PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: ANALYZING THE IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP PRACTICES, INSTRUCTIONAL CAPACITY, AND TEACHER COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

by

ALICESON NOBLES

(Under the Direction of Karen Bryant)

ABSTRACT

This action research study was conducted at Summerhill Prep Academy, a high-needs Title I elementary school in the southeastern United States and focused on the impact of professional learning communities (PLCs) on instructional capacity and teacher collective efficacy. The research, grounded in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, explored the role of school leaders in developing collaborative planning structures, the effects of collaborative planning on instructional strategies, and teachers' perceptions of their ability to implement collaborative planning structures through collective efficacy. Using a triangulation of data collection methods, including surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, collaborative planning observations, researcher reflections, and artifact analysis, the study engaged novice and veteran teachers in small group PLCs led by instructional coaches, the lead mentor, and the researcher. The study contributes to understanding how collaborative teacher development can benefit diverse grade-level teams in high-needs schools, potentially impacting student outcomes and school improvement efforts.

INDEX WORDS: Professional learning communities; Collective teacher efficacy; Instructional capacity

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ALICESON NOBLES

B.S.F.C.S., University of Georgia, 2005

M.A., Central Michigan University, 2011

Ed.S., Nova Southeastern University, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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ALICESON NOBLES

Major Professor: Karen Bryant

Committee: Jami Berry
Kaneshia Dorsan

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

This journey would not have been possible without the love, encouragement, and support of those who have walked beside me.

Stephen, your unwavering support, love, and encouragement have been my anchor. You believed in me even when I doubted myself, and your steady presence has carried me through the most challenging moments. I am endlessly grateful to walk through this life with you. Laila, my greatest inspiration, your curiosity, kindness, and determination remind me daily why I push forward. You are the reason I strive to be my best. May this achievement serve as a testament to the power of perseverance and passion. You are my joy, my motivation, and my heart.

To my three queens; my incredible mother, Felita, my grandmother, Mattie Bell, and my bonus mom, Beverly. Mom, your love, strength, and sacrifices have been the foundation on which I stand. Grandma Mattie and Mama Beverly, my angels above, I feel your presence in every step I take. Your unwavering faith in me, even from heaven, has lifted me when I needed it most.

Daddy, I wish you were here to celebrate this moment with me, but I carry your love and wisdom with me every step of the way. Your guidance shaped who I am, and this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine.

Your love and support have been the driving force behind this achievement, and I am forever grateful. This work is dedicated to you.

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INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership and school accountability are critical components of the educational system in the United States, stemming from a long history of educational reform efforts. The 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, *A Nation at Risk*, emphasized the importance of accountability in education. It suggested that schools should be held to high standards and evaluated based on their student's academic progress and achievements. The report's warning that U.S. schools were suffering from "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" highlighted the urgency of addressing these issues (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.112). To remedy this situation, the commission called for more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance on standardized tests, with more time devoted to the new basics and improved teacher preparation and educational leadership. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)

In response to these recommendations, various accountability measures, such as standardized testing, school evaluations, and performance-based assessments, have been implemented to monitor and improve the quality of education on the national, state, and local levels. To provide historical context regarding accountability, it is essential to note the following:

> The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1965, is the overarching legislation that governs federal funding for K-12 education in the United States, and it has undergone several reauthorizations over the years. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act substantially changed the policy, including requirements for standardized testing and

> school accountability measures. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law in response to the limitations and criticisms of NCLB. ESSA gave states flexibility in setting their own education goals and accountability systems. It also reduced the emphasis on standardized testing and gave states and local school districts more control. (U.S. Department of Education, 2023)

These efforts aim to ensure that the U.S. education system is continually evolving better to prepare students for future challenges. Due to more accountability, schools have put an even greater emphasis on all staff members' collective beliefs and efforts. Researchers have found that "When a team of individuals share the belief that through their unified efforts, they can overcome challenges and produce intended results, groups *are* more effective" (Donohoo et al., 2018, p.41). The collective preparation and planning undertaken by teachers can significantly influence the quality of instruction. When equipped with appropriate structures and support, educators can collaborate with their peers, ultimately enhancing their teaching skills and improving student learning and achievement (Dufour, 2004). This synergy between instructional leadership heightened accountability, and the cultivation of effective teaching practices is pivotal in improving student achievement and narrowing the achievement gaps between subgroups.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher planning and instructional preparation impact the teaching and learning in schools. With the shift in standards and the adoption of new curricula and resources across the nation, educators must clearly understand what their students need to know and how to get them to meet grade-level expectations. Frey et al. (2020) asserted that, “If you want to make decisions that have the greatest impact on learning, you have to engage in focused reflection, analysis, or conceptual change, about teaching and learning that will guide you through those decisions” (p.

5). School leaders are encouraged to have the proper collaborative structures for teachers to participate in such planning. According to Prelli (2016), “School leaders continue to search for the most powerful and effective practices to implement as a means to improve schools and promote higher levels of student achievement” (p. 174).

Consistency and accountability among collaborative planning teams also aid in producing professional learning communities that will yield the best return on planning and teaching. The study intended to provide structures and support that enhanced collaboration and instruction for improved student learning and achievement at Summerhill Prep Academy. This action research explored the following themes: the current leadership practices of school leaders related to professional learning communities, the instructional capacity of teachers, and teacher collective efficacy.

Overview of the Research Site Context

Summerhill Prep Academy (SPA, a pseudonym) is a pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary school located in a city in the northeastern part of a southern state. According to the state’s Department of Education, all schools in the county are identified as Title I schools with school-wide programs. The Title I status is due to the number of students who are considered economically disadvantaged. According to the state’s allocation report, 5.7 million dollars were allocated to the district in Title I funds.

SPA has 48 teachers, of which 16 are in the induction phase with three or fewer years of experience. The number of introductory teachers is due to the increased attrition rate caused by the impact of COVID-19. With 33% of teachers still in the introductory phase, the school’s leadership team has had to adjust its professional learning community model to meet the varied experience levels of grade-level teams. This study used the action research process to develop a

systematic plan for Professional Learning Communities, which was co-developed by the researcher, the action design team, and the participants: five veteran teachers and five novice teachers. The plan was developed based on an assessment of the school's needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to analyze the impact of professional learning communities on the collaborative planning and instruction of teachers in Summerhill County School District. This study focused on the leadership practices that the administrators and members of grade-level teams designed and implemented to meet the multifarious needs of the members of the grade-level teams and how these impacted instructional practices.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, the three research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?
3. What is learned by the action research design and implementation teams as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following key terms were defined:

- “Collective teacher efficacy” was described by Meyer et al. (2022) as “teachers’ perceptions of their collective ability to use their resources to deal with difficult or challenging situations, as well as produce and enrich successful learning environments.”
- “Common formative assessment” was defined as collaboratively designed, administered, scored, and analyzed learning assessments used to inform instruction (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006).
- “Data-driven instructional decision making” was defined as a five-step process including the charting of student performance data, analyzing the data, setting a goal for improvement, selecting specific teaching strategies to meet that goal in which participating teachers guided the implementation of instructional strategies from the five steps to improve student achievement (Ainsworth & Viegut, 2006).
- “Instructional capacity” was defined as the collection of teaching resources that educators had to support instruction and “the ability to use these resources to engage students and deepen learning effectively” (Jaquith, 2013).
- “Professional learning communities” were described as groups of educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process that resulted in better student achievement (Hoaglund et al., 2014).
- “Reciprocal determinism” described the interaction and mutual influence between individual factors, such as cognition and behavior, and social factors, such as environmental influences (Little, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

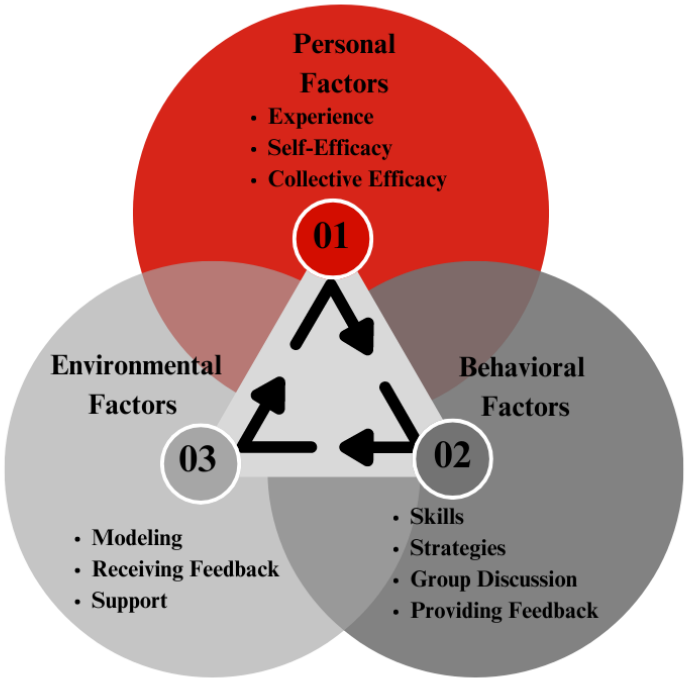
The foundation of this study was rooted in the social cognitive theories developed by Albert Bandura. In 1982, Bandura emphasized the concept of self-efficacy as an individual's

assessment regarding their ability to effectively carry out the necessary actions to address potential situations (p. 122). He provided a more detailed definition of self-efficacy, stating, "Self-efficacy is beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1998, p. 3). Teachers who exhibit a high degree of self-efficacy are more likely to channel their energy effectively toward attaining their goals. Conversely, those individuals grappling with lower levels of self-efficacy may encounter challenges in persevering and realizing their objectives. Drawing from the work of Bandura, it is worth noting four key elements that shape self-efficacy: the experiences of mastering tasks, the power of observing positive role models, the influence of social encouragement and persuasion, and the physiological factors that contribute to one's sense of self-efficacy.

This concept directly affects an individual's motivation to engage in activities and the level of effort they invest. Additionally, self-efficacy is pivotal in determining one's ability to persevere in facing challenges (Bandura, 1998). Bandura's concept of collective efficacy describes educators who collaborate within their school community and substantially influence students' academic achievements (Bandura, 1993). At the core of this theory lies reciprocal determinism, where an individual's actions are shaped by individual factors and the surrounding environment (Bandura, 1978). Figure 1.1 depicts the social cognitive theory framework for this study.

Figure 1.1

Theoretical Framework Based on Social Cognitive Theory



Quantitative data collection in this study was informed by the utilization of the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), a tool rooted in Bandura's (1998) Social cognitive theory research. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) proposed that for measures of teacher efficacy to be valuable and applicable across various contexts, they should encompass teachers' evaluations of their competence across the diverse spectrum of activities and responsibilities that constitute their roles (p.795). The TSES measures teacher efficacy, comprised of three subscales: efficacy for instructional strategies, efficacy for classroom management, and efficacy for student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 799).

Logic Model

The logic model illustrated in Figure 1.2 served as the roadmap for this study, which focused on investigating how school leaders can effectively interact with new and experienced teachers to develop shared accountability within professional learning communities. This model offers a pathway for teachers' professional growth and provides a structured framework for school leaders to participate in this process actively.

Figure 1.2

Logic Model for Study

This cycle centers on the vital role of shared accountability in strengthening professional learning communities, with direct implications for teaching and learning. It investigates how school leaders can support grade-level teams in this process. The study utilized a logic model to illustrate a continuous cycle of engagement involving both peers and school leaders.

Theory of Change

The engagement cycle started with teachers and leaders collaboratively identifying and defining a specific problem. These identified challenges served as the central focal point for their joint efforts. Practical implementation of strategies was observed to collect data and assess their effectiveness. Subsequently, teachers engaged in reflective practices to refine existing approaches or identify new areas requiring attention. The unique needs and priorities of the grade-level team drove the entirety of this process.

Overview of the Methodology

Educators conduct action research for educators to provide educator-researchers with a method to solve everyday problems in the educational setting (Mills & Gay, 2019). Through this method, educators can gauge the "appropriateness and effectiveness" of day-to-day practices in education (Glanz, 2014, p. 24). In fact, according to Glanz (2014), "Educational leaders who are truly concerned about improving their schools or programs will prioritize their responsibilities and expend appropriate energies toward undertaking some form of action research" (p. 25). For this study, the educational leader was the lead researcher who led an action research team to investigate collaborative planning structures.

Action Research

Since action research is a means for school personnel to improve the educational process within their environment through democratic partnerships, the action researcher determined that this method would best aid in addressing the systems for planning as grade-level teams (Mills & Gay, 2019; Coghlan, 2019). The voluntary nature of action research lends itself well to the work of a team seeking to get better together to pursue quality instruction and high student achievement. High student achievement is developed in classrooms where educators create

experiences that produce a deep student understanding. For these educational experiences to occur, educators must first thoroughly understand the content and best practices for achieving this level of instruction. The teachers in the school where the study took place reported limited capacity to offer this educational experience, especially when the appropriate school-based systems are not in place to support teachers through this understanding and development. Action research provided the researcher and team with the opportunity to reflect on the current collaborative practices and their impact on their understanding and teaching, engage in necessary learning to improve, put this learning into action, and develop a plan for improvement for the school. This cyclical process benefited the action research team as information from former research opened "new avenues of research" regarding collaborative planning (Glanz, 2014, p. 22).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, education has required veteran teachers to shift their approach to collaborative planning and best practices in teaching. More and more learning gaps in classrooms (via assessments) need to be addressed to move learning forward. To achieve this, a transformation in collaborative planning methodologies is necessary. In addition, new teacher programs nationwide did not prepare our induction teachers with the tools to instruct our students effectively. Due to the gaps and varied experience levels, the research team examined "phenomena from various perspectives" (Glanz, 2014, p. 32).

Throughout the action research, the researcher and team utilized data triangulation to help support the grade-level teams in strengthening their teaching practices through collaborative planning. Surveys and interviews were provided to novice and veteran teachers thrice throughout the study to understand both groups' perceptions of the effectiveness of their collaborative planning and its impact on their teaching. The action research team participated in a book study

and met monthly to discuss insight gained from reading. During the monthly sessions, the team also provided tools for effective planning, and members participated in a feedback cycle to support implementation. On a bi-weekly schedule, the researcher observed collaborative planning sessions and provided reflections in a research journal.

Data Collection

The action researcher utilized qualitative methods for data collection as listed:

1. Surveys and interviews of novice and veteran teachers before, during, and at the end of the study.
2. Focus group book study and discussions regarding best practices for effective professional learning communities grounded in collective efficacy.
3. Collaborative planning observations to determine the teachers' working methods during different phases of the study.
4. Researcher reflections on observations through a research journal.
5. Additional artifacts that would support the study included but were not limited to, lesson plans, minutes from collaborative planning sessions, and student achievement data.

The triangulation of data was analyzed by the researcher and themes were generated.

Intervention

The primary intervention of this study took the form of small group professional learning communities comprised of novice and veteran teachers, instructional coaches, the lead mentor, and the researcher. The group focused on supporting novice and veteran teachers by establishing conditions for their professional learning communities based on collective teacher efficacy through reflection and collaboration. The action research team, including the instructional coaches, the lead mentor, and the researcher, created and implemented the interventions.

The interventions included a variety of professional learning activities that were developed to build the knowledge and skills of the teachers. The activities included a book study and discussion, viewing recordings of model PLCs with an instructional leader, PLC recording and reflection, professional learning around a specific area, and PLC design, implementation, and debriefing. These interventions were designed to meet the needs of the grade level team as they arose in real-time planning while providing a group setting of support.

Significance of the Study

Accountability in education in the United States holds school systems, schools, and educators responsible for the quality of education they provide and the outcomes they achieve (United States Department of Education, 2023). Student learning outcomes are one of the primary accountability measures, and schools are evaluated on their ability to improve these outcomes. With such a high level of accountability at stake, school systems and schools often look for ways to improve teaching and learning continuously.

In the five years preceding this study, schools nationwide have experienced a decline in teacher retention, thus creating grade-level teams with diverse skill sets and experience. According to data compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), the educator workforce experienced a notable transformation. Specifically, in January 2020, there were approximately 10. 6 million educators. Presently, the number of educators is 10 million, indicating a decrease of 600,000 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). The importance of assisting schools is evident as grade-level teams experience the repercussions of significant turnover within the education sector.

This study looked specifically at what could be done in a Title I school in the southeastern United States to transform the diverse experiences of novice and veteran teachers in

PLCs from potential challenges to a shared commitment to collaborative work. The study could offer insight into the potential benefits of collaborative teacher development and its impact on student outcomes, teacher collaboration, and overall school improvement efforts. The study will add to the gap in research related to supporting grade-level teams with diverse experience and skills to build collective teacher efficacy. This study will also contribute to the models and guidelines for effective PLC implementation.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the problem and purpose of the study, the research questions, the definition of terms, and the method of the study. Chapter 2 comprises an organized literature review on professional learning communities in schools. Chapter 3 describes the methodology concerning the qualitative action research used in this study. The findings from the action research are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes an analysis of the findings from the action research case. Lastly, Chapter 6 details the study's summary, including the conclusion, implications for schools and school leaders, and connections to leadership practices.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Given accountability measures, the evolving educational standards, and the widespread adoption of new curricula and resources, it becomes imperative for educators to possess a well-defined comprehension of their student's learning requirements and the strategies necessary to guide them toward meeting grade-level expectations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In this context, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) emerge as instrumental platforms that facilitate collaborative efforts among educators. PLCs enable teachers to pool their expertise, share best practices, and collectively work towards addressing the evolving educational requirements, ultimately enhancing their ability to meet these needs effectively (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Easton (2017) presented the following five reasons for making sure that PLCs are accountable:

1. Students win when classroom and school culture and teaching and learning processes lead to improved achievement and well-being.
2. PLC members feel better about themselves and their colleagues when their PLC is accountable for results.
3. PLCs can significantly change classroom and school culture and teaching and learning processes.
4. People who support PLCs with time, money, and other assistance feel confident that their support is reaping results.
5. Parents and community members enhance student success when schools have effective cultures and teaching and learning processes. (p. 44)

It is essential to note that teachers come with diverse skill levels and experiences. Bryk et al. (2015) suggest that "When many more individuals, operating across diverse contexts, are drawn together in a shared learning enterprise, the capacity grows exponentially" (p. 141).

