maintain that focus. That has

really helped" (P, line 144-147). He further indicated support for collaboration by

stating, "The benefit to the teachers is to increase their professional awareness of

instruction. We have some excellent teachers in this building. It's having that

focused time on instruction, and again I hate to keep beating this dead horse, but it's

not who's doing the newsletter or who's doing the homework packet. It is how we

are going to teach this" (P, lines 162-166).

 The CIERA project as cited by Wixson and Yokum stated the "The most

effective schools were characterized by greater teacher collaboration and more

effective instruction. School effectiveness was significantly related to the factors of

the strong links to parents, systematic assessment of student progress and

communication, and collaboration within schools" (Wixson & Yochum, 2004). This

study also found that "the most effective schools used a collaborative model

involving regular teachers plus Title I, reading resource, special education and ELL

teachers who worked together to provide small-group instruction" (p. 229). This

research supports collaboration as a means to improve schools and instructional

practice which is an essential element to a professional learning community.

3. The number of students in the cohorts maintained a consistent level of performance.

The Thomas and Collier study (1997) results indicated that students, who experienced

well-implemented programs for English Language Learners in the elementary years,

including those who spend five or more years in U.S. schools, finished their school

years in the 10th to 30th percentile, compared to the 50th which is the average for

native English speakers.

4. The professional learning community was perceived to have provided more of an inclusive opportunity for the ESL resource teacher in the classroom. The resource teacher was encouraged to participate in the daily lessons of teachers and was included in the planning of instruction by the classroom teachers. According to one teacher, "I think in general, it's better for the ELL student to be in the classroom learning with all their peers instead of being pulled out. There are times where pullout is necessary, but as much as possible; to have instruction all together in one room is more beneficial to all the students (T1, line 123-126). The principal stated,

> I think because one of our focal points was the SIOP model, and our previous ESL teacher here was strong in SIOP, she had gotten seven or eight folks trained in that. Working with her and discussing once a month, how they keep those kids in the classroom in an inclusive model. The teachers could work with them in terms of building vocabulary and giving them an opportunity to practice their language before they perform it. Identifying those language goals in addition to the content objectives, I think our ELL students did do better because they were able to stay in the classroom for longer periods of time. (P, lines 98-105)

The reviewed research of Louis and Kruse, (1995) indicated professional learning community principles are cited including the importance of reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice and collaborative efforts all enriching shared understandings and strengthening the relationships within a school.

5. A professional learning community served as a process through which teachers were able to focus on a single reading strategy throughout the entire school. The teachers utilized professional learning community principles to emphasize reading as a central

theme during the year. One teacher commented regarding a professional learning community, "It opened our eyes, one of the best things about a PLC is we focus on one thing that we may not have thought about before. We have an opportunity to do that. I thought it was a great thing" (T2, lines 98-105). The principal stated,

 "At each grade level, I asked them to focus on one content area that they needed and an instructional strategy for each group. Once they did that, they divided into teams and folks began going in different ways. This is the first year that we had the whole school focused on one particular content (area) reading. We have the whole group focused on the same PLC" (P, 53-57).

Research indicates that reading instruction reform is a complex undertaking that requires changing classroom practice and facilitating school-wide collaboration (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003).

6. The additional time provided for teachers to focus on professional learning community principles monthly was viewed as beneficial in affecting teaching and learning. One teacher said, "The interaction between different grade levels and different departments is a benefit. I think there have just been so many more people getting together. Not just being friends with someone you know outside of school, but we've actually gotten to work together with people we never would have" (T4, lines 176-179). "…we identified the fourth Tuesday of every month as our PLC time…an hour is set aside specifically for their specific learning communities" (P, lines 60 - 63). Schools that have had successful school improvement efforts typically operate as strong professional learning communities, with teachers systematically

studying student assessment data, using the data to modify their instruction and working with colleagues to refine their teaching practice (Fullan, 1996).

7. A professional learning community provided an opportunity for teachers to emphasize concepts across grade levels by planning together collaboratively on a regular basis. Teachers who did not normally interact in the planning process with each other were able to gain insight into what others were doing for consistency in instructional delivery of shared concepts. "That has been really helpful. It's the things that seem obvious but, when you talk about them and you share ideas of how you do certain things, it's been really helpful" (T4, lines 93-95). The principal emphasized the communication of teachers throughout the school responding to what principle may need additional emphasis. He stated,

> I think the principle of the instructional…the conversation cycle is the piece we need to keep coming back to. They are good at identifying the data. They're good at talking about some strategies of how to get to those data. I think now it's that next piece of once you implement a strategy, how are you going to collect student samples? What other sources of data are you going to collect? Then, how do you analyze those data? What are you looking for? What are you going to do with it? I think is a really big piece for them. Coming back and re-visiting that cycle of inquiry is going to be critical for us. (P, lines 114-121)

Teachers added, "Being able to have the interactions between the grade levels and go back down, or go up and see who's teaching it how– this gives you a better idea or gives you a different idea of how it may work better" (T4, lines 207-209). "I think also working with the different grade levels you can end up helping them on things

that they need. I know being a third grade teacher, if a fourth grade teacher was saying, they're having a difficult time with this, what are you doing with this? How can we make this better? Things like that, how can we support them? So, next year, they're not struggling to have to teach the same thing over again" (T3, lines 196-200). Several researchers have stressed the importance of teachers learning and changing together over an extended period of time while they reflect on past practices and implement new teaching strategies (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow & Easton, 1994; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Langer, 2000; Louis & Kruse, 1995).