Purpose of the Study

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To achieve the objectives, a review of the literature on PLCs was conducted and divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of professional learning communities. The second section explores the notion of teacher efficacy and its impact on teacher

collaboration. The third section delves into school administrators' leadership practices and their role in establishing a culture of collaboration. The final section focuses on the instructional capacity of novice and veteran teachers.

Professional Learning Communities

PLCs are a group of committed educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process, resulting in better student achievement (Hoaglund et al., 2014). PLCs are not to be mistaken as traditional work groups but groups established to determine what students will be learning and how to respond when they do not learn (Hoaglund et al., 2014). Instead of individual teachers being left to analyze standards and curriculum independently, schools are incorporating PLCs. PLCs aim to improve educators' pedagogical and content knowledge through collaboration to improve students' learning outcomes (Fisher et al., 2020). The idea is that with this concept, educators better understand the "what" and "how", thus being able to plan and teach correctly.

Collaborating with colleagues through professional learning communities assists teachers with strengthening their practice in the education profession. It is an opportunity for teachers to remain current with the new research-based strategies promoting school success. Working hand in hand to disseminate information, exchange tips, and plan new strategies helps provide an essential learning experience for the students. Brown et al. (2018) found that PLCs improve student achievement and teacher perception when successfully instituted by school leaders and embraced by participants.

Collaborative Planning

Collaborative planning helps to ensure that teachers can deliver core instruction based on evidence-based instructional practices for all students. It is an opportunity for colleagues to come together to plan instruction, assessments, and intervention supports for the grade level or content

team. The concept of self-efficacy is a part of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory and speaks of one's belief in one's ability to contribute to different situations. Extending this same concept to teacher self-efficacy speaks of the degree to which teachers personally believe in what they contribute to teaching and learning (Goddard et al., 2007). When this notion is combined with the collaborative planning framework, one would argue that there is a correlation between them.

When teachers participate in professional development and collaborative meetings to share and perfect their craft, they show commitment to students and their learning. When school leaders provide time and resources for incorporating collaborative planning structures, self-efficacy is boosted. Schipper et al. (2020) stated, "Teachers who are part of a culture that embraces elements of communities as being collaborative, reflective, and learning-oriented report higher levels of commitment and enthusiasm to teacher students" (p. 114). During their study, Schipper et al. (2020) sought to determine if participating in the Lesson Study professional development approach influenced perceptions of culture and self-efficacy in schools (Schipper et al., 2020). Schipper et al. (2020) used 60 teachers from 8 secondary schools to go through two LS cycles during one school year in the Netherlands. These teachers were separated into an intervention group and a comparison group. They were provided with a pre-test questionnaire before engaging in the LS cycles. Participants provided ratings through a post-test questionnaire at the school year's conclusion. These pre-and post-test results were analyzed to determine the study's outcome.

Leader Support

School leaders play an important role in understanding and navigating the collaborative dynamics within PLCs (Reynolds, 2016). School leaders merely dedicating time for educators to

meet is different from what gets the results that schools desire. Fisher et al. (2020) state that "working toward collective efficacy, taking responsibility for learning, and being flexible in instructional practices transform a PLC from being purely additive to being transformative" (p. 4). Similarly, Williams (2012) supports that continuous collaboration in PLCs is pivotal to shifting the education focus from how teachers teach to how children learn.

Teacher Efficacy in Practice

History of Self-Efficacy

The idea of self-efficacy emerged from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1998). According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), "A teacher's belief in their efficacy is an assessment of their ability to achieve desired outcomes in student engagement and learning, even among students who may be challenging or lack motivation" (p. 783). Bandura (1986) initially introduced the concept of self-efficacy within the framework of his social cognitive theory. In contrast to Rotter's social learning theory, which centers on reinforcements as the primary driver of specific situations, Bandura's social cognitive theory highlights how cognitive processes influence human behavior.

Numerous studies have explored the notion of a teacher's sense of efficacy and its effects on both educators and students. Jang et al. (2023) found that "higher self-efficacy strongly predicts teachers' performance, student outcomes, and job satisfaction" (p.17). "Teacher job satisfaction was higher among less experienced teachers, whereas classroom management efficacy was higher for more experienced teachers" (Jang et al., 2023, p. 18).

Teacher Collective Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy builds on individual self-efficacy by extending it to incorporate the shared beliefs of teachers in their team's ability to achieve specific educational

outcomes. Teachers are most effective at building a sense of collective efficacy when they experience consistent success, witness others achieving success, are encouraged to believe in their ability to manage previously overwhelming challenges, and expect future success (Bandura, 1977). Positive school experiences significantly enhance collective efficacy, strengthening individual teacher self-efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). PLCs enhance collective efficacy and create a supportive environment that fosters ongoing professional growth for teachers and improved student outcomes.

When it comes to PLCs, the collective belief that the goals of the PLC are attainable and will lead to achievement is necessary. When we think of self-efficacy, we know that, at a minimum, this is the personal belief that we can achieve our goals. Accordingly, self-efficacy strongly influences the choice of goals, the effort invested, and teachers' perception of their challenges (Ninkovic et al., 2022).

Researchers suggest that "people, including teachers, who have high levels of self-efficacy exert sufficient energy to accomplish their goals" (Fisher et al., p. 17, 2020). Meanwhile, those with low levels tend to give up easily, thus not accomplishing their goals (Fisher et al., 2020). Taking this concept from "self" to that of a "collective" shifts the mindset from one rooted in personal gains to one considering the general body's success. John Hattie describes this as teacher collective efficacy, which is the "collective belief of teachers in their ability to affect students positively" (Visible Learning, 2018, para. 1). In fact, teacher collective efficacy is number two on Hattie's Barometer of Influence with an effect size of d=1.57. This is "more than two times bigger than that of feedback (*d=0.72*), and almost three times bigger than the effect of classroom management (*d=0.52*)" (Visible Learning, 2018, para. 2). Recent research has found that self and collective efficacy "are in a reciprocal relationship, as teachers are

influenced by the collective to which they belong and at the same time influence the perception of collective capacities" (Ninkovic et al., p. 3, 2022). Moreover, Ninkovic et al. (2022) believed that teachers were more willing to participate in cooperative activities when they believed in the shared abilities of the staff.

Eells (2011) conducted a meta-analysis focusing on collective teacher efficacy and its impact on educational achievement. Her findings revealed a strong and positive correlation between teachers' beliefs in the overall capability of their school and the student's achievements across various subjects and geographic settings (Eells, 2011, p. 110). Eells (2011) used the sports of track and field and basketball to show the interdependence of group dynamics to an individual's power to get the desired results, as noted below:

> Suppose the collective activity consists of the sum of independent successes, as it does for a track and field team. In that case, it is preferable to measure and aggregate the personal efficacies of the actors. When an entire group must interact, as a basketball team would, and collective activity is the product of cooperative work, measuring group members' beliefs about what the team can accomplish makes more sense. (p.51)

This tailored approach to measuring efficacy aligns with each situation's specific dynamics and teamwork requirements, optimizing our understanding of collective performance.

Building upon Eells' research, in 2016, John Hattie placed collective efficacy as the foremost factor influencing student achievement. Table 1 shows the top factors influencing student achievement (Donohoo et al., 2018, p.43).

Table 1.1

Factors Influencing Student Achievement

Influence	Effect size
Collective teacher efficacy	1.57
Prior achievement	0.65
Socioeconomic status	0.52
Home environment	0.52
Parental involvement	0.49
Motivation	0.48
Concentration/persistence/engagement	0.48
Homework	0.29

Note. Adapted from John Hattie (2016).

If there are teachers with low levels of efficacy, then this can pose challenges when leaders have grade-level teams collaborate regarding instructional practices and plans. One researcher found that when leaders promote high levels of teacher collective efficacy, it improves student performance (Prelli, 2016). Cogalty and Boz (2022) suggest that "collective teacher efficacy is more likely to increase when school leaders inspire teachers with visions of the future, encourage interaction among teachers, and respect teachers as valuable persons" (p. 15). With such a positive impact on student achievement, school teams need to come together as a collective to have a greater chance of meeting the instructional needs of students.

Leadership Practices

Leadership in Different Cultures

School principals are tasked with developing and implementing systems that help teachers meet the diverse needs of students. Beyond the day-to-day operations, observations, and feedback, managing the school budget, and hiring personnel, principals are also responsible for creating a school environment where teaching and learning occur at the most optimal level. For this level of teaching to take place, educators are encouraged to be equipped with the tools to

make it happen. A big part of what goes on in a school has much to do with the culture of the building, and building leaders can make or break that culture (Nehez & Blossing, 2022).

Schools across the country have students from various cultures, at various academic levels, and with diverse learning styles. Educational researchers have found that administrators' leadership practices can make a difference in student learning regardless of student background (Cogaltay & Boz, 2022). One study found that leaders can utilize PLC mandates and provide the time, resources, and support from instructional specialists to leverage school improvement efforts (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016).

The data collected in the Nehez & Blossing (2022) study consisted of field notes from eight observations of the principals' meetings, transcripts from eight focus groups with the principals, and the principals' reflective journals (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). The results indicated that "as many as six significant practices became meaningful for the principals to engage in when improving and stimulating enterprise education on an organizational level (Nehez & Blossing, 2022, p. 319). Three practices created conditions for improvement work, while the other three prevented the improvement work (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Table 1.2 identifies the positive and negative conditions of the practices.

Table 1.2

Significant Practices and the Improvement of Work

Practices in Principals' Improvement Work	Conditions of Practice
1. Leading the improvement work	Positive
2. Understanding what enterprise education is about	Positive
3. Making changes to promote enterprise education	Positive
4. Avoiding disputes with teachers	Negative
5. Organizing the daily work	Negative
6. Pretending to succeed	Negative

Note. Adapted from data taken from Nehez and Blossing (2022).

Nehez and Blossing analyzed the data by assessing the strength of the identified practices throughout the improvement process. Additional analysis of the results showed that “the promoting practices of ‘leading the improvement work’ and ‘understanding what enterprise education is’ were prominent during the whole process, except at the end” (Nehez & Blossing, 2022, p. 323). The prevention practices had little to no significance at the beginning of the study but became the dominating practice by the end (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). This adds to the complexity of the role of building leaders as they work to implement practices for school improvement.

Administrators need to build a culture that focuses on high expectations for student learning. Meyer et al. (2022) propose that "in addition to creating supportive and building trust and a supportive atmosphere among teaching faculty, principals can foster teachers' motivation to collaborate" (p. 593). This motivation to collaborate can lead teams to achieve the results they seek regarding student performance.

Nehez and Blossing (2022) suggested that principals should identify a culture type along with the different practices in the culture and reflect upon how these practices relate to the planned improvement (p. 326). In addition, Nehez and Blossing (2022) suggested, "A change to more collaborative and professional school cultures also necessitates a decisive reorganization of internal and external arrangements that promote dialogue and learning among and between school leaders and stakeholders at different levels" (p. 327). With such emphasis on leaders, it is vital to consider the support that administrators receive to strengthen their leadership skills so that a culture of collaboration is pervasive throughout the school. Jaquith (2013) found that central offices "must create district learning conditions that support school leaders as they work with teams to generate the instructional capacity our school needs" (p. 60). A systematic

alignment of support that stems from the district level and leads to building-level administration, which then leads to teachers, holds the potential to serve as a chain of accountability that will ultimately benefit students.

Instructional Capacity

The most powerful resource for transforming education is the one closest to students: teachers who teach and lead daily in schools. Every teacher is accountable for what they contribute to education. Teachers ensure that all students learn and meet their academic standards (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.127). The instructional capacity of teachers directly impacts the high-quality teaching and learning within schools. "Instructional capacity is defined by the degree to which resources and processes enable school professionals to convert information into knowledge and knowledge into changes that respond to the learning needs of students" (Adams, p. 365, 2013).

Novice teachers enter the profession with a skillset nurtured during college and teacher preparation programs, while veteran teachers have competencies gained from years of experience and participation in professional development. It would be advantageous for school leaders to build on the strengths of their teachers. The diverse perspectives of team members provide equitable outcomes for PLCs. A study completed by Jaquith (2013) found that school leaders can foster the development of the instructional capacity of teachers by creating the structures, conditions, expectations, teams, and learning focuses. With suitable systems and administrative and instructional specialist support, teachers will increase their instructional capacity.

Providing an environment conducive to teaching and learning while engaging students in meaningful work is vital for the success of schools. Research supports the notion that the correct supportive environment is needed to foster the commitment to continuous improvement, shared

responsibility, and cooperation to move schools forward (Adams, 2013). Gaining a deeper insight into the curriculum and best practices through collaboration and being willing to modify teaching strategies allows optimal teaching and learning. School leaders support this work through Professional Learning Communities that are designed, implemented, and supported in an environment where teachers believe that the collective work of their colleagues is essential for the success of schools.

Teacher Support

Adequate teacher support is important for fostering a high-quality educational environment. School districts can enhance teacher effectiveness by providing sufficient resources, professional development, and teacher support programs. The Georgia Educator Pipeline Dashboard (2023) revealed that 19.18% of teachers have five years of experience or less, and 42.1% have fewer than ten years of experience. Since 2018, the number of novice teachers has been on the rise. Ingersoll (2019) noted that up to 44% of new teachers leave within five years, with 10% departing after the first year (p. 13).

To support teachers, the Georgia Department of Education (2023) allocated $11.8 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan (ARP – ESSER) to help over 14,000 teachers participating in approved Teacher and Teacher Leader Endorsement programs and GaTAPP programs in high-need areas. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2023), the grants aimed to enhance the teaching profession, strengthen the teacher pipeline, and ensure that all Georgia students had access to high-quality teachers (paras. 6-7). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD)](2023) supports the notion that high-quality teachers can significantly improve student learning, with students taught by highly effective teachers gaining up to a year and a half of additional learning annually. OECD (2023) further

suggested that policy options should include emphasizing teacher quality over teacher quantity, supporting teachers in effective teaching practices, and associating innovative pedagogies with teachers' experience and skill (paras. 4-5). By addressing the needs of novice and experienced educators through targeted funding and professional development, school districts can enhance teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, student success.

Chapter Summary

Collaboration within PLCs contributes to teacher professional growth, allowing them to remain updated with research-based strategies for promoting student success. Effective collaboration involves disseminating information, exchanging insights, and devising new strategies, all of which enrich the learning experience for students (Brown et al., 2018). Collaborative planning within PLCs is pivotal in ensuring teachers deliver evidence-based instruction to all students.

The concept of self-efficacy, rooted in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, influences teachers' belief in their ability to contribute to teaching and learning. Combined with collaborative planning, it creates a potential connection, reinforcing teachers' confidence in their teaching abilities (Ninkovic et al., 2022). The concept of collective teacher efficacy, where teachers collectively believe in their ability to impact students positively, significantly influences student achievement (Visible Learning, 2018). Effective leadership practices are essential for cultivating a culture of collaboration and improving student learning outcomes. Principals are essential in developing a school environment that facilitates teaching and learning, regardless of student backgrounds (Cogaltay & Boz, 2022).

Teaching is a profession in which both new and experienced educators are often assigned similar responsibilities within PLCs. The transition from theory to practice is minimal or

nonexistent. Novice teachers contend with defining their teaching identity, enhancing their skills, and establishing relationships with colleagues who share common beliefs. These challenges can co-occur, resulting in a sense of overwhelm and potentially contributing to burnout.

The school leaders will identify and promote practices that support shared accountability while emphasizing the importance of creating a culture with high expectations for student learning. School leaders will connect these strengths by creating structures, expectations, and collaborative teams that empower teachers to increase their instructional capacity. Effective collaboration, leadership practices, and teachers' belief in their ability to impact student learning are essential components that have the potential to lead to successful schools.

Chapter 3 presents the action research methodology, detailing this study's data collection and analysis techniques. It provides a thorough overview of the research site's context, highlighting key elements relevant to the investigation. Additionally, the chapter examines the interventions implemented within the study's scope.

CHAPTER 3

ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Teachers are most effective at building a sense of collective efficacy when they experience consistent success, witness others achieving success, are encouraged to believe in their ability to manage previously overwhelming challenges, and expect future success (Bandura, 1977). Positive school experiences significantly enhance collective efficacy, strengthening individual teacher self-efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) enhance collective efficacy and create a supportive environment that fosters ongoing professional growth for teachers and improved student outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative action research study analyzed the impact of PLCs on teachers' collaborative planning and instruction in the Summerhill County School District. The study focused on the leadership practices that the administrators and members of grade-level teams designed and implemented to meet the multifarious needs of the grade-level teams and how these impacted instructional practices.

Research Questions

To address the purpose of this action research study, three research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?

3. What do the action research design and implementation teams learn as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research is a methodological approach to comprehending human behavior and interactions within their natural environment. Its essence is grasping the subjective meanings participants attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Understanding these experiences requires the researcher's immersion within the context in which they occur. Notably, qualitative research heavily relies on the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, introducing a unique form of bias (Merriam, 2017).

Rather than seeking to validate hypotheses, qualitative research helps to depict the complexities of a situation, revealing how participants interpret and derive meaning from it (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). This methodological alignment is critical when examining the experiences of novice teachers whose challenges are deeply entwined with their instructional preparation and collaborative planning contexts. Given the significance of addressing these challenges, this qualitative research study explored the transformation of novice and veteran teacher collaboration within PLCs. A qualitative research approach was selected because the study focused on the participants' perspectives of their collective efficacy. Utilizing action research methods that included interviews, a focus group, and participant observations, the study captured the complexities of teacher collaboration within PLCs and the lessons learned about teacher collective efficacy.

Overview of Action Research Methods

Action research is a qualitative investigative approach in which the researcher assumes dual roles as observer and participant. Unlike standard research paradigms, action research necessitates real-time engagement with the study's phenomena. The essence of action research lies in its repetitive nature. Reflections follow actions, leading to deeper insights into the subject matter and a commitment to continuous improvement (Glanz, 2014).