8. Scheduling the time to meet as a professional learning community was perceived as a challenge for the principal. The schedule of the school presented a barrier to increasing the time for teachers to meet and plan together. Teachers indicated, "From my point of view the biggest obstacle is scheduling and trying to find the balance of working with the kids that need one-on-one or small group instruction, but also allowing for time and energy to work with teachers and collaborate on lesson plans and grade levels" (T1, lines 130-133). "I'd like to do more of the collaborative, but it really does involve the whole school level figuring out the schedule for where the ELL learners and the teachers are" (T1. lines 134-136). The principal commented, "The one change we put in last year to have the focus time every month for the PLC was critical so that everyone knows at least for that one hour a month is set aside" (P, lines 147-149). One teacher indicated "You don't get the chance; you don't have the opportunity very often in the elementary school. You are in your own little world, maybe with your grade level, but you don't get to interact with a lot of other people.

I think that has been a wonderful part of the professional learning communities" (T4, lines 182-186).

   Langer; Kruse and Louis, (1993) added "reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, and collaborative efforts all enhance shared understandings and strengthen relationships within a school" (p. 2). Further research has connected a professional learning community to increased reading achievement by encouraging teachers to improve their reading instruction. Schools are encouraged to become learning communities (Killion, 2002).

9. The professional learning community was perceived to have enabled teachers to do more creative project-based, hands-on learning as part of their instruction. By collaborating and sharing ideas and strengths, teachers were able to provide meaningful project-based learning to the students. "It also gave the opportunity to have more hands-on experience. When the ESL teacher and I split our classes, for half the time, she would take half the kids and I would take half the kids and then we would flip the second part of the period. We did several things with more hands-on. We built volcanoes together to show eruption or talking about Pompeii or Rome. We actually got a pool full of sand to show camels' adaptations to the desert" (T3 lines 55- 60). The principal reported, "In terms of the kids, again, I see especially some of our English language learners and our minority populations, the way we are teaching is more engaging. That's what I am witnessing as I visit classrooms. I am seeing engagement. As we continue to shift from that paradigm of "a sage on a stage" and get away from teacher lecture and get into the really engaging activities. That is important" (P, lines 187-102). The Wixson and Yokum (2004) study also found that

"the most effective schools used a collaborative model involving regular teachers plus Title I, reading resource, special education and ELL teachers who worked together to provide small-group instruction" (p. 229).

10. Staff development was an essential component of the success of teachers in a professional learning community. A professional learning community provides a focus for the entire school's staff development program. The principal said, "One of the things that helped was to begin with a clear focus on what's important, why are we having professional development? Why are we talking about instruction? And, it all goes back to student learning. It has helped us stay focused. We talk about the data, they are what they are, they're not good, they're not bad, they are data" (P, lines 68-72). A professional learning community guides programs the principal plans as indicated by their comment: "One of the things we will do in our upcoming staff development is to revisit the whole instructional cycle and wheel of inquiry" (P, lines 63-64). A teacher commented on training by saying, "I took a class that summer in SIOP, the summer before we started. That's where I learned the methods to use" (T2, lines 68 -70). Schools aspiring to significantly improve students' reading achievement must be aware of the research on effective school improvement and professional development (Taylor et al., 2002). To improve instruction and performance, schools must also adopt and foster an attitude of continuous improvement in teaching and learning (Fullan, 2002).

Implications

This section includes implications for educational leaders to utilize and consider as a result of this case study. The 10 findings have been consolidated into 8 implications for educational leaders.

1. Professional learning community principles should be implemented by the principal and teachers as an approach to impact ELL instructional practices. The principal of Bayville Elementary demonstrated leadership through meaningful staff development opportunities enabling teachers to embrace the principles of a professional learning community in their teaching. Teachers value the shared mission and vision of a school wide emphasis on a single concept. This was perceived to have been made possible by the implementation of the professional learning community.

   The demographics of America's schools are changing. Research indicates that in the 1995-1996 school year, the ELL population in Virginia was reported to 22,716 students. That number grew to 84,344 by the 2007-2008 school year according to the Virginia Department of Education Report of Limited English Proficient Students (2007). Schools must be prepared to address the challenge of ELL student performance when considering adequate yearly progress (AYP). A professional learning community concept enables schools to address this challenge with existing resources. The SIOP research as presented by Echevarria and Short (2004) brings together a school's instructional program, organizational methods and techniques ensuring that effective practices are implemented. This

was the foundation for the professional learning community at Bayville Elementary School.

2. Collaboration is perceived by teachers to improve instruction. While there is no evidence to indicate it improves outcomes, teachers should be given time to regularly plan and teach together. "Definitely, when she would come into the room and we would do stuff, they would automatically focus on her and be much more in tune with what was going on with the lesson" (T4, lines 119-121).