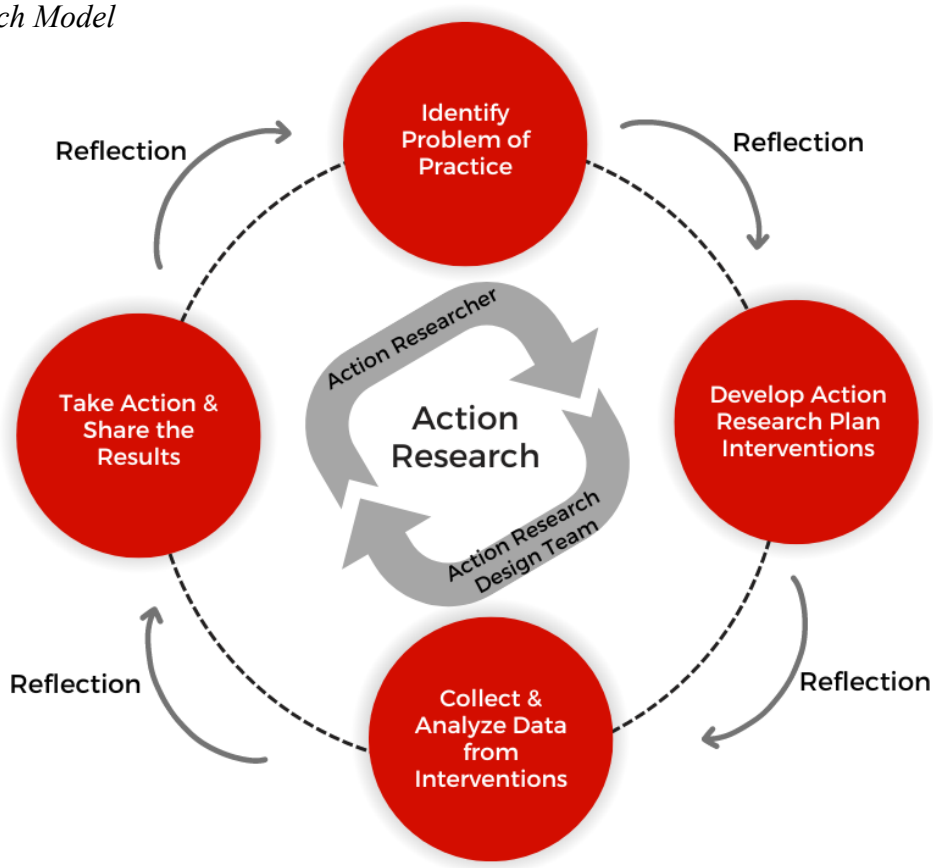
Glanz (2014) further suggests, "Educational leaders who are truly concerned about improving their schools or programs will prioritize their responsibilities and expend appropriate energies toward undertaking some form of action research" (p. 25). By actively engaging in action research, school leaders can dive deeply into the complexities of educational practice, critically assess existing strategies, and collaboratively develop innovative solutions tailored to the specific needs of their educational communities. Through the systematic inquiry and reflection components in the action research processes, school leaders are empowered to identify areas for growth, organize resources effectively, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement among their staff. By doing so, leaders can foster a culture of inquiry, collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making, ultimately leading to more meaningful and sustainable improvements.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the action research cycle model adopted for this study, drawing inspiration from Zepeda's (2019) reflective practice framework. Zepeda's model highlights the essential connection between reflection and action. While standard action research cycles typically encompass phases of planning, executing, and assessing actions, Zepeda’s framework strongly emphasizes critical reflection. Thus, it highlights the personalized nature of action

research and the significance of thoughtful analysis in understanding and evaluating its outcomes.

Figure 3.1

Action Research Model



Note. Adapted from Glanz's (2014) and Zepeda's (2015, 2019) works.

Action research was chosen for the present study because of its practical nature and direct impact on practice. Elliott (1994) defined action research as a way for teachers to be "knowledge generators rather than appliers of knowledge generated by outsiders" (p. 133). Action research empowers participants and prevents them from accepting theories and programs at face value (Glanz, 2014). Coghlan and Brannick (2014) describe action research as interactive and real-time. Given the study's emphasis on bolstering collaboration, instructional capacity, and collective efficacy among novice and veteran teachers to enhance student learning and

achievement, the attributes of action research make it the most suitable methodology for this study. Additionally, this qualitative action research case study was informed by quantitative data using the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale created by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfok Hoy (2001).

Action Research Design

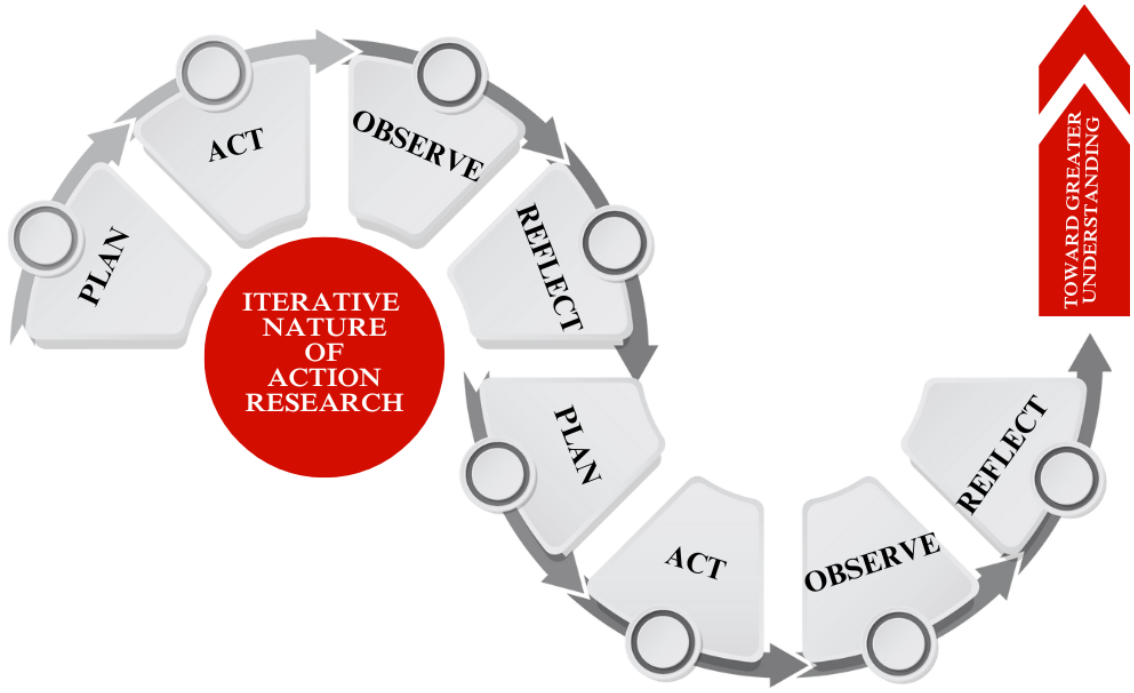
Action research provides educators with current knowledge, skills, and understanding of enhancing educational practices or solving significant challenges and problems in schools and classrooms (Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2008). The design of action research was unique for the researcher because change and understanding occurred in tandem. Kemmis et al. (2014) noted that a shift in action occurs as understanding develops, spiraling into a new action cycle. The new cycles of action are called the spirals of action research.

The Spiraling and Iterative Nature of Action Research

Action research is an ongoing process through which researchers continually evaluate the processes through reflection and seek ways to improve practices. This reflection leads to the need for adjustments and further data collection, creating a continuous cycle of inquiry. Kemmis et al. (2014) describe this process as a spiraling journey. In action research, the researcher and participants engage in this iterative process, using self-reflection to deepen their understanding. As depicted in Figure 3.2, this process can be visualized as a forward path toward greater understanding. Planning, acting, observing, and reflecting drives the research forward. For this study, the logic model guided the cycles, providing a structured framework for the researcher and participants.

Figure 3.2

The Spiraling Nature of Action Research



Note. Adapted from Kemmis et al. (2014).

Logic Model

The logic model illustrates the interconnected pathways through which school leaders can engage with novice and experienced teachers, fostering a culture of shared accountability within professional learning communities (PLCs). Figure 3.3 illustrates the model used for this study. At the core of this model lies the principle of shared accountability, which ensures that all members are collectively responsible for the outcomes of the learning process. The continuous cycle of engagement within the model allows for constant involvement from school leaders while the team progresses through implementation, monitoring, reflection, and feedback.

Figure 3.3

Logic Model

Theory of Change

The engagement cycle began with a collaborative effort between teachers and school leaders to identify and clearly define a specific problem. This initial phase set the stage for targeted interventions focusing on practical implementation and data collection to assess the effectiveness of various strategies. Novice and veteran teachers contributed their insights and perspectives during problem identification. Teachers and leaders tailored their approaches to meet the specific needs of their students and teams.

Following the implementation phase, the cycle moved into the reflective stage, in which teachers assessed the outcomes of their interventions. This reflection allowed for refining existing strategies and identifying new areas for improvement. The entire process was driven by

the unique priorities of each grade-level team, ensuring that the strategies were relevant and responsive to their specific needs.

The Case

This study's context was a single elementary school. The instructional capacity and collective teacher efficacy of novice and veteran teachers at Summerhill Prep Academy were explored as they engaged in PLCs, guided by their evolving needs identified through reflective practice. By examining this specific case, the research provided valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by collaborative grade-level teams and how school leaders could effectively support them during PLCs.

The case study approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how and why certain interventions work within the specific context of Summerhill Prep Academy. This method enabled a detailed examination of the contextual conditions that shaped the experiences of novice and veteran teachers. Data from observations, field notes, and interviews were used to construct a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative structures in place, how school leaders facilitated these processes, and how the team perceived the collective efficacy of the team.

Action Research Design Team

The action research design team comprised school personnel, including the researcher, instructional coaches, and grade-level team leaders. Table 3.1 lists the team members and describes their roles in the research.

Table 3.1

Action Research Design Team Members

Team Member	Primary Role at Summerhill Prep Academy	Action Research Role
Primary Researcher	Principal	Leads and conducts all research with the action research design team for data analysis. Brings nine years of classroom experience and 10 years of administrative experience.
Mrs. Stephanie Lewis	Assistant Principal Summerhill Prep Academy	Provides context and charge for the school-wide leadership team and perspective for action research. Brings 15 years of classroom experience and eight years of administrative experience.
Mrs. Linda Dawson	2nd-5th Grade Instructional Coach	Provides over 18 years of elementary experience, 14 years in 3rd and 5th grade, and 4 years as an instructional coach.
Mrs. Cassidy Hill	MTSS Specialist, Lead Mentor	Provides experience from more than 15 years of teaching elementary school with experience in special education and general education. Also serves as a member of the district's MTSS team.
Ms. Adriana Newton	3rd Grade Team	Provides experience from 8 years of teaching elementary school. Also serves as a member of the Gifted Team.

Team Member	Primary Role at Summerhill Prep Academy	Action Research Role
Ms. Tiffany Miller	5th Grade Team Leader	Provides experiences from 13 years of teaching elementary school. Also served on the leadership team for 5 years.

The primary researcher served as the principal at Summerhill Prep Academy and had a vested interest in examining how to support PLCs best. The assistant principal also served on the action research design team to provide a whole-school perspective. Mrs. Dawson had spent 14 years teaching third and fifth grades before transitioning into her current role as an instructional coach, where she had served for the past 4 years. Her extensive experience supporting teachers and enhancing instructional practices across second to fifth was critical for developing interventions. Mrs. Hill had worked in both special education and general education settings. As the MTSS Specialist and Lead Mentor, she provided a diverse perspective of instructional practices. Ms. Newton served as a team leader and a member of the Gifted Team. Her expertise allowed her to apply her leadership and curriculum development skills to benefit novice and veteran teachers. Ms. Miller served as the fifth-grade team leader. Her expertise enabled her to leverage her leadership and curriculum development skills to support novice and experienced teachers. The Action Research Design Team members were selected based on their leadership abilities, instructional expertise, and diverse roles within the school.

Action Research Implementation Team

Staff members in third, fourth, and fifth grades were asked via email to participate in this study, which occurred during the 2024-2025 school year. The research aims, and potential benefits to the teachers were outlined in the email. The Action Research Implementation Team

comprised nine teachers in SPA's third and fifth grades. Due to the composition of the grade-level teams, a unique feature of the Action Research Implementation Team was that two participants- Ms. Tiffany Miller and Ms. Adriana Newton- also served on the Action Research Design Team.

Research Plan and Timeline

Glanz (2014) suggested continuous reflection and action result in sustained improvement. The research timeline followed this idea of reflective action. Table 3.2 outlines the cycles of reflection and action used in the study.

Table 3.2

Action Research Timeline

Date	Action Research Activity
August 2024	Bi-weekly Action Research Design Team Meeting; Book Study with Action Research Design Team; Initial individual teacher interviews conducted.
September 2024	Bi-weekly Action Research Design Team Meeting; Completion of Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale by Implementation Team; Action Research Cycle 1 and intervention implemented.
October 2024	Bi-weekly Action Research Design Team; Action Research Cycle 2 and intervention implemented; Reflective Interview
November 2024	Bi-weekly Action Research Design Team; Action Research Cycle 3 and intervention implemented; Reflective Interview
December 2024	Bi-weekly Action Research Design Team Meeting; final individual interviews

Date	Action Research Activity
	conducted; Action Research Design Team Focus Group.

Context of the Study

Summerhill County School District, nestled in the northeastern part of a southern state, served 12,000 students in 21 schools and through other special programs. The system had 14 elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools. In addition to the schools, the district had two Early Learning Centers, which served Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K students, along with the Summerhill Community Career Academy (SCCA). The SCCA partnered with a local college and businesses to offer high school students career-focused, college-level courses ranging from accounting to welding. The demographic diversity of the district reflected 48% African American, 25% Hispanic, 21% Caucasian, 4.6% Multi-Racial, and 1.3% Asian. The district employed 1,155 teachers, of whom 781 have advanced degrees. The average year of experience was 10 years.

Summerhill County was a charter system that gave the district local control and grants schools flexibility to operate within state mandates and rules. With such flexibility, schools could meet the diverse needs of their students and communities, aiming for higher student performance. SCSD began its second five-year term as a member of the state's Charter System Foundation in 2022.

Summerhill Prep Academy was one of the district's 14 elementary schools. Enrollment declined slightly between 2020 and 2021. Since returning to complete in-person instruction, enrollment had increased steadily. The diverse student populations included 25% Caucasians, 53% African Americans, 12% Hispanics, 7% multi-racial, and 3% other. Summerhill Prep

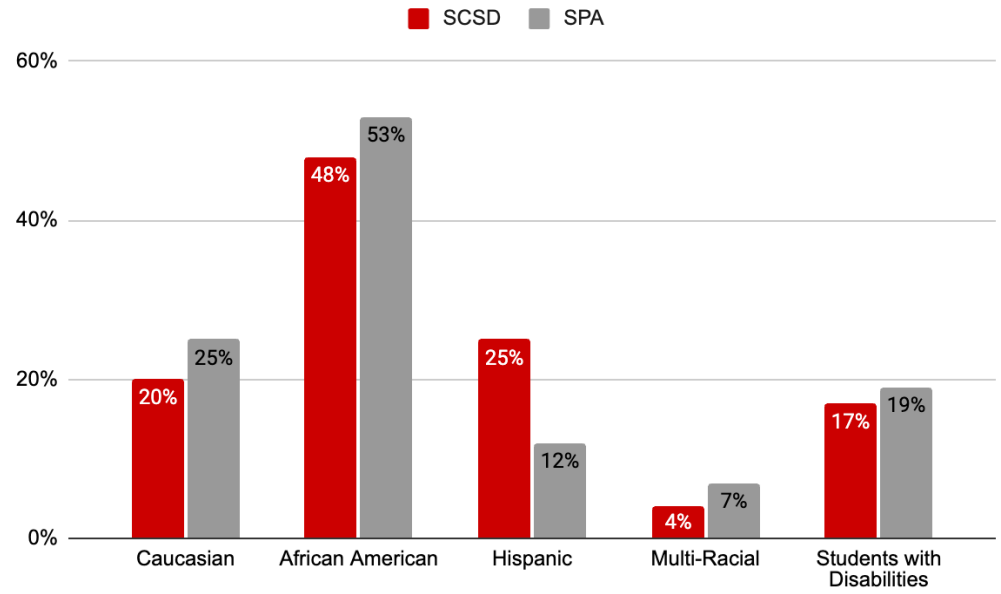
Academy was located on the east side of the city where the study was situated. It was one of three elementary schools that filtered into one of the four middle schools and ultimately into one of the comprehensive high schools. SPA students lived in housing that ranged from housing development apartments with rent as low as $25 a month to homes valued at $459,000 or more. The vast differences in housing options contributed to the diversity that made up the community. Sprinkled throughout the community were two large apartment complexes for college students attending the state's flagship university.

Student Body Characteristics

Summerhill Prep Academy had a diverse student body of 470. The student body was also comprised of students from other special populations, including 18% served through special education, 8% identified as English Language Learners (ELL), and 20% identified as gifted. Figure 3.4 provides ethnicity and subgroup data comparing Summerhill Prep Academy (SPA) to the Summerhill County School District (SCSD).

Figure 3.4

Demographic Comparison of Students in SCSD and SPA as Reported by Governor's Office of Student Achievement



Note. Adapted from data taken from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2023).

The school was known for the varied enrichment programming it provided for students. These opportunities included Boys to Men, Girls of Leadership & Distinction, Choir, Step Team, Student Leadership Council, Girls on the Run, and girls and boys Basketball teams for fourth and fifth grade. The school strove to provide opportunities for all students at SPA.