> She got them up and moving around doing a lot of different things that kept it interesting. She thought of different ways, I never would've, to do social studies. It involved moving around. With topics of goods and services and wants and needs, she had them up and doing these different activities that I never would have thought of. It was creative. (T4, lines 159-164)

3. The principal perceived that ELL students should be assigned to classrooms where the professional learning community principles are utilized over consecutive years for consistency of instructional practices whenever possible. At Bayville Elementary the students who were present for 3 years in a professional learning community, performed consistently in terms of reading achievement. The cohort of ELL students present at Bayville all three years passed the SOL reading achievement test with 100%. For students present two of the three years, the achievement was also consistent from one year to the next. For students tested each year, the passing rate was 100% for seven out of the nine study grades according the data identified in this study. Several researchers have

stressed the importance of teacher's learning and changing together over an extended period of time while they reflect on past practice and implement new teaching strategies (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow & Easton, 1994; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Langer, 2000; Louis & Kruse, 1995).

4. Based on comments from teachers, principals should consider the placement of ELL students in an inclusive classroom rather than assigning them where pull-out instruction occurs. The SIOP can assist principals and teachers in facilitating inclusion. "It is always good to have that other person that they haven't learned from yet. That sometimes they would focus on more than having to focus on their classroom teacher" (T3, lines 113-115). "I hear some of our teachers talking about how they've introduced a topic in a different way because of SIOP or because the ESL teacher being in the classroom working collaboratively. So, I think in that way the PLC has been very successful" (P, lines 107-110).

5. Principals should encourage teachers to plan regularly across grade levels using professional learning community principles to improve consistency of instruction. "And that has been really helpful as again it's the kinds of things that seem obvious, but when you talk about them and you share ideas of how you do certain things, it's been really helpful" (T1, lines 93-95).

6. Scheduling at the elementary school must be examined to maximize the opportunity for teachers to collaborate in a professional learning community.

> I took the training and you had a class, I don't think you truly, fully experience that until it really happens in your classroom and you have somebody opens up your eyes to wow…I was thinking this the whole time

and she was thinking that the whole time and I never knew it. I agree that

it should be done more often by more teachers. (T3, lines 299-304)

7. Principals should encourage project-based learning to enhance the instructional

techniques of teachers to support performance of ELL students.

That was just something that was amazing to them. To actually put their

hand in and spread it (sand) out as opposed to knowing something would

sink in it if they didn't have the right feet (adaptation). I think it was more

of an experience where they had the benefit of hands-on. She (ESL

teacher) opened my eyes to a different vocabulary. I thought they would

have taken for granted in knowing what it was and really they didn't.

(T3 lines 63-65)

8. Staff development in a professional learning community is an essential issue in

the implementation of a professional learning community.

I also had an opportunity: Bruce Oliver with *Just Ask*, did a summer

workshop for the Virginia Staff Development Council. I was able to bring

a good bit of work back from him on professional learning communities

and get the staff thinking about what they look like.

 (P, lines 43-46).

Research indicates that reading instruction reform is a complex undertaking that

requires changing classroom practice and facilitating school-wide collaboration

(Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). This research highlights the

continued relevance of the reform movement at the school level and supports a

professional learning community organizational structure to improve reading

achievement.

<div align="center">Recommendations</div>

As a result of this case study research the following recommendations are presented regarding ELL student reading achievement in a professional learning community.

1. The school division should incorporate the professional learning community concept in other elementary schools. This would be beneficial for purposes of consistency in instructional practices when ELL students transfer from one school to another within the division. It also provides for continuity in the instructional practices.

2. The school division should provide support and personnel to Bayville Elementary school to ensure that appropriate planning time can be provided for collaboration among the classroom teachers and the ELL resource teacher. Common planning time was valued by the teachers and should be included in the school's master scheduling plan for instruction.

3. Staff development for the professional learning community should be maintained at the school level to support the division-wide initiative. Teachers should be encouraged to continue training in the use and implementation of the principles of professional learning community.

4. Bayville Elementary school should establish a parent-teacher advisory committee to maintain communication strategies on ELL student activities and academic achievement in reading.

5. A review of instructional practices on inclusion for ELL students in the elementary classroom should be conducted to ensure all appropriate opportunities are being provided. The teachers indicated that having the ELL students in the classroom with the ELL resource teacher and the regular teacher brought about better learning whereby students learned from each other and could engage in more project-based learning activities in addition to sheltered instruction.

<div align="center">Further Study</div>

As a result of this case study, the following should be explored to build upon the growing body of knowledge.

1. The school division should conduct a longitudinal study of the ELL students at Bayville Elementary to ensure the levels of achievement are maintained in middle and high school culminating in graduation.

2. The school division should continue to gather passing percentage in addition to scaled score data on students entering Bayville Elementary to more clearly establish the relationship between the implementation of a professional learning community and ELL student reading achievement.

3. The school division should consider how to address and enhance consistency of instructional programs within the division in response to issues of student mobility.

4. School divisions would benefit from a study that examines the gains and losses in achievement of schools that utilize the PLC structure and those that do not.

Conclusions

Three questions were proposed as a basis for this study inquiring into the perceptions of teachers, the principal, instructional practice and the reading achievement scores of ELL students. They are restated here with support from the data gathered for this study:

1) How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by school leadership, impact instructional practices?

- The principal emphasized the principles of continuous improvement 14 times, results orientation 13 times and collective inquiry 8 times. These were the three most occurring principles in the data.

- The principal indicated a determination to improve instruction based on measurable test data indicators of student performance and continued staff development opportunities.

2) How does the implementation of the principles of a professional learning community, as perceived by teachers, impact instructional practices?

- The data from the focus group indicates that teachers referenced collaboration 22 times, continuous improvement 10 times and collective inquiry 9 times in their discussion.

- Teachers perceived the principle of collaboration as a key component to improving ELL instructional practice as a result of the focus group discussion.

3) What changes occurred in reading achievement of English Language Learners in grades three, four and five as indicated by the Standards of Learning reading assessment results in a school organized as a professional learning community?

- The cohort of students who were present all three years maintained a passing rate of 100%. No consistent pattern of change in performance emerged and indicated a PLC impact is difficult to identify. The passing percentage rate did not decrease over the study period for the cohort.

- The cohort of students present for two years demonstrated consistent performance on the reading SOL assessment from year one to year two. A total of 20 students passed both years, six students failed both years, and three students failed either the first or the second year. No program impact on achievement could be identified.

- There was no measurable relationship between the implementation of the principles of a PLC and ELL student performance on the Standards of Learning reading assessment.

Summary

The principal was interviewed to determine how school leaders can utilize the principles of a professional learning community to impact instructional practice and ELL reading achievement scores on the SOL test. The leadership of the school principal is vital to removing the traditional barriers of grade levels and students moving on from year to year. In a professional learning community, the principal encouraged the teachers to concentrate on the content presentation not only to prepare for the current year, but prepare the students to build on this content for the following year. The principal

provides a conducive environment through staff development and collaboration for teachers to work together to provide instructional benefits of the PLC model. The principal is the essential piece in developing and sustaining the principles of a professional learning community within the school.

The teacher perceptions were gathered through a focus group discussion asking specifically, what their perceptions were of the effectiveness of a professional learning community in their classrooms and the school. Information was gathered to determine which principles were working best and which ones were approaching implementation. This information was supplemented by direct classroom observation by the researcher of various grade levels to see how the principles were utilized in daily teaching and learning. These combined elements indicated that collaboration and collective inquiry were perceived as most beneficial to the teachers and to learning. Teachers shared that the ability to collaborate regularly in planning and being focused on one key element collectively for the year, in this case reading, was an improvement. Additionally, through a professional learning community, teachers viewed resource staff as part of their instruction, including them in planning and valued their contribution to the learning process. The teacher perceptions of the impact on the ELL student's achievement and instructional practices were beneficial and the quality of their instruction improved. The passing percentage data reveal no impact on reading achievement. Further study is needed with more students to determine the extent of performance impact on the reading SOL assessment.

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Figure 4. Diagram of a case study of professional learning community principles.
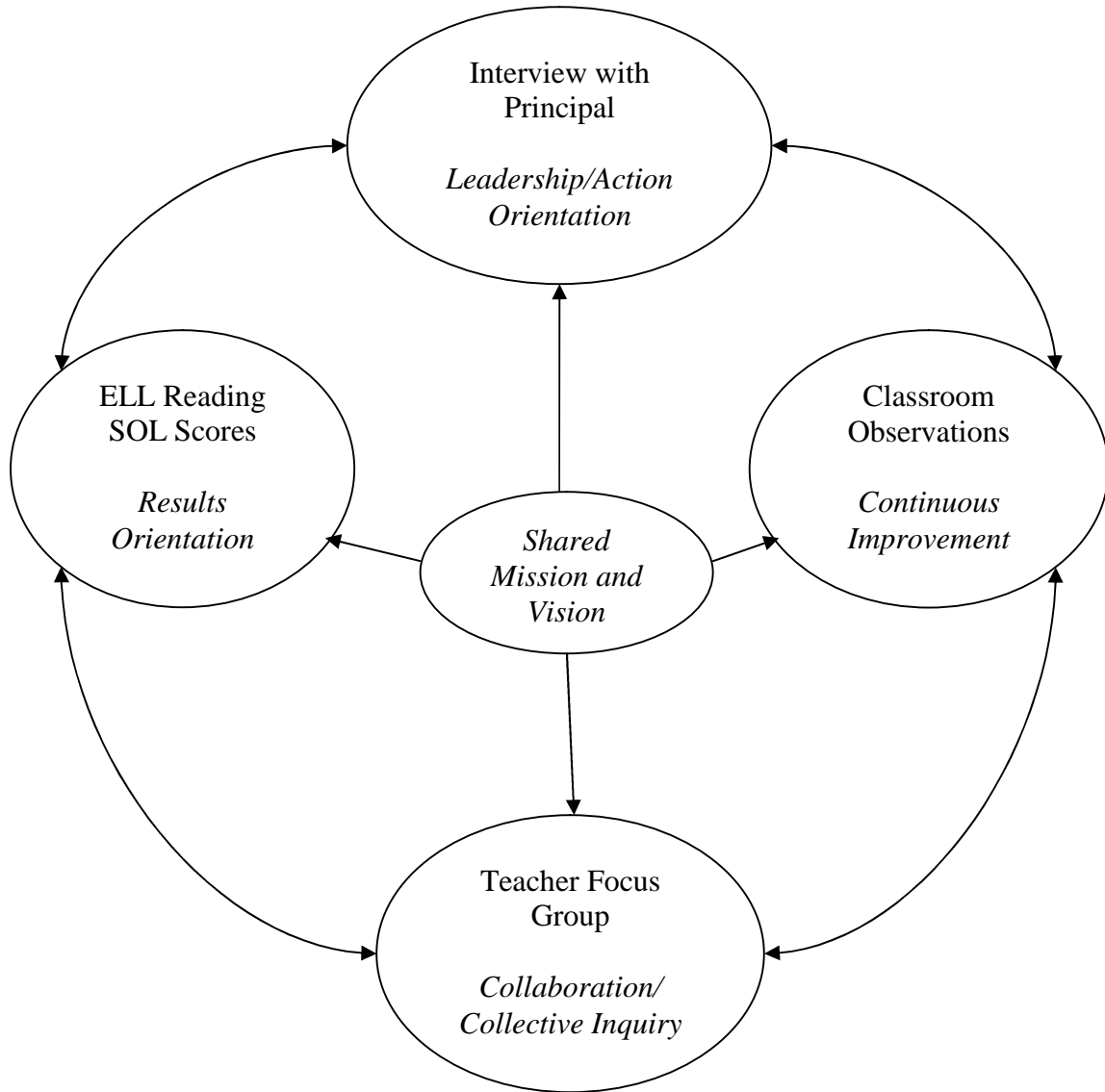
Interview with
Principal