Academic Achievement

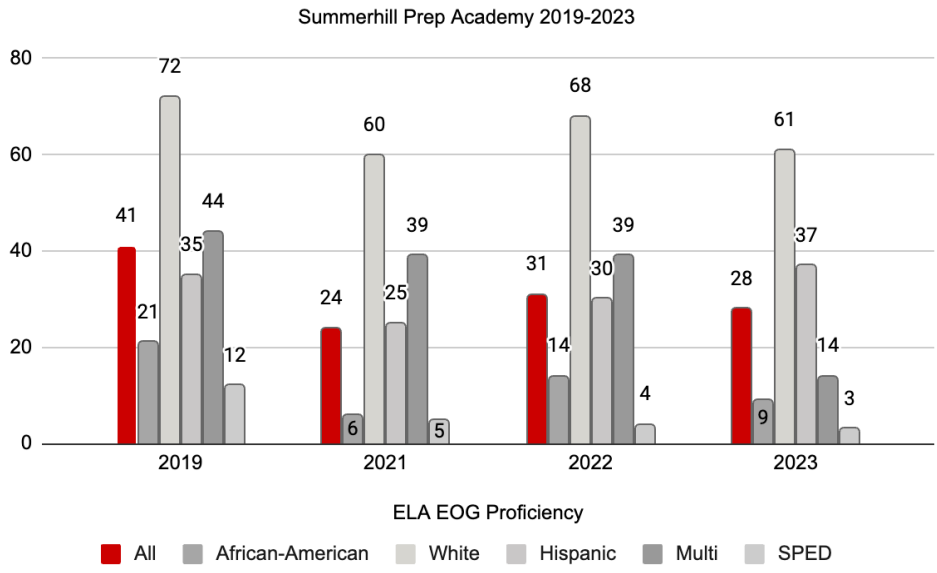
Summerhill Prep Academy End of Grade ELA test data revealed a notable fluctuation in student performance over the years. In 2019, the overall proficiency level was at 41%. In 2021 there was a significant decline, with the performance dropping to 24%. However, in 2022, there was a partial recovery, with performance rising to 31%. In 2023, there was a further drop, with the performance level at 28%. This fluctuation in student performance over the years was

concerning. The inconsistency in performance indicated the presence of factors impacting student achievement.

Like the ELA data, the math data revealed a fluctuation in student performance over the years, indicating a need for comprehensive examination and intervention. In 2019, the overall math proficiency performance level was at 40%. In 2021, there was a significant decline in math performance, with the score dropping to 27%. In 2022, there was a notable recovery, bringing math performance back to 40%. However, in 2023, there was another decrease, with the math performance level at 37%. Figures 3.5 and 3.6 detail SPA proficiency data by subgroup for ELA and Math, respectively.

Figure 3.5

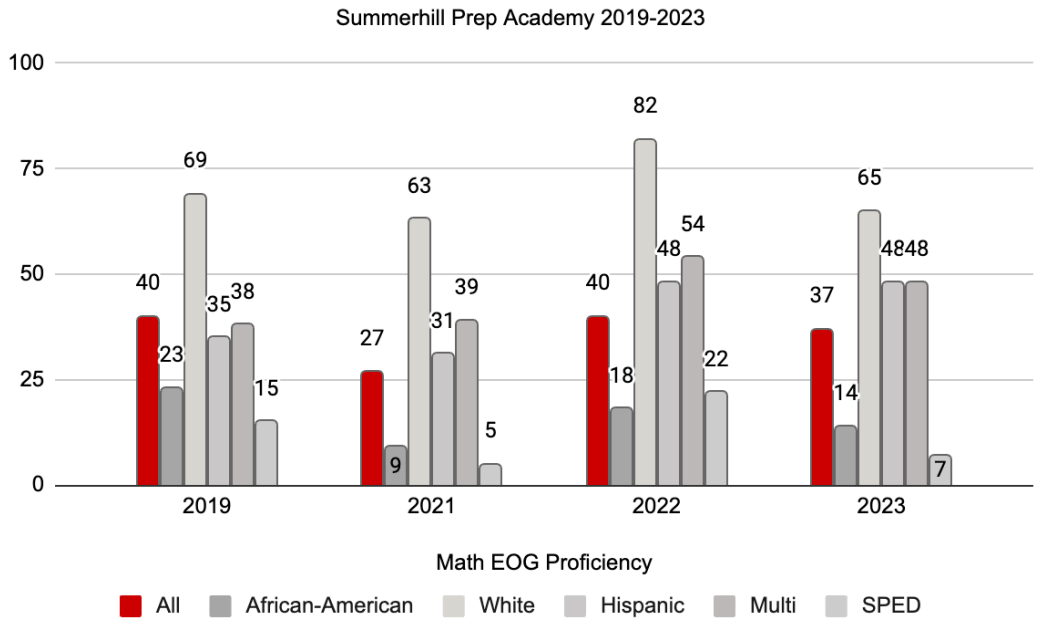
End of Grade (EOG) ELA Test Scores: Summerhill Prep Academy



Note. As reported by the Georgia Insights (2023).

Figure 3.6

End of Grade (EOG) Math Test Scores: Summerhill Prep Academy



Note. As reported by the Georgia Insights (2023).

Staff Characteristics

The faculty and staff included the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, instructional coach, family engagement specialist, 34 general-education teachers, four special-area teachers, nine special-education teachers, one full-time speech pathologist, two half-time speech pathologists, and 16 instructional support staff. Due to the high number of students with disabilities at SPA, each grade had one collaborative class. These collaborative classes placed students with disabilities in a general education class to gain the same educational experience as typical peers. The collaborative classes were composed of a general and special education teacher.

Teaching Staff

There were 48 teachers at Summerhill Prep Academy, 34 of whom were general education teachers, nine of whom were special education teachers, and four of whom are special-area teachers. While there was an African American teacher on each grade-level team, the total teaching staff included 73% White and 23% African American teachers. Fifty-four percent of the teachers held advanced degrees of master's or higher, and only three teachers were provisionally certified.

Leadership

The all-female school leadership team comprised a principal, an assistant principal, and an instructional coach. Two members were African American, and one was Caucasian. Two members had been at the school for over 15 years, while the other had only been there for four years. All three members had advanced degrees and leadership certifications. The team was focused on meeting the school's needs more effectively through instructional leadership, planning and assessment, and school culture and climate.

Current Professional Learning Community Structure

Collaborative planning through PLCs was a part of the school's instructional framework. Grade-level teams were required to meet three times a week to plan weekly lessons, analyze data, and discuss students' progress as part of the Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) process. The instructional coach supported teams during the grade level PLCs as they unpacked standards, identified learning targets, and planned and designed a variety of learning experiences and assessments. The assistant principal led all MTSS sessions in which teachers looked at performance data to determine the need for interventions for those students not meeting grade level targets. The principal led the data-driven instruction sessions as teams analyzed formative,

summative, and diagnostic data. Teachers used the data to plan remediation, reteaching, and extension instruction.

Data Sources

With a significant portion of teachers in the introductory phase, adapting the PLC model became paramount. The study aimed to analyze the impact of professional learning communities on the collaborative planning and instruction of teachers with a range of experiences in the Summerhill County School District. Varying data sources were used to comprehensively understand the challenges and opportunities essential in supporting teachers with varied experience levels.

Participants

Novice third and fifth-grade teachers with a homeroom class during the 2024-2025 school year participated in the study. These teachers offered fresh insight and knowledge, adding to the team's innovation. Veteran teachers served as a source of wisdom and offered historical insight regarding teaching practices, problems, and solutions.

Selection Criteria

Due to the study's nature, participant selection was deliberate. The study criterion warranted novice and veteran teachers representing intergenerational diversity within grade-level teams. This diversity represented the complexity of the team's experiences, perspectives, and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. The novice teachers had three or fewer years of experience, while the veteran teachers had seven or more years of experience and a deep understanding of educational contexts. The sample size was contingent upon the number of teachers who met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. The next section of this chapter describes the data collection methods included in this study.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this study was designed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of both novice and veteran teachers within the school setting. Various qualitative methods were utilized to triangulate data from different sources. Glanz (2014) noted that using a few sources could lead to incomplete analyses and misevaluations.

Data collection for this study involved multiple qualitative methods. These methods included:

1. Semi-structured interviews with novice and veteran teachers on the grade-level teams.
2. Focus group conducted with the action research team reflecting on the process and sharing views.
3. Observations of PLCs conducted by the action research team on the implementation team's behaviors and activities.
4. Researcher journal notes based on observations during PLCs and action research team.
5. Documents contributing to the focus of the study.
6. Pre- and post-perception survey about teacher efficacy using the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale created by Dr. Megan Tschannen-Moran and Anita Woolfok Hoy (2001).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted at three different points of the study to gain insight into the perceived effectiveness of collaborative planning and its impact on teaching. Semi-structured interview questions were used to allow participants to express their viewpoints thoroughly. Table 3.3 provides a sampling of interview questions. The complete list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Table 3.3

Reflective Interview Questions Sample

Research Question	Interview Questions
Q2: How do elementary school teachers describe the impact of the collaborative planning processes on their instructional strategies?	What kinds of support did you find most helpful from your colleagues and the action research team? How has your participation in the PLC impacted your teaching practices? Have you observed any changes in student outcomes due to implementing strategies discussed in the PLC?
Q3: How do elementary school teachers perceive their ability to implement collaborative planning structures through collective efficacy?	How do you perceive the sense of collective efficacy among PLC members? In what ways do you feel the PLC has strengthened your confidence in addressing classroom challenges?

Focus Group

The action research team participated in focus groups to gain their perspective on the impact of the study. The action research team comprised school and teacher leaders who served on the school's leadership team. The members were comfortable with providing the necessary insight without feeling pressured. The focus group occurred a few days after the third action research cycle ended. The meeting with the focus group lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. Table 3.4 provides a sampling of focus group questions. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix B.

Table 3.4

Focus Group Questions Sample

Area of Interest	Focus Group Questions
Obstacles and areas of success of PLCs	What challenges or obstacles do you see within PLCs?
Effectiveness of support for PLCs	How well did the team members collaborate during the cycles? What kinds of support did you find most helpful for the grade-level teams?
Next steps for PLCs	How do you build upon the collective efficacy within the PLC? Are there any additional resources or support that would enhance the PLC's effectiveness?

Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale

The action team completed the 12-question short-form version of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) created by Dr. Megan Tschannen-Moran and Anita Woolfolk Hoy (2001) at the beginning and end of the study. The TSES assesses teachers' self-efficacy in three key areas: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Using the TSES for pre- and post-perception surveys allowed the researcher to measure changes in teacher efficacy over time and provided data on the impact of the interventions. The form can be found in Appendix C.

Observation Notes

The researcher also collected data through observation. Third and fifth-grade teachers were observed during their PLCs as they implemented strategies discussed during ARDT

meetings and professional development sessions. The researcher observed each PLC while implementing these strategies throughout the semester. Observations lasted approximately 45 minutes. A sample of observational data is provided in Table 3.5. The data in the table was collected during Action Research Cycle 3, focusing on having agreed-upon protocols and using an agenda to maximize the use of time. The researcher concentrated on how the agenda and protocols were utilized and the resulting level of engagement from each team member during the observations.

Table 3.5

Observation Sample from Intervention 3

Teacher	Date and Time	Observation Highlights
Ms. Washington	November 4, 2024 11:11 am	The team leader comes into the room and informs the team that they will focus on wit and wisdom for the day. Teachers are on their devices scrolling through resources. There is much talk between two team members and not as much from others. The team leader encourages participation by asking, "How are we feeling about opinion writing?"
Mrs. Newton	November 4, 2024 11:31 am	The teacher tries to bring focus to the discussion by referring other teammates to the Wit & Wisdom resource. The teacher asks, “Does everyone understand how we will do the new read?” The rest of the team confirms with head nods.
Ms. Miller	November 5, 2024 2:02 pm	The PLC starts 12 minutes late. The team leader calls the group together. There is a deep conversation about the standards. The three homeroom teachers consistently participate, but the SPED collaborative teacher does not contribute as much.

Interventions

This study explored and enhanced teachers' collective efficacy through targeted professional learning communities. The study focused on implementing interventions based on Dewitt's (2019) Collective Efficacy Cycle. By engaging in collaborative goal-setting, learning from resources, applying strategies, collecting evidence, and celebrating successes or refining goals, the study aimed to strengthen teachers' collective belief in their ability to impact student outcomes positively. Action research was utilized to design, implement, and evaluate these interventions, ensuring that the professional learning activities were responsive to the emerging needs of the teachers involved. Through this process, the study sought to build a sustainable professional development model that fostered continuous improvement and collective teacher efficacy.

According to Bandura (1986) and Goddard et al. (2004), collective efficacy beliefs are shaped by four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. Of the four sources, mastery experiences represent the most influential factor in fostering collective teacher efficacy. This perspective aligns with Bandura's (1986) theory, in which successful outcomes attributed to internal causes boost collective efficacy among teams, leading to an expectation of repetitive effective performances.

In the present study, the primary intervention was small group professional learning communities comprised of novice and veteran third and fifth-grade teachers, the instructional coach, the lead mentor, and the researcher. The interventions were based on Dewitt’s (2019) Collective Efficacy Cycle. The cycle emphasizes the development of collective teacher efficacy, highlighting that as teachers collaboratively work towards common goals, their collective belief

in their ability to overcome challenges and achieve desired outcomes strengthens. Figure 3.7 portrays the collective efficacy cycle adapted from Dewitt (2019).

Figure 3.7

Collective Efficacy Intervention Cycle

Note. Adapted from Dewitt (2019).

Co-Construct a Goal

The collaborative process started with the co-construction of a goal. This first step ensured that all participants had a voice in shaping the direction of the PLC (Dewitt, 2019). At SPA, teachers meet in professional learning communities three times weekly to develop a shared understanding of the desired academic improvements.

Learn from Resources and Find New Strategies

Once the goal was set, team members collaborated to examine innovative approaches to help them meet it (Dewitt, 2019). SPA teachers had 90 minutes of collaborative planning time once a week to provide additional uninterrupted planning time.

Try the Strategy in a Practical Application

During the next phase, grade-level teams applied the strategies within their common PLC. The team acquired valuable knowledge about these approaches' practicality, efficacy, and influence on student achievements through experimentation in an authentic setting, the PLC (Dewitt, 2019).

Collect Evidence to Understand and Evaluate the Impact

Organizations that utilized the efficacy cycle used observations to assess the impact of the new strategy. Data and feedback were collected to determine the effectiveness of the implemented changes (Dewitt, 2019).

Celebrate the Success or Refine the Goal

If initial strategies did not yield the desired results, team members were prompted to refine their ideas and try again (Dewitt, 2019). This approach acknowledged that progress was often nonlinear and required ongoing reflection and adjustment. By embracing this mindset, grade-level teams cultivated a culture of continuous improvement and learning.

The novice and veteran teachers taught third or fifth grade during the 2024-2025 school year. The group focused on supporting novice and veteran teachers with professional learning based on their perceived needs and building collective teacher efficacy through reflection and collaboration. The intervention was created and implemented by the action research design team, which included the assistant principal, instructional coach, lead mentor, teacher leader from the third and fifth grades, and the researcher.

The first round of interventions was created after the action research design team engaged in a book study by Jenni Donohoo, "Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning." The subsequent interventions were created after bi-weekly check-ins with the group.

The check-ins were used to determine the group's most significant needs at a given time. The novice and veteran teachers then implemented the intervention with some action research design team members utilizing the collective efficacy cycle.

The interventions included various professional learning activities developed to meet the emerging needs as they surfaced in the group. The activities included developing individual and collective efficacy among the team, goal setting utilizing student achievement data, planning an engaging lesson, scripting a lesson with questions that teachers can use to propel student thinking, and modeling a lesson focusing on giving students academic ownership. These interventions were designed to meet the needs of the grade-level teams as they arose in real-time teaching while providing a group setting of support. Each intervention was implemented within the professional learning community and was observed by the researcher, followed by a group debrief and reflection on implementation. The interventions for the study are provided in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Interventions of the Study

Collective Efficacy Framework	Intervention Activities	Target Groups	Frequency of Intervention
Co-Construct a Goal	Professional Learning Community	3rd and 5th Grade Teams	Monthly
Learn from Resources and Find New Strategies	Professional Learning: Collaboration	3rd and 5th Grade Teams	Monthly
Try the Strategy in a Practical Application	Professional Learning Community	3rd and 5th Grade Teams	Bi-Weekly
Collect Evidence to Understand and Evaluate the Impact	Observation Feedback Form	3rd and 5th Grade Teams	Bi-Weekly

Collective Efficacy Framework	Intervention Activities	Target Groups	Frequency of Intervention
Celebrate the Success or Refine the Goal	Professional Learning Community	3rd and 5th Grade Teams	Bi-Weekly

The study used qualitative research methods to collect and analyze the data. The analysis identified emerging themes, precise patterns, and detailed case descriptions.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis in qualitative methods began at the data collection stage and remained ongoing (Glanz, 2014). Merriam (2009) further emphasized the interconnectedness of collection and analysis, describing them as "recursive and dynamic" (p. 169). This perspective highlighted the flow of qualitative research, where the researcher constantly moved back and forth between collecting new data and interpreting existing ones, refining their understanding as they progressed through the study. In addition, Mertler (2017) advocated for a holistic view of qualitative data, recognizing the richness and uniqueness added by collection circumstances such as setting and participants. By acknowledging these factors, the researcher could make more informed decisions about analyzing and interpreting the findings.

Coding

In the present study, coding and categorization revealed emerging themes and patterns. Mertler (2017) characterizes this process as continual reflection and introspection. Reflection facilitates sense-making and interpretation, while introspection allows the researchers to adopt an open-minded perspective when examining the data. Both perspectives are needed to gain accurate insights.

Thematic Analysis

As the researcher progressed through coding, a transition to thematic analysis occurred, enabling a higher level of analytical examination. The researcher adhered to the phases of thematic analysis and established procedures for ensuring the validity and reliability of findings. Since the researcher serves as the primary instrument of analysis in qualitative research methods, utilizing a systematic approach to coding and theme identification is crucial to lessen researcher bias and enhance the study's trustworthiness. Adhering to the processes aligned with thematic analysis facilitates data triangulation, thereby strengthening the reliability and validity of the study's findings. This approach ensured that the analysis was thorough and that the conclusions were robust and valid.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Action research provides educators and researchers with a systematic qualitative approach to address common educational challenges. By engaging in the action research process, educators aim to enhance their effectiveness, ultimately increasing student learning outcomes. Educators initiate and conduct action research, empowering them to drive meaningful change within their professional practice (Gay et al., 2012, p. 508).

Guba (1981) established a framework for trustworthiness in qualitative research, relying on four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria ensure the integrity and reliability of research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified member-checking, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation, and thick description as a series of techniques to use when conducting qualitative research that aligns with the four trustworthiness criteria. Similarly, Wolcott (1994) identified the idea of

talking a little, listening a lot, and recording accurately as strategies for ensuring the validity of action research.