*Leadership/Action
Orientation*

ELL Reading
SOL Scores

*Results
Orientation*

Classroom
Observations

*Continuous
Improvement*

*Shared
Mission and
Vision*

Teacher Focus
Group

*Collaboration/
Collective Inquiry*

Appendix B

DATE: September 24, 2008

Office of Research Compliance

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e-mail moored@vt.edu *www.irb.vt.edu*

Approval date: 9/24/2008

Expiration Date: 9/23/2009

Continuing Review Due Date: 9/9/2009   MEMORANDUM

TO: Travis W. Twiford

    Charles Hurd

FROM: David M. Moore

IRB Expedited Approval: "Professional Learning Communities and English

Language Learner Reading Achievement" , IRB # 08-556

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for

expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR

56.110.

As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for

a period of 12 months, effective September 24, 2008.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities

to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of

how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except

where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks

or harms to human research subjects or others.

3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.

4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB application.

Appendix C

School Division Request for Consent Letter

Date _____

Director of Research
School Administration Office
Study School Division

Dear _____,

I am currently a doctoral student at Virginia Polytechnic and State University. My dissertation topic is professional learning communities and English language learner reading achievement. The purpose of my research is to learn how the implementation of the principles of professional learning communities effects English language learner reading achievement in grades 3 through 5.

My study will require an interview with the principal of Bayville Elementary and a focus group of selected teachers and staff. Classroom observations by the researcher will also be conducted as part of this project. I am requesting permission from Study school division to conduct this research.

I will submit a request to the Institutional Review Board for Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University for approval and provide a copy of the approval for your records at your request. Please place your signature granting approval for this study in the space indicated below and return the original in the enclosed envelope. Thank you in advance for your consideration and participation in this aspect of my graduate studies. I will plan to share my research with the department of research upon completion.

Sincerely,

Charles C. Hurd

Signature of Approval: _____

Printed Name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

December 22, 2008

Mr. Charlie Hurd
The Hanover Center for Trades and Technology
10002 Learning Lane
Mechanicsville, VA 23116

Dear Mr. Hurd:

The Department of Research and Planning has reviewed and approved your research study entitled "Professional Learning Communities and ELL Reading Achievement".

Reports and publications generated from this study should not identify the individuals, schools, or the division and all research materials should accurately represent the party conducting the study. If there are changes to the methods or materials that you plan to use, you must submit the changes to our office for review prior to proceeding. If you are affiliated with an organization with an Institutional Review Board (IRB), an IRB approval letter must be on file in our office prior to beginning the study.   It is our expectation that you will submit a final report upon completion of the study to the Department of Research and Planning.

Please contact ██████████████████████ Elementary School, at ██████████.k12.va.us, or ████████ who will assist you in the process of beginning your research studies.

Thank you for your interest in ██████████ Public Schools.

Sincerely,

██████████████ Ph.D.
Director of Research and Planning
██████████ Public Schools

Appendix E

Ethics Protocol/Participant Release Agreement

(To be read by the interviewer before the beginning of the interview. One copy will be left with the respondent and one signed copy will be kept by the interviewer)

I am the researcher in the project entitled: Professional Learning Communities and Student Achievement. This project is part of my doctoral work through the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech. I may be contacted at 804-346-1921 or churd@vt.edu if you should have any questions.

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this research project. Your participation is important to the completion of my doctoral studies and is very much appreciated. Before we start this interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this research, you have several rights:

> First, your participation in this interview process is entirely voluntary.
> Secondly, you are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
> Third, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.
> Finally, this interview will be kept strictly confidential and the responses will be available only to members of the research team, which includes and my professors and me.

Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research findings, but otherwise under no circumstances, will your name or identity be revealed in this dissertation.

I respectfully request your signature on this form to verify that I have read you the contents.

Signed: _____

Printed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F

Dear Selected Bayville Teachers,

My name is Charlie Hurd and I have been granted permission to conduct a research study at your school as part of the doctoral dissertation requirements of Virginia Tech. The title of this study is Professional Learning Communities and English Language Learner Reading Achievement. As part of the process, a focus group of teachers will be selected to discuss the PLC and the reading achievement of Bayville's ELL students. You are invited to participate in this session that will last approximately 1 1/2 hours. It is scheduled to be conducted on 2 February 2009 at Bayville Elementary. Your participation in this session is voluntary and confidential. Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research to the principal. Thank you in advance for your participation and consideration.

Sincerely,

Charles C. Hurd
Doctoral Student
VPI/SU

Appendix G

Dear Parent/Guardian,

During the next several days, your child's classroom will be observed by a researcher collecting information on the instructional methods used by teachers in your school. The purpose of this research is to learn how the implementation of the principles of professional learning communities effects English language learner reading achievement in grades 3 through 5.

These observations will not involve direct contact of the researcher with your child. No questions will be asked directly to your child. There will be no interruption to the teaching and learning taking place in the classroom. These observations are part of a doctoral dissertation project supervised by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Should you have any questions regarding this activity, please contact Mr. Charles Hurd at churd@vt.edu via email or by telephone at 804-357-0512.

Sincerely,

Charles C. Hurd

Appendix H

Classroom Observation #1 Field Notes

Date 14 January 2009

Third Grade

Length: 75 minutes

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
Students engaged in indoor recess due to extreme cold with "Simon Says" activity. 18 students in class. Grade level SOL posted on board.	Students raised hands and were well behaved and followed along with teacher. They gave themselves a pat on the back.
Students transitioned to reading time with a discussion of fiction v. non-fiction writing. Students were excited to share their knowledge about reading.	Teacher maintains excellent transitions between activities with specific directions and pack-up routines and voice level monitoring.
Class constitution is posted on wall with student expectations of following directions respectfully, work quietly, keep hands and feet to self, do your homework and walk in line. Calendar and day planner page posted with AR charts, All about me word study station and an alphabet genre wall with reflexive charts were used in instruction.	Teacher modeled reading by reading aloud and a review of previous day's lesson. Teacher facilitated excellent transitions between activities. Students were allowed to get water at their own discretion. Teacher kept reminding students about their voice levels being appropriate. Class responsibilities were posted.

Students moved to reading area and their assigned spot. They were asked questions and were anxious to respond. Students followed along and read portions aloud together. Teacher used guided questioning throughout reading time to discover and make predictions. Students participated by giving details. Knowledge tickets were given as rewards.	Students worked in teams to return books after reading activity. They were eager to ask the teacher questions and demonstrate a high desire to please the teacher. They really want to do well and recall information. When the teacher wrote on the board, there was not much space with all of the postings and other information on the board.
Students continued work on flip book project with a discussion of Mali, Timbuktu and universities. Students were asked for synonyms including college	This activity was ongoing and once they were updated, they were put away. A student was called to the office via the PA.
Students used notebooks as organizers and holder for their research. Discussion centered on civilizations and what characteristics they have including libraries and universities. Students were given a hand out to work on in teams to read questions and share answers. They were guided by page number. Students worked well together. They worked at various paces. Students would raise hands to ask	Students reminded to use indoor voices. Students followed directions independently and moved to various locations around the room to work. Some papers were delivered from the office to be given to the students. Teacher was moving around well and monitoring instruction throughout the lesson. A clap response was used to get the

questions and teacher moved from group to group assisting and interpreting passages. Teacher explains the differences in a photo and an illustration. Students were asked to predict likeness. Salt slabs were discussed and how it is different from how we get salt today.	students attention to clarify areas where students appeared to be having some difficulty and check for understanding. Handout was a fill in type and a time limit was given to speed up completion. Students were given directions to be sure to put responses in their own words.
Interdependence- a high order concept was discussed. Students were asked to read out loud for clarity. Teacher modeled using gestures to emphasize instruction with positive comments. The ESL teacher collaborated with the classroom teacher and moved around the room as the teacher kept the pace moving	Students self monitored themselves during activity and listened to each other. The sound levels in the classroom remained constant during the whole activity and were not loud at all. Students were excited and engaged. It did appear that an advanced group sat near the observer as they finished the assignment while others appeared behind.

Appendix I

Classroom Observation #2 Field Notes

Date 5 February 2009

Second Grade

Length: 65 minutes

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
The daily objective was on the board and the students were working on language with incorrect sentences on the board. 1. Yesterday we eat apples, oranges and bananas. 2. Im so happe I could shout.	Students were all quiet and engaged in their activities at their seat. Diverse class with 20 students. Students asked teacher who the observer was and she answered to see what exciting things are happening.
Announcements came on the TV with the Pledge of Allegiance and the students sang God Bless the USA. Students were journaling and working independently. Students asked good questions and were very perceptive.	All students repeated the Pledge and most students sang the song as a sign of patriotism. The video announcements were broadcast through the school and students were reading them live on the air. Upcoming events were highlighted as well as a review of the calendar.
Classroom rules posted along with the division mission. A writing checklist is posted on wall. A science poster is also on the describing the three states of matter.	Teacher used a timer to keep things flowing and monitored student progress. Teacher reinforced readiness naming students on task and providing a paper