Triangulation involved employing multiple sources of information or methodologies within a given field to consistently confirm recognizable patterns (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). By combining different data sources, researchers can enhance their findings' validity and reliability, reducing the impact of biases or limitations associated with one approach. This study gathered and analyzed various data sources using suitable qualitative research approaches to guarantee trustworthiness and authenticity. The strategies used in the study included:

1. Prolonged engagement: Sufficient time in the field, spent observing various aspects of the setting, speaking with diverse individuals, and fostering relationships to grasp the culture, social setting, or phenomenon under study (Guba, 1981).
2. Member checking: The ARDT and ARIT established validity by analyzing data collected to account for the different perspectives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
3. Persistent observation: Depth gained from the observational notes of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
4. Triangulation: Data were collected from various sources, including focus groups, book studies, surveys, participant observations, artifacts, and research journal notes.

The triangulation of the research methods is presented in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7

Triangulation of Research Methods

Research Questions	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis	Approximate Timeline
RQ1 How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?	Book Study	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August-September 2024
	Focus Group	Researcher Reflection	August 2024
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	August-September 2024
	Participant Observations	Coding/Analysis of Themes	September-November 2024
RQ2 How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?	Focus Group	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August 2024
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	August-November 2024
	Reflective Interviews	Coding/Analysis of Themes	September-November 2024
	Document Analysis	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August-November 2024
RQ3 What is learned by the action research design and implementation teams as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?	Focus Group	Coding/Analysis of Themes	August-November 2024
	Perception Surveys	Coding/Analysis of Themes	September and November 2024
	Researcher Journal Notes	Researcher Reflection	August-November 2024

A thick description was provided to achieve external validity, allowing future researchers to determine the transferability across other contexts. This approach aligns with the recommendations of qualitative research methodologies outlined by Bloomberg and Volpe

(2019), emphasizing the importance of rich contextual details for enhancing the generalizability of findings.

Subjectivity Statement

At the time of the present study, the researcher was the principal in a school district designated as a Title 1 district. The researcher's background is in elementary education. The researcher has spent 20 years in education, beginning as a Pre-K teacher for 3 years and a third-grade teacher for 8 years. Following her classroom experience, the researcher worked a half-year as an instructional coach, 3.5 years as an assistant principal, and, at the time of the study, had completed 5 years as principal.

The researcher's focus was drawn to the requirements of novice teachers and the importance of self-efficacy in education, influenced by her firsthand experience as a novice teacher within the district. Collaboration and collective efficacy emerged as vital strategies a former school leader introduced early in the researcher's career. These early encounters significantly shaped her professional approach, motivating her to pursue avenues for supporting novice teachers in her current role as a school leader.

Limitations

This study's limitations stem from the qualitative research approach and the context in which it was conducted. The researcher's dual role as both a participant and observer introduced an element of researcher bias. With the roles intertwined, the research inevitably influenced the study's findings. The researcher's position of authority within the school further limits the findings. To mitigate these limitations, participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that participation did not impact their employment or evaluation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the data collection and analysis methods for this action research study. Action research was chosen for the present study because of its practical nature and focus on action and reflection. Various data collection methods, including interviews, observations, focus groups, and researcher reflections, were employed to capture the experiences of novice and veteran teachers participating in PLCs. The interviews primarily focused on understanding teachers' perceptions of collaborative planning and their sense of collective efficacy. Focus groups provided insights into the perspectives of instructional coaches and school leaders on supporting collaborative efforts within the PLCs. Researcher reflections offered ongoing analysis and insights throughout the study. The data were systematically coded and analyzed to identify themes and patterns related to developing collective efficacy within the PLCs. The next chapter presents the findings of this study at Summerhill Prep Academy, detailing how PLCs at the high-needs Title I elementary school impacted teacher collaboration and instructional strategies. The chapter also discusses the implications of collective efficacy on student achievement and overall school improvement.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CASE

The urgency of fostering collective efficacy within professional learning communities (PLCs) at Summerhill Prep Academy is emphasized by significant fluctuations in academic performance data over recent years. Between 2019 and 2023, SPA experienced a notable decline in ELA proficiency, which fell from 41% in 2019 to 24% in 2021, followed by a partial recovery to 31% in 2022 and a subsequent decline to 28% in 2023. Math proficiency showed the same inconsistency, decreasing from 40% in 2019 to 27% in 2021, recovering to 40% in 2022, and then declining again to 37% in 2023. The inconsistent trends suggest systemic issues impacting student achievement, necessitating deliberate efforts to establish effective instructional planning practices. Enhancing collective efficacy within PLCs is critical to stabilizing and improving academic outcomes through consistent, data-informed instructional strategies and collaborative problem-solving.

The challenge of addressing the performance gaps is emphasized by the current composition of the teaching staff at Summerhill Prep Academy, where 33% of teachers are in the induction phase with three or fewer years of experience. Supporting these early-career teachers while simultaneously leveraging the expertise of veteran staff requires the implementation of collaborative structures that strengthen their professional practices. The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of professional learning communities on the collaborative planning and instruction of teachers in Summerhill County School District. To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?

2. How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?
3. What do the action research design and implementation teams learn as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?

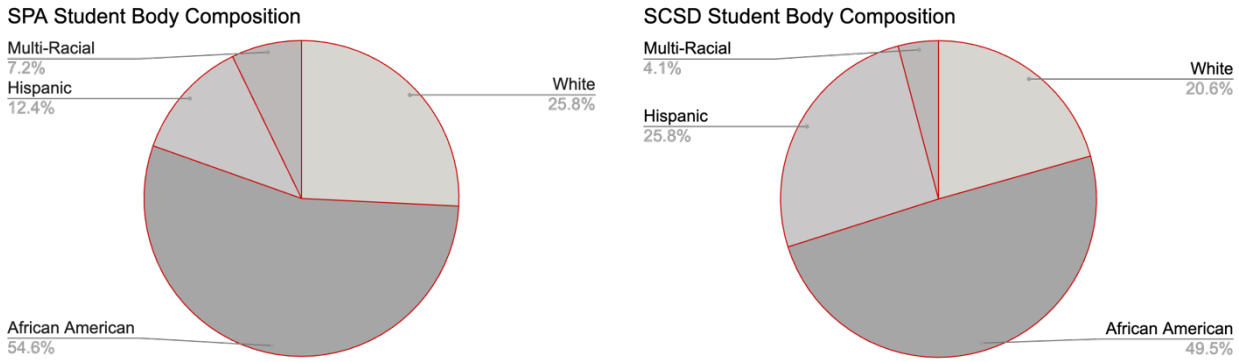
Chapter 4 explores the context of the study and the findings from this unique case. The context includes a description of the school, an overview of the academic needs, the impact of the diversity in the experience level of teachers, and the problem-framing in the context of Summerhill Prep Academy, the site of this action research dissertation. The findings from the case are presented in terms of the action research cycles and from the perspective of the action research design team. The findings are coupled with the participants' voices to present a complete case picture.

Context of the Study

Summerhill Prep Academy is a diverse elementary school located in the northeastern section of a southern state. The school is situated on the east side of the city, surrounded by a range of housing options including, public housing sites, college student housing, and single-family homes, contributing to the school's and community's diversity. Summerhill Prep Academy serves approximately 470 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten-5th grade. Approximately 48 teachers, 33%, are in the induction phase and have 3 years or less of teaching experience. The school's racial composition is similar to that of the school district, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Racial Composition of School



The 2024-2025 school year welcomed 10 new teachers to the school. Of the 10 new teachers, five were beginning their education careers, and three were on a provisional certification. This aligns with the school trend of having a third of the teaching staff in the induction phase yearly. Although all positions were filled for the school year, the three vacated Special Education positions were filled by provisionally certified teachers. Although hiring out-of-field teachers for the Special Education positions was not ideal, the school did not want the unfilled positions to impact the school significantly. The need to hire out-of-field matched the national trend of teacher shortages in special education, mathematics, and science. The intermediate grades (3-5) at Summerhill Prep Academy have been afflicted with much higher turnover rates than the rest. Only 3 of the 14 intermediate grade teachers taught at Summerhill Prep Academy 3 years ago, and only 3 of the teachers were at Summerhill Prep 5 years ago.

This study examined how school leaders can support the diverse needs of novice and veteran teachers in professional learning communities through the lens of collective efficacy while fostering consistency in instructional quality, strengthening accountability, and improving student achievement. The participants were allowed to join the study, and initial interviews were

conducted. The action research was designed as three cycles of interventions and reflections. The interventions were designed to meet the needs of the grade-level team as they arose in real-time planning.

Action Research Implementation Team

The study participants were selected based on the grade level they teach. The third and fifth-grade teams of Summerhill Prep Academy comprised mainly novice teachers during the 2024-2025 school year. The nine teachers had varied levels of experience and educational backgrounds, as shown in Table. 4.1. The teams met three times per week to plan lessons, analyze data, and collaboratively create assessments. School leaders established this collaborative planning protocol for all grade levels.

Table 4.1

Implementation Team Years of Experience

Team Member	Years of Experience	Type of Certification	Highest Degree
Dylan Bell	6	Regular	M.Ed.
Mattie Camp	1	Provisional	B.A.
Tiffany Miller	8	Regular	M.Ed.
Linda Monroe	32	Regular	M.Ed.
Adriana Newton	8	Regular	B.S.Ed.
Thomas Parker	7	Regular	M.Ed.
Skylar Stewart	1	Regular, student teaching shortened due to COVID-19	M.Ed.
Annie Washington	1	Masters, 5 years of Pre-K paraprofessional experience prior to teaching	M.Ed.
Alex Wilson	0	Provisional	B.A.

Mr. Bell served as a fifth-grade teacher, and all his experience occurred as a 4th and 5th-grade teacher at Summerhill Prep Academy. After switching careers, Ms. Camp started her teaching career in the 2023-2024 school year. Ms. Miller was the fifth-grade team leader and has been at SPA for the last 6 years. Mrs. Monroe returned to the Summerhill School District in 2023-2024 after moving out of state for 3 years. Mrs. Monroe's 32 years of teaching experience has been in second and third grades. Mrs. Newton has been at Summerhill Prep Academy since finishing her student teaching there in 2016. Mrs. Newton was hired to fill the vacancy of her mentor teacher, and after that, the teacher was promoted to instructional coach. Mr. Parker has been a part of the SPA staff for 2 of his 7 years of teaching. Ms. Stewart and Ms. Washington started their teaching careers at Summerhill Prep Academy. Before the 2023-2024 school year, Ms. Washington served as a paraprofessional at the district's Early Learning Center while finishing a teacher preparation program to earn her bachelor's degree in education. Ms. Washington finished a Master's in Education program during her first year of teaching. After completing his college career as a football player in a neighboring state, Mr. Wilson returned to his hometown to pursue a career in special education. Mr. Wilson was the co-teacher in Mr. Bell's fifth-grade class for the 2024-2025 school year at SPA.

Action Research Design Team

The Action Research Design Team (ARDT) helped guide the study and designed the interventions based on participant feedback. The ARDT met weekly to discuss the research cycles and interventions and also met with participants during their collaborative planning sessions. The team's composition is outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Action Research Design Team Members

Team Member	Primary Role at Summerhill Prep Academy	Years of Experience
Primary Researcher	Principal	19 years; 11 years of classroom experience
Mrs. Stephanie Lewis	Assistant Principal Summerhill Prep Academy	23 years; 15 years of classroom experience
Mrs. Linda Dawson	2nd-5th Grade Instructional Coach, Lead Mentor	18 years of classroom experience, 4 years as Instructional Coach
Mrs. Cassidy Hill	MTSS Specialist, K-1st Instructional Coach	15 years of classroom experience, 4 years as MTSS Specialist/Instructional Coach
Ms. Adriana Newton	3rd Grade/Gifted Team	8 years; 4 years as team leader
Ms. Tiffany Miller	5th Grade Team Leader	8 years; 4 years as team leader

Findings from the Case

This action research case study was designed to examine how school leaders can support the diverse needs of novice and veteran teachers in professional learning communities through the lens of collective efficacy while fostering consistency in instructional quality, strengthening accountability, and improving student achievement. The teachers were allowed to opt into the study, and initial interviews were conducted along with administering the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy* scale. Based on the data gathered from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale, the ARDT determined the area of focus needed as a foundation to strengthen the collective efficacy of the teams. The ARDT then met with collaborative planning teams bi-weekly, and as new challenges surfaced, the teams planned and implemented interventions. The teams met with the ARDT to debrief and reflect after each implementation. The primary researcher interviewed the

teams halfway through the study and then again at the end. The ARDT participated in a focus group to wrap up the study.

The data capture the journey of the third—and fifth-grade teams as they navigated their way through the first half of the 2024-2025 school year. Both teams started this school year with new team members and roles. The study revealed several key findings. Developing and refining advanced teaching strategies increased assets-oriented, overall efficiency of the PLCs, and trust among team members emerged as essential factors for both teams. The subsequent sections will explore the action research cycles and expand on these findings.

Action Research Cycle 1

Action Research Cycle 1 began a few weeks into the school year in late August 2024. The cycle lasted approximately five weeks and concluded at the end of September. The cycle began with a book study on *"Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning"* by Jenni Donohoo. Members of the ARDT engaged in discussions to deepen their understanding of collective efficacy. The implementation team completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale survey to assess individual teacher efficacy. The survey provided quantitative data to measure teachers' beliefs in their abilities to impact student learning. The grade-level teams met twice weekly to analyze data and plan lessons for the upcoming week. The ARDT met with the teams bi-weekly to observe and probe common planning challenges.

During the initial meeting, the ARDT discussed the current state of professional learning communities across the school. Mrs. Newton stated, "Our collaborative time is not being used to its maximum potential…it is important time that is needed and necessary, and what's done during that time needs to be done right." Mrs. Dawson noted that in the past, "When we've had effective PLCs, the teachers walk out of there feeling more confident to implement what it is that

they've met about, so knowing how to do that or finding a way to do that regularly would be helpful." Mrs. Hill suggested a reason for the shift, stating, "I've observed that although there is a protocol to follow, teachers do not understand purposeful collaboration and collective responsibility." Field notes indicate the ARDT was able to dig deeper into this notion of purposeful collaboration and collective responsibility and decided that the first step to addressing these issues would be to provide professional learning about collective efficacy to the teams.

Intervention for Action Research Cycle 1

The robust discussion about collective efficacy within PLCs led to a significant need for the grade-level teams. The teams were analyzing data from their first unit assessments in ELA and math and needed to make decisions regarding the next steps for students based on their performance on the assessments. During the ARDT's observations of the PLCs during the first unit, the team noticed a lack of contributions from all grade-level team members. The ARDT thought this was the opportune time to deliver the collective efficacy of professional learning.

The ARDT met to design a presentation about collective efficacy based on information they gained from "*Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning"* by Jenni Donohoo and information that the primary researcher gathered from "*Collaborating Through Collective Efficacy Cycles"* by Toni Faddis, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey. The professional learning was delivered during the grade-level teams' extended planning day. During the professional learning, the ARDT shared Hattie's (2018) Barometer of Influence, focusing on the effect size of collective efficacy compared to other teacher practices. Field notes indicate that the professional learning session evoked a rich discussion about collective efficacy as the story of the geese flight was shared compared to the dynamics of collaborative planning. At the end of

the session, the participants were asked to reflect on their sense of efficacy and complete the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale*.

The primary researcher gathered notes during the professional learning sessions. Observational notes indicate that members of the third-grade team were more vocal than those of the fifth-grade team. For example, third-grade teachers responded to what was being presented without being prompted with guiding questions. In contrast, the fifth-grade team remained more reserved and required specific prompts for discussion. Third-grade teachers made connections between the content of the professional learning and their current grade-level practices and openly shared examples and insights. In contrast, fifth-grade teachers focused more on listening and taking notes, with fewer contributions to the group dialogue. Following the professional learning session, the ARDT team gathered and used notes from the session and survey results to develop the collective area of focus for the grade-level teams.

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* (TSES) survey was administered during the first cycle of the study. The survey provided quantitative data that measured teachers' beliefs in their abilities to impact student learning across three areas: student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The participants rated themselves using a 10-point Likert scale. The data gathered from the TSES identified areas of strength and need across the implementation team.

The primary researcher gathered the data and based findings on the average participant scores for each area. Efficacy in Student Engagement had an overall range of 4.75 to 8.5. In contrast, Efficacy in Instructional Strategies ranged from 5.5 to 8.75, and Efficacy in Classroom Management had an overall range of 6 to 9. The overall efficacy averages suggested that while

most teachers felt confident in their instructional strategies, a targeted focus on student engagement would benefit those who rated themselves low.

The ARDT's more in-depth analysis of the questions related to instructional strategies revealed the need for personalized, targeted coaching on effective methods for two participants who showed the lowest confidence in instructional strategies. Further analysis of this area indicated a moderate level of comfort for most participants, which prompted the ARDT to consider strengthening advanced teaching strategies as a collective in hopes of lifting those struggling and refining the practices of the stronger participants.

Initial Interviews

Initial interviews were also conducted with the grade-level teams during the first cycle. The interviews offered insights into the perceived effectiveness of collaborative planning, the teachers' sense of collective efficacy, and the support and resources needed. The interviews also provided the teachers with the opportunity to provide additional insight regarding their personal needs and struggles, which aligned with their ratings on the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* survey.

The interviews were conducted in early September 2024, after the initial tasks and challenges of the beginning of the year had been resolved. Ms. Washington was the most expressive during the interviews. Ms. Washington shared, "The lack of experience and confidence keeps my team members from speaking out, which causes those with experience to take the lead and eventually leads to burnout." She felt her team would be in a much better place collaboratively if everyone "pulled their weight." Ms. Miller shared expressions similar to Ms. Washington's, noting, "We come from various places with different experiences, and sometimes it makes it hard for us to come together and for everyone to contribute as they should." As the

fifth-grade team leader, Ms. Washington recognized how crucial it is for members to have a strong sense of psychological safety. Hence, they feel comfortable contributing to the planning sessions.