	reward.
Students moved to carpet for spelling. Teacher counted to 20 to facilitate the students to move quickly. Spelling soccer inside was the game and the students described the game for understanding. The students were to find a partner and match words. They used markers to chart progress to the goal. The words were cut into slips of paper as a flash card. Students were to move to the goal and back. Timer was set for 10 minutes. When time expired, teacher used counting technique 3-2-1 to get the students attention to transition to science. The students moved back to their desks.	Students moved quickly and after receiving their game board, they did not sit at their desks, they worked in teams around the room on the floor and worked independently. The students enjoyed this activity and had fun with their learning. Many smiles were on the student's faces as this seemed to be a favorite activity. Teacher moved around the room from group to group encouraging students and their progress. The volume level was constant but not too loud the teacher could always be heard. Struggling students were helped by the teacher and those doing well were also.
Students transitioned to reading and moved back to desks and teacher directed questioning. The book from seed to plant was described as realistic fiction and vocabulary was discussed including cross pollination,	Students were well behaved and transitioned well between activities. The sound level did not rise exceedingly high. Students responded appropriately when called on. Students transitioned well to the carpet area for further discussion of the

insect, bird. Students raised hands and asked questions about seed travel-wind to growth. Questions moved form simple to more complex. Students repeated in unison out loud the responses of key terms. The students raised their hands and waited to be called on by the teacher.	story they were reading. Students replied out loud together as they attempt to answer the questions. One student was researching the glossary to find definitions to share. The students were asked to restate sentences to show understanding.
Students were asked to study pictures and diagrams of a flower along with vocabulary. Boys were asked to read aloud and then the girls, this was done twice. A competition was used to make the words clearer each time. Students were asked to use and share words in a sentence and then attempt to define them. This was done through the entire list.	Students were well behaved and participated in the discussion activity. Students were not assigned places but one student positioned far from the teacher had continued difficulty with the questions and understanding the concepts. The students appeared to get along well together and have a helpful attitude when working independently and in teams.
The teacher explained that the story they were studying was expository non-fiction and she reviewed the look-fors in this type of writing which are bullets, events in time order, a glossary, sentence use and a description of ordering.	Overall, the students were well behaved and followed directions effectively. The students did appear to have a good time in the class and responded well to each transition between subjects.

Appendix J

Classroom Observation #3 Field Notes

Date 5 February 2009

Fourth Grade

Length: 65 minutes

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
The students were engaged in the identification of vocabulary words. The students try to guess the words as the teacher writes them on the board one letter at a time. Teacher notifies each student who is to answer and some moved closer to the board to see and have their voices heard. Teacher provided definition to students guessing the words. The students wrote the words down in cursive.	Students were all quiet and engaged in their activities at their seat. Diverse class with 20 students. Students asked teacher who the observer was and she answered to see what exciting things are happening. Classroom jobs for students and the daily schedule was posted on the board. Transition time to reading time was smooth and quiet as students were allowed to get a snack by tables as they moved to the carpet.
Students went to the shelves to get their books to begin reading time. Each student's materials were stored there. The "Night of the Pufflings" was the book chosen to read beginning on p.211. The	All student books were covered and protected. The students paid attention and followed along during the group reading time. Teacher personalized responses to students

teacher described the type of writing as non-fiction. Teacher reviewed the vocabulary words as the students read the story. Students were prepared to read out loud and followed along taking turns.	by saying "read for me" and the teacher did not move to another student until she was satisfied they understood. Analogies were used to emphasize understanding. Teacher asked frequent questions to make sure students were following along.
Math was next and students were dismissed by table from the carpet to their desks. Teacher moved around the room checking and asking for completed homework. Students exchanged papers for review as teacher provided answers as students checked papers. Students received their graded papers and asked to recycle them when finished.	The tables were stacked in pods of 6. the class has 24 students and the groupings of seats were mixed by gender and ethnicity. Students interacted well with each other and worked cooperatively. The sound level did rise during this activity but the teacher did not let it get out of control. Most students had done their assignments.
Students participated in a discussion review of measurement and they were making a chart to assist them in metric conversions. Each student had to cut and paste the proper measurement in place. Students checked each other before they glued it into place. Students raised hands and waited	Students worked well together during this activity. Students moved freely from their tables to the storage area where the supplies were kept. Students were enthusiastic about the activity and appeared to enjoy it. The class had both a rabbit and aquarium

patiently for the teacher to provide assistance.	that the students took care of.

Appendix K

Interview Protocol

Project: PLC's and English language learner Reading Achievement

Time of Interview: _____   Date: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____   Position of Interviewee: _____

Description of Project: This study examines the achievement of the English language learner in a professional learning community environment. The interview is designed to provide information from key figures in the school on PLC principle implementation and its impact on achievement.

Questions:

1. What has been your role in developing a professional learning community within this school?

    Prompts:
    What are your duties and responsibilities in terms of a PLC at this school?
    What staff development/training have you received?

2. What are the strongest and most effective principles in place at this school?

    Prompts:
    In what ways have the principles of PLC's improved your instruction/leadership?
    How has ELL achievement improved in the classroom?