Action Research Cycle 2

The second action research cycle began at the beginning of October 2024. The cycle lasted 4 weeks and was completed by the end of October. The data from the survey and notes in cycle one confirmed that both teams would benefit from going through the stages of the collective efficacy cycle while homing in on strengthening procedural factors within their PLCs. While the teachers noticed strengths in being successful as a team and supporting each other to maintain a positive outlook, the data collection revealed that the third-grade team would benefit from working on internalizing lessons as a collective. In contrast, fifth grade would benefit from contributions from all team members.

Intervention for Cycle 2

The ARDT met to share notes from PLC observations and determine the best action to address the identified need. The team decided that both the third—and fifth-grade teams would benefit from professional learning centered around purposeful collaboration. Mrs. Newton shared that the need could stem from the diverse experience levels of both teams.

Mrs. Hill led the professional learning with the third and fifth-grade teams. She stopped throughout the session and guided the teams to reflect on the effectiveness of their collaborative practices through the lens of the five principles of deliberate practice outlined by Faddis et al. (2023). Mrs. Hill emphasized the importance of planning, pushing beyond their comfort zones, working toward specific goals, focusing on practice activities, receiving feedback, and developing a model of expertise within the teams' collaboration. For example, during a

discussion about team plans, Mrs. Hill asked teachers to consider how their collaborative efforts reflect deliberate practice that entails continuous thinking, analyzing, and responding. She gave each person a reflective questionnaire and asked them to rate their most recent PLC in mastery, trust, problem-solving, efficiency, and optimism. The third and fifth-grade teams actively engaged in the process.

Midway through the session, Mrs. Hill guided each team to begin the collective efficacy cycle process. The third-grade team identified a shared challenge: their students struggled to complete writing tasks at a high level. Drawing on her expertise, Mrs. Newton led the team through the second step of the cycle by modeling strategies for teaching the effective use of graphic organizers and guiding students through the writing stages within appropriate time frames.

Similarly, the fifth-grade team pinpointed their common challenge as students rushing through math problems without demonstrating careful reasoning. To address this, Mrs. Dawson introduced and modeled the “My Favorite No” strategy, helping the team explore ways to use student mistakes as opportunities for deeper understanding. Both teams engaged actively in the process, reflecting on these targeted strategies to address their students' needs.

To provide additional context to the importance of deliberate practice, Mrs. Hill shared the quote “good is the enemy of great” from the leadership guru, Jim Collins. She asked the teams to reflect on this quote and provide their thoughts. Field notes indicate that Ms. Stewart shared that being good enough “creates an idea of complacency,” which prevents you from pushing yourself to improve. Mr. Wilson shared an idea, noting, “Just like we would not want a mechanic to fix our cars just ‘good enough’ because of fear of having to return, we should not

want to just give a good enough effort to our teaching for fear of giving students the education that they deserve."

As the session progressed, it became clear to members of the teams that embedding the principles of deliberate practice into their collaboration would not only strengthen their teaching practices but also enhance the learning experiences they create for their students. Ms. Washington was immediately satisfied with the process. She exclaimed during the session, "This is what we've been missing." Noting the effort that all team members were putting into the planning session.

Mid-Study Focus Group Interviews

The mid-study interviews came at the end of the second research cycle. Field notes indicate that the ratings provided by the teams in response to the reflective questions during the professional learning sessions served as a foundation for our focus group discussions. Teams felt relatively successful in their collaborative efforts. During her interview, Mrs. M noted, "We're doing okay as a team, but there's definitely room to grow." Mr. Perry added, "Sometimes, I feel like we make progress, but it's not always consistent."

An entry in the researcher's journal recognized that work needed to be done on team cohesion and decision-making. One participant shared, "I feel that a lot of our meetings feel wasted because of talk that does not have anything to do with what we are planning." Another added, "The team works and talks through things but often has difficulty reaching a common decision." The frequent movement of staff members compounded these challenges. As one educator reflected, "Every team at Summerhill Prep Academy is new in a sense, even if you have veteran teachers because of the movement of staff members. This makes the collective effort even more important."

Action Research Cycle 3

The last action research cycle began in November 2024 and lasted five weeks, concluding by the end of December 2024. During this time, data was collected from PLC observations and mid-study interview notes, which provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of the collaborative process. While both teams identified areas of success, they also recognized opportunities for further improvement. One key takeaway from this cycle was enhancing efficiency within PLC meetings. Specifically, both teams agreed that improving agendas and protocols would strengthen collaboration and maximize the productivity of their meetings. As a result, the intervention for Cycle 3 was designed to focus on efficiency, ensuring that teams adhered to structured agendas and maintained clear protocols to streamline discussions and decision-making.

During the PLC observations, the primary researcher interviewed third- and fifth-grade PLC teams to examine how they engaged in collaborative planning and reflection. These observations made it evident that while teachers were committed to the process, inconsistencies in agenda usage, meeting structures, and role clarity sometimes hindered progress. Some teachers noted that meetings occasionally strayed off-topic, leading to inefficiencies in time management. Others emphasized the importance of clear leadership and shared accountability in ensuring that each meeting remained goal-oriented and productive. These findings underscored the significance of structured collaboration, reinforcing the need for clearly defined roles, expectations, and adherence to agreed-upon protocols to enhance team effectiveness.

The TSES results provided insight into how this intervention impacted teacher confidence and instructional effectiveness. Post-survey data revealed that teachers who engaged in more structured and efficient PLC meetings reported increased confidence in their ability to

implement instructional strategies, engage students, and manage classroom dynamics. Many teachers also expressed that having a clear framework for collaboration improved the quality of their planning discussions and allowed them to apply new strategies in the classroom better. The data suggests that efficiency in collaboration directly contributes to higher teacher efficacy, reinforcing the idea that well-organized professional learning communities foster continuous improvement and instructional growth.

By the end of this research cycle, the findings emphasized that efficiency is a critical factor in the success of PLCs. Establishing clear meeting agendas, ensuring all team members are adequately prepared, and maintaining structured meeting protocols resulted in more focused and productive collaborative discussions. The combination of qualitative reflections from PLC observations and quantitative insights from the TSES survey demonstrated that enhancing efficiency within professional learning communities leads to stronger teacher confidence, more effective instructional planning, and improved student outcomes. As the teams progress, sustaining these structured collaborative practices will be essential in maintaining long-term instructional improvement and team cohesion.

Action Research Design Team

The Action Research Design Team played an essential role in this study. The ARDT convened to debrief after each meeting and observation of the grade-level teams. The ARDT analyzed data and carefully considered teachers' challenges to find strategies that would aid the teams. The ARDT collaboratively planned targeted interventions and led their implementation.

Individual Roles

In her eighth year as a teacher at Summerhill Prep Academy, Mrs. Newton brought valuable expertise to the ARDT. Mrs. Newton was the third-grade team leader two years before

the 2024-2025 school year. Her unique position allowed her to contribute her understanding of team dynamics and instructional strategies to the ARDT. Transcripts revealed that Mrs. Newton would hold back in grade-level meetings to avoid overshadowing the current team leader, showing her intentional effort to support collaborative decision-making. Mrs. Newton's interpretation of the needs of the third-grade team was instrumental to the study.

Ms. Miller served as the team leader of the fifth-grade team. Her role positioned her uniquely on the ARDT due to her dual perspective as both the current team leader of the fifth-grade team and a former third-grade teacher. Her experience allowed her to provide a comprehensive understanding of team dynamics while meeting the needs of students in lower and upper elementary. As the fifth-grade team leader, Ms. Miller provided valuable insights into her team's current needs and challenges. Her previous third-grade experience informed her ability to bridge strategies between grade levels. Ms. Miller's blend of perspectives contributed to the comprehensive approach of the ARDT interventions.

With 18 years of classroom teaching experience and four years as an instructional coach, Mrs. Dawson brought a wealth of expertise to the work of the ARDT. Her extensive background in education contributed to the team's ability to address the challenges faced by the grade-level teams. Collaborating closely with the researcher and Mrs. Hill, the other instructional coach, Mrs. Dawson, provided consistent and intentional support to the grade-level teams. Her role was critical in addressing the needs of novice teachers, who often voiced their challenges during meetings. Field notes revealed that these teachers frequently expressed gratitude for her guidance and mentorship.

Mrs. Dawson actively observed team meetings, leveraging her experience to offer an inclusive perspective on the challenges and the effectiveness of implemented interventions. Her

accessibility to the teams and the researcher allowed her to provide real-time feedback throughout the study. Mrs. Dawson was pivotal in delivering individualized support to participants requiring additional assistance. Her contributions exemplified the importance of experienced instructional leadership in fostering the development of novice educators and strengthening team dynamics.

Mrs. Hill's vast experience was critical to the ARDT. Her expertise spanned general and special education, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and instructional coaching, enabling her to bring a multifaceted perspective to the ARDT. Mrs. Hill offered insights uniquely tailored to the needs of both general and special education. Mrs. Hill worked closely with Mrs. Dawson to provide guidance and best practices aligned with the collective efficacy cycles, specifically supporting teachers outside general education roles. Mrs. Hill consistently grounded the ARDT in evidence-based practices that prioritized the efficacy of novice teachers.

With 23 years of experience, the most among the ARDT members, Mrs. Lewis brought a wealth of knowledge to the team’s work. Though often subtle, her contributions were impactful in ensuring that the ARDT maintained a balanced perspective, carefully considering the unique needs and limitations of novice and veteran teachers. Mrs. Lewis played a pivotal role in helping veteran teachers on the grade-level teams recognize and leverage their expertise to enhance their teams' collective efficacy.

As Assistant Principal, Mrs. Lewis provided valuable instructional leadership to the ARDT. However, due to the demands of her role and the need to address emergent school-wide issues, she was unable to participate in all sessions throughout the study's duration. Despite these challenges, her input was instrumental in shaping the ARDT’s strategies.

Focus Group

After the study, the ARDT participated in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to reflect on their work with supporting grade-level teams and enhancing collective efficacy through professional learning communities. By the end of the session, the group hoped to gain an overall understanding of the work by evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions, identifying the obstacles and success of the implemented strategies, and discussing implications for future initiatives. The focus group provided a final opportunity to evaluate the process and assess the outcomes of their efforts. The interview questions for the focus group can be found in Appendix B.

The ARDT members emphasized the significance of providing tailored support to grade-level teams to enhance collective efficacy and instructional practices. Mrs. Dawson stressed the importance of real-time feedback and customized interventions, particularly for teams needing additional guidance to implement effective strategies. Mrs. Hill advocated for targeted support, especially for teams with limited experience in collaborative planning, highlighting the need for differentiated approaches to address diverse needs. Mrs. Lewis emphasized balancing the perspectives of novice and veteran teachers. Mrs. Newton reflected on the challenge of contributing meaningfully during meetings while respecting the leadership roles of current team leaders.

The ARDT discussed obstacles to implementation. Time was identified as the most significant barrier. Effective collaboration requires time for meaningful engagement, including opportunities for planning, observation, reflection, and feedback. Although the grade-level teams had protected collaborative planning time, the competing demands of daily instructional responsibilities and other professional obligations sometimes limited uninterrupted time for

grade-level teams to engage in these critical processes. The ARDT members highlighted the need for ongoing, structured opportunities to revisit and refine strategies. The limited availability of time for engaging in reflective discussions cut opportunities for shared learning and mutual support. Despite this barrier, the ARDT recognized the potential for future improvement, with Mrs. Dawson identifying the necessity for school leaders to not only provide protected planning periods but also to create additional, consistent time within the school calendar to support the continuous professional growth and collaboration required to strengthen collective efficacy in PLCs.

Trust among team members was identified as a critical barrier to fostering collective efficacy within grade-level teams. Without trust, teams were less likely to engage in honest dialogue. The lack of trust manifested in surface-level discussions during PLCs, where deeper issues went unaddressed due to fear of judgment. The ARDT emphasized that building trust required intentional effort through open communication and support.

The ARDT also identified the lack of well-defined PLC structures as a barrier. The lack of defined norms and agendas led to unstructured discussions that did not address the instructional needs. ARDT members shared how they observed that the teams struggled to set actionable goals, which limited their ability to reflect on and refine their practices effectively. The team praised the structure of the interventions provided through the lens of the collective efficacy cycles. They noted that strategically addressing grade-level collaborative challenges and working together to develop solutions helped keep the discussion grounded in best teaching practices and forward momentum. Mrs. Newton suggested that the success of the PLCs in this study stemmed from the teams' openness to collaboration and willingness to try new strategies. Mrs. Hill reiterated this sentiment, noting that teams with a shared commitment to growth tend to

be more flexible and receptive to innovation. Mrs. Dawson emphasized that each team member's contributions were valued, which created an environment of mutual respect and trust essential for fostering collaboration. The intentional focus on instructional practices emerged as a critical element of the PLCs' success, enabling grade-level teams to strengthen their collective efficacy and achieve meaningful professional growth.

Overall, the ARDT believed that time, trust, and well-defined structures within PLCs are essential to effectively support grade-level teams in collective efficacy and refining instructional strategies. Time allows teams to engage in meaningful collaboration, conduct deep discussions about instructional practices, and participate in cycles of reflection and improvement. Trust fosters an open environment where team members feel valued and are encouraged to share ideas, seek feedback, and embrace challenges without fear of judgment. Clear and intentional structures within PLCs, such as established norms and focused agendas, provide the necessary framework for productive collaboration. Mrs. Hill suggested that schools follow a collaborative planning model rooted in "utilizing the collective efficacy cycle to strengthen the collective need and focus of teams." This model would allow teams to have well-defined structures, build trust, and ultimately lead to productive collaboration to best meet the instructional needs of students.

Chapter Summary

The study sought to address the collaborative needs of the third and fifth-grade teams. The grade-level teams met three times each week to analyze data and plan lessons for the upcoming week. Each of the three research cycles was centered around challenges from the grade-level teams. The ARDT designed interventions to address these challenges specifically.

The findings reported in this chapter were derived from multiple data sources, including the Teacher Collective Efficacy Scale survey results, PLC observations, interviews with the

grade-level teams, and focus group meetings with the ARDT. Field notes and entries from the researcher's journal validated the other data forms. In line with the action research model, each cycle concluded with a debrief and reflection session. The data were analyzed and coded, identifying emerging themes. The next chapter discusses the thematic findings in relation to the study's purpose, research questions, logic model, and theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE ACTION RESEARCH CHASE

This study aimed to analyze the impact of professional learning communities on the collaborative planning and instruction of teachers in an elementary school in a southern state as they worked to strengthen their collective efficacy through targeted support. To address the purpose of this action research study, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?
3. What do the action research design and implementation teams learn as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?

This chapter outlines the themes from the data collection and findings across the action research cycles. The analysis of the themes is connected to the study's purpose, research questions, logic model, and theoretical framework. Chapter 4 also describes the action research cycles and the data collected. The data was collected during the first half of the 2024-2025 school year at Summerhill Prep Academy. The action research study engaged school leaders in supporting two grade-level teams to enhance collaborative planning and instruction while building collective efficacy. Data were collected through observational notes, interviews, surveys, focus groups, artifacts, and the researcher’s journal throughout three action research cycles.

The theoretical framework of the study was based on the social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory emphasizes the reciprocal interactions of personal, behavioral, and

environmental factors, which aligns with the work of fostering confidence among grade-level teams that their collective efforts can positively impact student outcomes and instructional quality. This theory led to the development of a logical model to guide the study. The design team provided interventions via professional learning, observations, and reflections. The grade-level teams strengthened their collective efficacy and instructional planning, guided by active leader engagement through action research cycles.

The findings from Chapter 4 were analyzed through systematic coding of the collected data. The coding was tallied and analyzed. Distinct themes emerged from the data, corresponding to each research question. A summary of the themes connected to the research questions is shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Summary of Themes Connected to Research Questions

Research Questions	Themes
1. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?	Theme 1: Collaborative Norms are Key
2. How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?	Theme 2: Collaborative Planning Influences Instructional Strategies Theme 3: Increased Confidence Boosts Efficacy
3. What is learned by the action research design and implementation teams as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?	Theme 4: Repetitive Learning & Adaptation Enhances Instructional Practice

Data Analysis

When conducting the thematic analysis for the interviews and the focus group, the researcher followed six steps as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The first step included the researcher becoming familiar with the dataset. When becoming familiar with the dataset, the researcher read each interview and focus group transcript multiple times, highlighting any information that stood out to her. Then, the researcher began the second step of the analysis: identifying initial codes. When identifying initial codes, the researcher reviewed each transcript and highlighted commonly used words, phrases, and ideas. Table 5.2 below highlights the initial codes.

Table 5.2

Initial Codes- Semi-Structured Interviews

Initial Code	Occurrences
adaptation	5
adapting to needs	7
adjustments	3
alignment	1
building relationships	2
classroom application	2
collaboration	17
collective efficacy	4
common goal	8
confidence	1
continuous improvement	8
contribution	1
data-driven	10
deliberate practice	2
empowerment	1
encouragement	1
engagement	4
equity	7
facilitation	2
feedback	12

Initial Code	Occurrences
feedback loops	8
goal setting	4
growth mindset	4
implementation	1
instructional strategies	4
iteration	1
leadership	2
lesson design	9
lesson rehearsal	2
monitoring progress	10
mutual respect	9
ongoing learning	5
ownership	7
partnership	9
planning	18
problem-solving	10
purposeful collaboration	2
refinement	6
reflection	2
reinforcement	3
repetitive practice	9
restructuring	8
risk-taking	4
scaffolding	10
self-efficacy	8
self-reflection	6
shared decision-making	9
skill-building	5
strategic alignment	9
strengthening practice	10
structures	5
support	23
taking initiative	9
teacher agency	3
teamwork	9
trial and error	5
trust	16
validation	2
voice	9

As highlighted in Table 5.2, 59 unique codes were identified in the transcripts. After identifying initial codes, the researcher then began grouping them into initial categories, as identified in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3.