3. What is the principle(s) that needs additional emphasis and development?

    Prompts:
    How can the principles be implemented more effectively?
    What are the reasons for principles being less effective?

4. What has been the impact on English language learners in a professional learning community environment?

    Prompts:
    How long have you been at this school?
    What specific changes have occurred as a result of PLC implementation?

5. What has been the benefit of professional learning community to teachers and students?

   Prompts:
   What has been the feedback if any, from the community in terms of PLC's?
   What is the impact on the school climate as a result of a PLC implementation?

6. What are the effects on the school as a whole with regards to the implementation of a PLC?

   Prompts:
   What are the unforeseen effects on the learning of the students in this school?
   What is different in the learning/teaching environment?

Thank you for your participation. All responses are confidential and used for research purposes only. Additional space added to record responses and prompts. Adapted from Creswell, (1998)

Appendix L

Focus Group Protocol

Project: PLC's and English language learner Reading Achievement

Time of Focus Group: _____   Date: _____

Location: _____

Facilitator: _____

Participant: _____   Position of Participant: _____

            _____   _____

            _____   _____

            _____   _____

            _____   _____

Description of Project: This study examines the achievement of the English language
learner in a professional learning community environment. The focus group is designed
to provide information from teachers and staff in the school on PLC principle
implementation and its impact on achievement.
Questions:

1. What has been your role in developing the professional learning community
    within this school?

    Prompts:
    What are your duties and responsibilities in terms of a PLC at this school?
    What staff development/training have you received?

2. What are the strongest and most effective principles in place at this school?

    Prompts:
    In what ways have the principles of PLC's improved your instruction/leadership?
    How has ELL achievement improved in the classroom?

3. What is the principle(s) that needs additional emphasis and development?

    Prompts:
    How can the principles be implemented more effectively?
    What are the reasons for principles being less effective?

4. What has been the impact on English language learners in a professional learning community environment?

   Prompts:
   How long have you been at this school?
   What specific changes have occurred as a result of PLC implementation?

5. What has been the benefit of professional learning community to teachers and students?

   Prompts:
   What has been the feedback if any, from the community in terms of PLC's?
   What is the impact on the school climate as a result of a PLC implementation?

6. What are the effects on the school as a whole with regards to the implementation of a PLC?

   Prompts:
   What are the unforeseen effects on the learning of the students in this school?
   What is different in the learning/teaching environment?

Thank you for your participation. All responses are confidential and used for research

purposes only. Additional space added to record responses and prompts. Adapted from

Creswell, (1998)

Appendix M

Observational Protocol for PLC Classroom/Study Groups Length of Observation: _____ Date: _____	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
	Sketch of Classroom

A sample observational protocol used to record activities and descriptions of classroom

behaviors, discussions and the setting. Adapted from Creswell (1998).

Appendix N

DATE: August 24, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Travis W. Twiford

Charles Hurd

FROM: David M. Moore

IRB Expedited Continuation 1: "Professional Learning Communities and English

Language Learner Reading Achievement", IRB # 08-556

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted expedited approval by the IRB. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Pursuant to your request, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval for extension of the study for a period of 12 months, effective as of September 24, 2009.

Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.

4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Approval date: 9/24/20099

Continuing Review Due Date: 9/23/2010

Expiration Date: 9/9/2010

Appendix O

ELL Reading Scores for Students in Attendance Three Years

	2006			2007			2008		
Student ID	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
A	410				500				431
W	552				500				456
MM	441				426				466
Average Score	468				475				451
Percent Passing	100%				100%				100%

ELL Reading Scores for Students in Attendance Two Years

	2006			2007			2008		
Student ID	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
D				490				491	
F				321				350	
J					320				369
K				558				507	
L				490				477	
M		449				496			
N					337				333
O				399				477	
Q				321				366	
R		488				496			
S		449				432			
U		409				432			
X				461				507	
Z		473				479			
BB				408				390	
CC					470				477
FF				302				307	
GG					457				486
II				427				491	
JJ				449				442	
RR					312				431
SS				490				528	
UU					500				491
XX		555				600			
ZZ					457				477
AAA					337				326
DDD	438				465				
FFF		473				442			
HHH					417				491
Average Score	438	471		426	407	482		444	431
Percent Passing	100%	100%		67%	60%	100%		67%	67%

Annual SOL Reading Scores for ELL Students

Student ID	2006 3rd Grade	2006 4th Grade	2006 5th Grade	2007 3rd Grade	2007 4th Grade	2007 5th Grade	2008 3rd Grade	2008 4th Grade	2008 5th Grade
B			455						
C							415		
E							446		
G		555							
H		438							
I								453	
P							486		
T				427					
V							415		
Y					593				
AA			386						
DD			368						
EE			520						
HH	410								
KK							525		
LL	454								
NN			427						
OO	600								
PP	441								
QQ			392						
TT							364		
VV				507					
WW									466
YY							600		
BBB					470				
CCC				449					
EEE						401			
GGG					457				
III							425		
JJJ							471		
Average Score	476	497	425	461	507	401	461	453	466
Percent Passing	100%	100%	50%	100%	100%	100%	89%	100%	100%