Initial Categories

Theme	Keywords
The Essential Role of Teamwork, Trust, and Shared Practices in Effective Learning and Instruction	Collective efficacy, Trust, Structures, Shared decision-making, Teamwork, Collaboration, Support, Contribution, Engagement, Equity, Voice, Partnership, Mutual respect, Building relationships, Purposeful collaboration, Common goal, Alignment
Structured Teamwork Enhances Teaching Practices, Curriculum Design, and Student Learning Outcomes	Planning, Instructional strategies, Lesson rehearsal, Feedback, Implementation, Refinement, Lesson design, Data-driven, Reflection, Adapting to needs, Facilitation, Goal setting, Classroom application, Strategic alignment, Problem-solving
Strengthening Educator Self-Assurance Enhances Teaching Effectiveness, Student Engagement, and Collaborative Success	Confidence, Self-efficacy, Leadership, Empowerment, Taking initiative, Risk-taking, Self-reflection, Teacher agency, Ownership, Growth mindset, Validation, Encouragement, Strengthening practice, Skill-building
Continuous Practice and Flexible Adjustments Strengthen Instructional Strategies and Student Achievement	Repetitive practice, Deliberate practice, Continuous improvement, Iteration, Refinement, Adjustments, Feedback loops, Ongoing learning, Reinforcement, Trial and error, Scaffolding, Adaptation, Monitoring progress, Restructuring

In the fourth and fifth steps, the researcher then aligned the themes to the research questions while also defining each theme. Table 5.4 highlights this process.

Table 5.4

Naming and Defining Final Themes

Initial Theme	Adjusted and Aligned Theme	Theme Definition
The Essential Role of Teamwork, Trust, and Shared Practices in Effective Learning and Instruction	Collaborative Norms are Key	Collaborative norms establish a foundation of trust, shared decision-making, and teamwork, fostering a culture of collective growth and efficacy.
Structured Teamwork Enhances Teaching Practices, Curriculum Design, and Student Learning Outcomes	Collaborative Planning Influences Instructional Strategies	Collaborative planning helps educators refine instructional strategies, ensuring lessons are data-driven, well-structured, and effectively implemented to maximize student learning.
Strengthening Educator Self-Assurance Enhances Teaching Effectiveness, Student Engagement, and Collaborative Success	Increased Confidence Boosts Efficacy	When educators gain confidence, they develop stronger instructional methods, actively engage students, and collaborate more effectively, leading to enhanced teaching outcomes.
Continuous Practice and Flexible Adjustments Strengthen Instructional Strategies and Student Achievement	Repetitive Learning & Adaptation Enhances Instructional Practices	Repetitive learning and ongoing adaptation allow educators to refine their approaches through feedback, reflection, and iterative improvement to enhance student success.

Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy

This analysis examines changes in teachers' sense of efficacy before and after an intervention and their reflective self-assessments on collaboration, problem-solving, and team efficiency. To assess these areas, participants completed a structured survey measuring their

confidence in key instructional domains, including student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The survey was conducted in two phases: a pre-intervention survey, which established baseline efficacy levels, and a post-intervention survey, which captured any shifts in confidence and effectiveness following the intervention. In addition to quantitative measures, participants provided qualitative reflections on their experiences with teamwork, problem-solving, trust, and the overall efficiency of collaborative planning. The results offer valuable insights into how collaborative norms, structured planning, and professional development impact instructional effectiveness, highlighting strengths and opportunities for continued growth.

Efficacy Change Analysis

Table 5.5 below presents the average efficacy scores in three key areas: (a) Student Engagement, (b) Instructional Strategies, and (c) Classroom Management. Scores were collected before (pre) and after (post) an intervention, with the calculated difference (average change) showing the intervention's impact.

Table 5.5

Efficacy Change Analysis- Pre- and Post- Intervention

Category	Pre Avg	Post Avg
Q2	6.88	7.45
Q3	7.93	8.11
Q4	7.14	7.56
Q11	6.64	6.78
AVERAGE	7.14	7.47
Q5	7.23	7.56
Q9	7.07	7.67
Q10	8.07	7.78
Q12	7.21	7.33
AVERAGE	7.39	7.58
Q1	6.88	7.76
Q6	7.43	7.33

Category	Pre Avg	Post Avg
Q7	6.57	7.33
Q8	7.71	7.89
AVERAGE	7.14	7.58

Overall, there was a positive change in efficacy across the three categories, indicating that the intervention had a measurable impact on teachers' instructional effectiveness.

Reflective Scores Analysis

In the intervention, participants provided qualitative ratings on their experiences in collaborative teamwork. Table 5.6 below presents average scores in key areas such as trust, problem-solving, efficiency, and emotional tone.

Table 5.6

Reflective Score Analysis

Reflective Dimension	Avg Score
Mastery Experiences: In what ways was our team successful?	3.00
Trust: Was there a sense of trust among the team while determining the common challenge?	3.78
Problem Solving; In what ways did we work together to solve grade level problems?	3.22
Assets-Orientation: When faced with a problem, did we build upon students' strengths, interests, and background knowledge?	2.56
Efficiency: Did we adhere to agreed-upon protocols and use our time well?	3.00
Optimism: What was the general tenor/emotional tone of our meetings?	2.89

The highest-rated dimension was trust among team members (3.78), while asset-oriented problem-solving received a slightly lower score (2.56), suggesting room for improvement in leveraging student strengths in discussions.

Summary

The results highlight the positive impact of structured collaboration and instructional planning on teachers' efficacy. However, further improvements can be made in promoting an asset-based approach to student challenges. Future professional development efforts should continue focusing on building trust, refining instructional strategies, and reinforcing the effectiveness of collaborative planning.

Triangulation of Data Sources

To strengthen the validity of the findings, the analysis triangulates the emergent themes with the survey responses from the pre-survey, post-survey, and reflective self-assessments. This alignment provides a holistic understanding of how collaborative practices influence teacher efficacy, ensuring that qualitative and quantitative data support the identified patterns. The four themes—Collaborative Norms are Key, Collaborative Planning Influences Instructional Strategies, Increased Confidence Boosts Efficacy, and Repetitive Learning & Adaptation Enhances Instructional Practice—are directly reflected in the structured survey domains: Student Engagement, Instructional Strategies, and Classroom Management.

The reflective self-assessment responses strongly support the theme that collaborative norms are key, particularly regarding trust, problem-solving, and efficiency. Teachers who rated their teams highly in trust and collaborative decision-making also exhibited higher post-survey scores in student engagement and instructional strategies. This suggests that establishing strong collaborative norms contributes to greater confidence in instructional effectiveness. Similarly,

the theme of Collaborative Planning Influences Instructional Strategies is evident in the post-survey increases in instructional efficacy. Teachers who engaged in structured teamwork and lesson planning reported improved ability to design and implement effective strategies, a trend supported by both the post-survey responses and reflections on the collaborative process.

The survey data reinforce the theme Increased Confidence Boosts Efficacy, as post-survey scores indicate measurable growth in teacher confidence across all three domains. The qualitative reflections further support this trend, with teachers noting that collaboration and shared problem-solving contributed to their willingness to take instructional risks and refine their approaches. Lastly, Repetitive Learning & Adaptation Enhance Instructional Practice is evident in the cyclical nature of efficacy development, as participants reported ongoing refinements to their teaching strategies in response to collaborative discussions. This theme aligns with post-survey increases in instructional efficacy and classroom management, demonstrating that repeated engagement with collaborative practices fosters a more adaptive and effective teaching approach. The analysis provides a well-rounded perspective on how collaboration influences teacher efficacy by triangulating these themes with the quantitative survey results. The convergence of findings across multiple data sources strengthens the conclusion that structured teamwork, reflective practice, and repeated engagement with instructional planning significantly impact teachers' confidence and effectiveness in the classroom. In essence, improving PLCs and instructional practices naturally involves collaborative learning and professional growth processes, which effortlessly align with the stages of the collective efficacy cycle. The next section of this chapter includes an analysis of each thematic finding aligned with this study's research questions.

Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question clarified the study's purpose. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers? The data show that the current landscape of the teaching staff needed support with building collective efficacy and planning instruction through professional learning communities. Leaders establishing planning structures emerged as the key theme for this research question.

Theme 1: Collaborative Norms are Key

The grade-level teams were asked to provide an honest assessment of their professional learning communities (PLCs), and many responses highlighted the critical role that collaboration and shared understanding play in establishing effective teamwork. Ms. Washington noted, "Although we have a structure in place, there's not enough understanding from all team members regarding how to execute this." While acknowledging the existence of a structure, she expressed concern that the lack of clarity hindered the team's ability to utilize their collaborative time fully. Another participant reinforced this idea, stating, "We talked about a few months ago about this whole idea of collective efficacy and coming together around a common cause and making sure that we all have this belief in students and our practices with helping our students to get there." This reflection underscores the need for intentional efforts to establish shared norms and ensure all team members are aligned in their understanding of the PLC process.

One key factor that aligns with collaborative norms is the need for leaders to establish an expectation for teams to define roles and responsibilities clearly. Ms. Miller reflected on the importance of maximizing the contributions of staff supporting the team, stating, "We have all these people come and support our team; then we have to maximize the use of that." Her

comment supported the notion that there was a gap between the resources available and how effectively they were utilized. Similarly, Mrs. Hill expressed frustration about inefficiencies in how personnel were being used: "…That's a waste of a resource. That's a waste of a person. That's a waste of money." Another teacher added to this conversation, explaining, "If we're not using our personnel resources wisely, then they're going to take that away from us. Hence the loss of a fifth grade, and we're at three." This sentiment highlights the long-term consequences of underutilizing available staff and emphasizes the need for clearer expectations regarding their roles within collaborative structures.

Another key factor discussed was the importance of preparation, particularly in bringing necessary materials to PLC meetings. Mr. Bell emphasized, "Making sure that all team members bring items to the meeting." This expectation is vital for effective collaboration, ensuring discussions are grounded in relevant resources and data. Mrs. Dawson echoed this idea by pointing out inconsistencies in how materials were accessed during meetings: "I did not see anyone with their math, like a teacher copy of their math book, but they were all using their device to go to their resource to look at it that way." This observation reveals that a uniform approach to resource access may help streamline discussions and avoid unnecessary delays. Another participant elaborated on this concern: "We have to be real with ourselves around that. Are we getting there, turning to the page, or not having the page and just listening?" This quote further reinforces the importance of preparation and the need for clearer meeting protocols to ensure that discussions remain focused and productive.

Some participants also voiced concerns about inefficiencies during collaborative meetings, noting that conversations often strayed from their intended purpose. One teacher stated, "I feel like a lot of our meetings feel wasted because of talk that doesn't have anything to

do with what we are planning." This concern underscores the necessity of structured meeting protocols to ensure that discussions remain on track and lead to meaningful outcomes. In contrast, another participant highlighted the benefits of structured collaboration, stating, "We have purposeful collaboration, and we're deliberate around what we are doing, then we should get some pretty darn good results." This reflection supports the idea that when teams intentionally focus on shared goals and structured discussions, they can drive more effective and impactful instructional improvements.

The overall theme for Research Question 1 was the importance of establishing collaborative norms to enhance the effectiveness of professional learning communities. The teams recognized that a lack of clarity regarding executing the existing structure impeded collective progress. Clearly defining roles and expectations for all members and ensuring preparedness for all team members fosters productive and focused collaboration. Aligning norms, roles, and preparation practices would lead to more impactful PLCs, ultimately driving meaningful instructional outcomes.

Research Question 2

The second research question examines how teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning on their instructional practice. When collaboration is meaningful and well-structured, it drives action, enhances understanding, and strengthens teacher efficacy. In this study, collaborative planning led to a positive influence on instructional strategies and an increase in teacher confidence and efficacy. The alignment between structured planning and instructional improvement was common across teacher reflections.

Theme 2: Collaborative Planning Influences Instructional Strategies

Many teachers noted that collaboration helped them feel more prepared for the upcoming weeks. Mrs. Dawson stated, “I think it was the first time I've ever heard everyone go, yeah, we're ready for next week. Like, there was that. Not the frustration, because they're very good at vocalizing when frustrated about not finishing something.” This quote highlights how a well-structured planning process reduces frustration and ensures all team members feel adequately prepared. Ms. Washington echoed this sentiment, noting that collaborative planning encouraged greater reflection on instructional effectiveness: “Sometimes it's not on the kids as much as it is on their instruction. So now we have to be more reflective and think about our practices.” This reflection underscores the role of collaboration in prompting educators to critically assess their teaching methods and make improvements based on team discussions.

Another key takeaway was how leadership within collaborative planning contributed to instructional growth. Ms. Miller emphasized this connection, stating, “I lead the work, so I see the growth in my classroom because I am during their preparation.” Her experience illustrates how taking an active role in planning enhances team coordination and directly improves classroom outcomes. Teachers also expressed the need for structured collaboration to ensure all members contribute meaningfully. One participant noted, “We just have one person leading, and we’re not all contributing meaningfully.” This highlights a common challenge in PLCs, reinforcing the importance of shared leadership in planning meetings.

Theme 3: Increased Confidence and Its Impact on Teacher Efficacy

Beyond improving instructional strategies, collaborative planning also boosted teacher confidence, strengthening their overall sense of efficacy. Ms. Hill expressed the importance of revisiting collaborative efforts to ensure alignment, stating, “We thought it would be best that

we've all come back together so that we can just recalibrate or get a good understanding about what we mean by collaboration." This desire to refine and reinforce shared practices highlights the role of collaboration in building teacher confidence and ensuring collective efficacy.

The Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES). The TSES results support this theme. The post-survey data indicated increased self-reported confidence across multiple dimensions of teacher efficacy, including student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. Teachers who participated in collaborative planning scored higher in these areas than their pre-survey responses, suggesting that structured teamwork positively influenced their perceptions of their abilities. The qualitative reflections align with these quantitative trends. Many teachers reported that working in structured planning teams helped them feel more prepared, supported, and confident in their instructional decisions. One educator noted, "Collaboration takes teaching practices to new heights that are impossible to reach alone." This underscores the transformative power of purposeful teamwork. Another participant said, "Teachers engaged in past instructional collaboration have improved practices through structured feedback and modeling." This highlights how deliberate collaboration enhances both planning and execution in the classroom

Research Question 3

The ARDT played a crucial role in the study, acting as thought partners who collaborated with the researcher throughout the process. Their involvement in data analysis, field observations, and focus group discussions provided valuable insights into how educators adapt to new strategies through repetitive learning cycles. Research Question 3 explored the perspectives of both the ARDT and the implementation team regarding the study's design and implementation. Data from field notes, post-survey responses, and transcripts suggest that

repetitive learning and adaptation were central to professional growth and instructional refinement.

Theme 4: Repetitive Learning & Adaptation Enhances Instructional Practice

One of the key themes emerging from the data was the cyclical nature of professional learning and how repeated exposure to strategies helped solidify best practices. One participant described this process as “going through this whole PLC cycle of identifying a goal that we want to work on, learning from resources, figuring out strategies, trying that strategy, collecting evidence, evaluating the impact, and celebrating success.” This continuous cycle reinforced the idea that adaptation is necessary for sustained improvement.

Another participant emphasized the importance of shared leadership within the ARDT, stating, “It’s not that Ms. Washington has to lead every day. I’m sitting back now, okay, come on, Ms. Monroe, this is your turn.” This statement highlights how leadership responsibilities rotated among team members, fostering shared ownership and accountability within the group. Similarly, another educator noted, "We will continue this improvement cycle until we get those results.” This reflection underscores the iterative nature of the process, where teachers engage in repeated practice and refinement to ensure strategies are effectively implemented.

The concept of collaborative problem-solving and adaptability was also evident in the discussions. One teacher mentioned, “Sometimes we need to adjust and go through the lesson again. We made some changes last year, and we’re adjusting based on what we learned.” This highlights how teachers revisit past strategies and modify them based on reflections and feedback. Another participant reinforced this idea by stating, “It’s okay to do those things because that’s what’s going to help the greater good of all, not just your particular class.” This

perspective aligns with the study's findings that effective professional learning communities emphasize adaptability and responsiveness to student needs.

Furthermore, the TSES results suggest ongoing exposure to collaborative learning and adaptation improved instructional confidence. Post-survey responses indicated that teachers who engaged in repetitive learning cycles reported feeling more confident in implementing instructional strategies, particularly in student engagement, lesson planning, and differentiated instruction. These findings suggest that repetitive practice and collaborative reflection strengthen teacher efficacy and instructional effectiveness.

Chapter Summary

The findings illustrate that the Action Research Design Team's iterative learning process enhanced instructional strategies and teacher efficacy. By engaging in repetitive planning, implementation, and reflection cycles, educators could adapt their practices based on real-time feedback and collaborative discussions. Integrating shared leadership, structured reflection, and strategic adjustments led to a culture of continuous improvement, reinforcing the importance of repetitive learning and adaptation in professional development. As educators continue to refine these processes, they can expect long-term instructional growth and sustained improvements in student learning outcomes.

Four themes emerged from the data related to one of the research questions guiding this study. Research Question 1 investigated how leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers. The primary theme that surfaced was that *collaborative norms are key*. School leaders emphasized the importance of establishing clear expectations and shared norms to create a foundation for effective collaboration. These norms

guided the planning process, ensuring alignment and fostering a culture of accountability among grade-level teams.

Research Question 2 explored how teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice. The two themes that emerged from the data were collaborative planning, which influences instructional strategies, and increased confidence, which boosts efficacy. Teachers reported that they gained access to diverse perspectives and strategies that directly improved their instructional practices through collaborative planning. In addition, the collaborative process helped boost their confidence, empowering them to try new approaches and ultimately strengthening their efficacy.

Research Question 3 examined what the action research design and implementation teams (ARDT) learned as they worked to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The emergent theme was that *repetitive learning and adaptation drive progress.* The ARDT found that repetition with collaborative practices allowed for deeper understanding and refinement among the grade-level teams. The ARDT and implementation team discovered that iterative cycles of reflection and adaptation were essential for addressing evolving challenges. The conclusion, implications, and connections to future leadership practices are presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS TO LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The focus on effective implementation of professional learning communities demonstrated that collaboration was fundamental to improving instructional effectiveness. Through structured planning and reflective adaptation, teachers developed their efficacy, which affected their instructional methods and built their self-confidence. This chapter focuses on the collective impact of collaborative planning strategies, customized learning cycles, and reflection practices on developing teachers' instructional abilities. The chapter demonstrates teachers improved their educational methods through joint learning experiences, which enhanced classroom practices and student achievement.

This study sought to determine the effects of collaborative planning and structured professional development on teacher efficacy and instructional effectiveness. It investigated teacher engagement in professional learning communities and their adoption of collaborative strategies to determine best practices for ongoing professional development. The study examined efficiency and role clarity alongside reflective learning cycles to determine their contributions to teachers' adaptive skills for instructional challenges and student engagement enhancement.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How do the leaders articulate their role in developing and supporting collaborative planning structures for teachers?
2. How do teachers describe the impact of collaborative planning processes on their classroom instructional practice?

3. What is learned by the action research design and implementation teams as they collaborate to enhance collective teacher efficacy through Professional Learning Communities?

The chapter begins with a detailed analysis of essential results from past action research cycles investigating teacher reflections, observational data, and survey responses. The study shows how structured collaboration affects instructional confidence by linking collaborative planning to team efficacy and lesson preparedness. This section explores how repetitive learning cycles and iterative adaptations support instructional development while providing teachers with structured feedback and reflection mechanisms that drive continuous practice improvement. The chapter ends with exploring teacher collaboration in professional learning communities and its broader implications while providing recommendations to maintain long-term instructional effectiveness and student achievement.

Summary of the Research Design

This study's research design aimed to investigate the effects of collaborative planning processes on teacher efficacy and instructional effectiveness among professional learning communities. The study used qualitative action research to document teachers' experiences alongside their reflective practices and ongoing professional development. The study gathered data using several methods, including pre-and post-intervention surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, and PLC observation sessions. The selected research methods provided an extensive understanding of the impact structured collaboration had on teacher instructional strategies and confidence throughout the study period.

The researcher completed three action research cycles and designed each phase to develop from the discoveries of the preceding stage. Teachers participated in collaborative

planning sessions, which led to implementing PLC-discussed strategies, followed by reflective discussions to evaluate their instructional adjustments. The research strategy focused on iterative learning and adaptation, which provided teachers with several chances to improve their teaching methods based on feedback and peer experiences.

The research design incorporated the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) as a quantitative tool to measure teacher confidence levels during each study cycle. Researchers obtained a deeper understanding of the study's challenges and successes through interviews and focus groups. The combination of multiple data sources improved the results' trustworthiness, enabling a more comprehensive examination of teacher collaboration practices to refine their teaching methods. The study used a structured, iterative approach to evaluate collaborative planning effectiveness while uncovering key elements that led to ongoing professional development. Surveys, qualitative reflections, and observational data offered comprehensive insights into the impact of collaborative norms and structured lesson planning on teachers' ability to adjust and enhance their teaching methods through repeated learning cycles.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

The results from this research provide essential knowledge about how professional learning communities (PLCs) help improve teacher effectiveness, teaching methods, and team-based planning. The research questions examined key areas of collaborative norms, structured planning, and continuous adaptation, aligning with established research on collective teacher efficacy and professional development. The study bridges its discoveries with existing scholarly work through references that appear earlier in the manuscript, which support the discussion.

Discussion of Findings from Research Question 1

Professional learning communities strengthen because collaborative norms are structured guidelines that help teachers participate in meaningful dialogue. Hoaglund et al. (2014) highlighted that shared expectations, trust, and accountability are essential elements for creating effective professional learning communities. The study participants discovered that their meetings became more productive and generated practical instructional plans when teams adhered to defined expectations and established routines. The research showed that collaborative meetings faced challenges with unstructured discussions and wasted time because clear expectations were missing, which matches findings that suggest unclear expectations reduce meeting effectiveness (Meyer et al., 2022). The study confirms that school leaders significantly influence collaborative norms through their role in establishing participation expectations, while professional learning environment research supports this idea (Reynolds, 2016).

Discussion of Findings from Research Question 2

Research reveals that structured collaborative planning enhances teachers' instructional methods and professional self-assurance. Research by Goddard et al. (2007) indicates that teachers who engage in routine collaboration and data-driven conversations develop more deliberate and refined instructional methods. The study participants reported that their collaborative planning sessions enabled them to evaluate their teaching methods while integrating different perspectives into lesson development. The research showed that active collaborative planning participation among teachers enhanced instructional preparedness, validating Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) findings about teacher efficacy through structured professional learning. Multiple teachers reported participation disparities among teams

during collaborative planning sessions, which matches research stating that equal member investment enhances effectiveness (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Discussion of Findings from Research Question 3

The findings demonstrate that sustained professional development requires educators to engage in repetitive learning and adaptation. Research findings reveal that teachers achieve maximum benefits when they constantly implement, reflect upon their teaching methods, and make necessary refinements (Bandura, 1986). Educators who participated in several professional development iterations and collaborative dialogues demonstrated higher self-assurance in customizing instructional techniques to student requirements. Research shows that sustained professional development results in enhanced teacher confidence and better student learning results (Schipper et al., 2020). Participants found that their instructional choices were largely influenced by trial and error, which supports the idea that professional learning communities need to enable experimentation and flexibility, according to Jaquith (2013). The results make it clear that structured collaboration, reflective learning, and continuous adaptation are essential elements for developing effective teaching practices. When interpreted alongside previous research findings, this study confirms that professional learning communities serve as an essential foundation for teacher development and instructional enhancement, along with building collective teacher efficacy.

Limitations of the Current Study

Research studies contain inherent limitations, which researchers must openly recognize to ensure the findings are understood accurately. The study encountered multiple limitations in design, data collection methods, and participant engagement, which affected the research results' scope and their applicability to other contexts. The research's main limitations included the

number of participants and their varying characteristics. Researchers performed this study in an educational context involving a select group of teachers who participated in professional learning communities (PLCs). The findings give meaningful information about collaborative planning and teacher effectiveness but lack full representation for broader educational settings. Subsequent research should enlarge the study sample to include more educators from diverse backgrounds to generalize the results better.

The study faced restrictions because it depended on data collected through self-reporting methods from surveys alongside focus group responses. Self-reported measures carry inherent response bias risks because participants often supply answers matching their perceptions of expectations instead of their genuine experiences. Future research could achieve better evaluations of instructional effectiveness by integrating classroom observations and student performance data with self-reported measures.

The study faced difficulties because of time limitations combined with the nature of professional learning cycles. The intervention span lasted a fixed duration that potentially lacked the length needed to detect lasting changes in teacher capability and teaching methods. Teachers develop their instructional skills over long periods; thus, extended study lengths could offer better insights into how collaborative planning leads to lasting instructional advancements. Longitudinal studies examining teacher efficacy and instructional modifications across multiple school years could provide valuable insights for future research.

The study results may have been affected by external factors which remained beyond the researchers' ability to control. The differences in school policies and institutional priorities and the level of administrative support may have shaped teachers' participation in PLCs and their application of collaborative teaching methods. The unexpected workload demands and

scheduling conflicts among participants restricted their complete involvement in collaborative planning activities. Future research considering these context-based factors can enhance best practice recommendations for establishing effective professional learning communities across various educational contexts. Although the research faced certain limitations its findings significantly enhance our understanding of collaborative norms as well as structured planning processes and iterative learning cycles within teacher professional development. Awareness of limitations enables better analysis of results and identifies areas for future research to expand on these findings.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

This study's results demonstrate essential implications for educational practitioners who work with professional learning communities (PLCs), engage in collaborative planning activities, and practice instructional leadership. Structured collaboration implemented with intentionality leads to improved teacher efficacy, enhanced instructional strategies, and better student learning outcomes. This section examines the central implications of the study’s results and proposes guidance for educational practitioners and school administrators.

The main finding shows that collaborative planning serves as a tool for enhancing instructional capacity. Structured collaboration among teachers leads to better instructional designs that cater to various student needs, as emphasized by Jaquith's 2013 research study. Educators with access to clear collaborative structures tend to participate in reflective practices while making instructional decisions based on data and fostering collective professional learning (Adams, 2013). Administrators must establish clear collaborative structures that undergo frequent evaluation and maintain alignment with student learning objectives.

School leaders are essential in developing a collaborative culture within educational institutions. According to Meyer et al. (2022), principals establish high student learning expectations and build professional cultures that enable teacher collaboration. Nehez and Blossing (2022) propose that school leaders establish organizational frameworks that enable dialogue, learning, and collective decision-making in PLCs. Research indicates that leadership involvement is critical in maintaining and developing professional learning communities.

The research highlights teacher self-efficacy's critical role in professional learning contexts. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) describe teacher self-efficacy as the teacher's belief in their capability to promote student engagement and learning despite difficult situations. According to Schipper et al., 2020, Teachers participating in learning-focused professional environments alongside reflective and collaborative practices show enhanced engagement, instructional effectiveness, and motivation. Educational institutions must focus on continuous teacher training and collaborative frameworks that strengthen educators' belief in their teaching skills.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The subsequent recommendations are established according to the research findings.

- **Formalizing Professional Learning Community (PLC) Structures.** Educational institutions must implement precise guidelines and protocols for professional learning community meetings to ensure they remain structured and focused on achieving specific outcomes that enhance instructional methods (Adams, 2013).
- **Providing Targeted Support for Instructional Leadership.** School administrators need continuous training on enabling collaborative planning while building teacher leadership and developing shared accountability systems (Meyer et al., 2022).

- **Integrating Professional Learning within Collaborative Settings.** Integrating professional development into PLCs through peer coaching and collaborative lesson study helps improve teacher learning (Jaquith, 2013).
- **Using Data to Drive Instructional Decision-Making.** According to Frey et al. (2020), teachers need to frequently evaluate student performance data to discover instructional gaps and modify their lesson plans, which will enhance student achievement.
- **Fostering a Culture of Reflective Practice.** Professional learning communities benefit from teacher-led discussions, action research, and structured reflections, which improve instructional decision-making and professional development (Schipper et al., 2020). Educational practitioners implementing these recommendations will enhance collaborative planning structures while boosting teacher self-efficacy and advancing instructional leadership. This study's outcomes match previous research findings on professional learning communities, teacher self-efficacy, and leadership-centered school advancement (Nehez & Blossing, 2022). Schools can create a culture of ongoing betterment that positively affects student learning achievements by combining intentional collaboration with leadership engagement and structured professional development.

Implications and Recommendations for Researchers

This research provides essential information that will benefit future investigations into collaborative planning practices, professional learning communities, and teacher self-efficacy development. The section presents research implications together with suggestions for future studies. Researchers need to investigate how structured collaborative planning processes affect teacher self-efficacy levels. Educators who join well-defined professional learning communities experience greater instructional confidence and a sense of efficacy. The research conducted by

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) demonstrates that teacher self-efficacy develops through collaborative environments that promote shared responsibility alongside collective decision-making processes. Subsequent research must examine how structured collaboration impacts teacher self-efficacy throughout several academic years.

An important research direction involves understanding how leadership maintains collaborative planning frameworks. According to Meyer et al. (2022), school leaders significantly contribute to professional learning communities through their establishment of standards, provision of necessary resources, and maintenance of accountability measures. Research shows that school leaders must actively participate in professional learning communities to bolster instructional development initiatives. Researchers should focus future studies on identifying which leadership behaviors best enable sustainable collaborative planning efforts. This study demonstrates how professional learning communities affect teaching consistency and student performance outcomes. Research indicates that professional learning communities enhance instructional coherence through organized teacher activities that involve data analysis, best practice sharing, and curriculum alignment (Jaquith, 2013). Further investigation is required to evaluate how collaborative planning affects student achievement in various educational environments.

Upcoming research needs to investigate how different teaching experience levels affect the success of collaborative planning efforts. Research indicates that the benefits of PLC participation diverge between novice teachers who add innovative instructional methods and veteran teachers who provide institutional knowledge (Schipper et al., 2020). Future studies must determine the best methods to effectively use diverse teaching team strengths. Research should explore how professional learning communities can be expanded across diverse educational

contexts in the future. The research addressed a Title I elementary school environment, yet its discoveries extend relevance to middle schools, high schools, and alternative educational settings. It is necessary to research how professional learning communities' frameworks can be modified to fit different student groups and educational settings, according to Nehez and Blossing (2022). Through their research activities in these areas, researchers will better understand the impact that collaborative planning and professional learning communities alongside leadership activities have on teacher effectiveness and instructional success. Educational policies alongside teacher training and leadership development programs need these insights to improve instructional quality and student learning results.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

This study reveals important information that transcends individual educational settings to guide policymakers seeking to strengthen educational collaboration frameworks. The research identifies institutionalizing collaborative planning structures as essential for advancing teacher development and increasing student achievement. Instituting policies that allocate time for professional learning communities (PLCs) and supply essential resources for teacher collaboration can improve instructional consistency and effectiveness throughout multiple schools. PLC initiatives require financial support as an essential policy outcome. Research findings indicate that structured professional learning investments produce enduring instructional improvements while boosting teacher retention rates (OECD, 2023). Teacher professional development funding must be a top priority for policymakers to establish collaborative planning as a fundamental part of school systems. Policies must support mentorship programs within PLCs to provide early-career teachers with essential guidance from experienced educators.

Research establishes that school leadership is crucial in building collaborative school environments. Training programs for principals and instructional leaders must focus on implementing and maintaining effective PLCs as a policy measure. Nehez and Blossing (2022) found that school leadership involvement in professional development is crucial to maintaining collaborative environments. School leaders need evaluation systems from policymakers that examine their support for teacher collaboration while maintaining active collaborative planning processes. Educational policies must incorporate adaptable approaches for PLC implementation, serving different school contexts. Different schools find success through grade-level PLCs, while others need cross-disciplinary collaboration or subject-specific planning teams. Educational policies must establish guidelines that enable schools to develop tailored PLC models that meet their specific instructional collaboration requirements.

Policymakers must include collaborative efficacy metrics in teacher evaluation systems as a final step. Standard teacher evaluation systems prioritize individual achievements over team-wide performance outcomes. Teacher evaluation systems that integrate collaborative contributions strengthen joint accountability for student achievement while creating an educational framework that recognizes teacher performance as a personal and team effort. School districts and governing bodies that integrate these findings into their educational policies will be able to develop durable systems that boost teacher cooperation and instructional quality, leading to better student learning results.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts

This study demonstrates that structured collaboration and collective efficacy through professional learning communities (PLCs) are crucial in improving teacher effectiveness and instructional quality. Through systematic and reflective collaborative planning, teachers develop

greater self-efficacy while gaining confidence and preparedness for their instructional methods. The work of Goddard et al. (2004) supports the notion that when teachers exhibit collective efficacy, it results in superior instructional results and better student performance.

This study reveals that collaborative planning supports professional development and helps teachers adapt instruction methods. Structured PLCs created opportunities for teachers to hold evidence-based discussions that enhanced their teaching methods through peer input. The research conducted by Jaquith (2013) aligns with this finding as it emphasizes how instructional capacity affects student learning outcomes. The action research model used in this study demonstrated Glanz's (2014) assertion that sustained professional development requires ongoing cycles of reflection and action. The research underscores how leadership practices influence the long-term sustainability of productive Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Educational administrators who establish collaborative structures and allocate professional learning time enable teachers to participate effectively in substantial instructional challenge discussions. The study by Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) demonstrates that when principals participate in professional learning communities, it leads to better teacher collaboration and improved instructional alignment.

This study investigated teacher efficacy and instructional effectiveness, yet its results indicate that structured collaborative planning over time produces significant effects on student achievement. Research shows that continuous professional development through Professional Learning Communities produces measurable gains in student performance (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Research must examine the extended effects of PLC engagement on student learning in diverse educational environments and assess the impact of various leadership approaches on maintaining professional development frameworks. The findings of this study

demonstrate how collective teacher efficacy serves as an essential foundation for enhancing instructional practices. When schools promote collaboration alongside continuous learning and shared accountability, they build educational environments that enable teachers to improve their methods which results in better student performance. These research outcomes provide essential guidance for policymakers, school administrators, and educators who want to apply evidence-based methods to advance teacher training and instructional quality.

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APPENDIX A

Individual Interview Questions

1. **Collaboration and Interaction:**
    - How do you feel about the level of collaboration within the PLC?
    - What challenges, if any, have you encountered when collaborating with other team members?
2. **Collective Efficacy:**
    - How do you perceive the sense of collective efficacy among PLC members?
    - In what ways do you feel the PLC has strengthened your confidence in addressing classroom challenges?
    - Can you provide an example of how the PLC's collective effort led to a positive outcome for students in your grade?
3. **Impact on Teaching and Learning:**
    - How has your participation in the PLC impacted your teaching practices?
    - Have you observed any changes in student outcomes as a result of implementing strategies discussed in the PLC?
4. **Support and Resources:**
    - What types of support and resources have been most beneficial to you as a PLC member?
5. **Feedback and Improvement:**
    - What suggestions do you have for improving the effectiveness of the PLC?

Follow-Up Questions:

- Can you elaborate on that point?
- What do you think caused that to happen?
- How did you address that challenge?

APPENDIX B

Reflective Questions for Focus Group

1. **Effectiveness of Interventions:**
    - Which interventions or strategies implemented during this cycle were the most effective?
    - Can you provide specific examples of how these interventions impacted your teaching practice or student outcomes?
2. **Collective Efficacy:**
    - How do you build upon the collective efficacy within the PLC?
    - How do you feel more confident in your ability to work with your colleagues to achieve common goals?
3. **Collaboration and Interaction:**
    - How well did the team members collaborate during the cycles?
    - What kinds of support did you find most helpful for the grade level teams?
4. **Professional Learning and Growth:**
    - What new insights or skills did you gain from this cycle?
    - How have these insights or skills influenced your teaching practices or professional development?
5. **Challenges and Obstacles:**
    - What challenges or obstacles do you see within PLCs?
    - How did you address these challenges?
6. **Student Outcomes:**
    - Have you noticed any changes in student engagement or learning outcomes due to the interventions in this cycle? Can you give specific examples?
7. **Suggestions for Improvement:**
    - Are there any additional resources or support that would enhance the PLC's effectiveness?
8. **Future Goals:**
    - What are your goals or expectations for the next cycle?
    - How do you envision applying what you've learned in future PLC activities?

Follow-Up Questions:

- Can you elaborate on that point?
- What do you think caused that to happen?
- How did you address that challenge?

Appendix C

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (short form)	**How much can you do?**								
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us better understand the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below.	Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfok Hoy (2001).