PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES TO IMPACT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: A COLLABORATION OF ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS AND COURSE TEAMS IN ONE LARGE SUBURBAN HIGH SCHOOL.

by

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(Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the discussions and interactions of high school assistant principals and course team members (teachers) working as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The context of this study occurred in a large suburban high school with four assistant principals and 19 teachers who were members of a course team. Distributed leadership theory provided a framework to address the gap in research about the relationship dynamics of high school assistant principals and course team members. The findings that emerged from this study are: 1) Assistant principals reported that their actions outside of course team meetings are important to improve PLCs; 2) The structure of professional development can impact teacher morale; 3) The features of testing platforms can encourage course team collaboration; 4) Course team leaders reported barriers that hinder collaboration.

INDEX WORDS: Professional Learning Communities, Assistant Principal, Course Teams, Distributed Leadership

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DEDICATION

To my loving mother Carole Wallace, who raised me as a single mom after my father passed when I was only seven years old. To my beloved Aunt Kim, who has indeed been my second mother. Lastly, to my beautiful children Gavin and Gracynn, who are the apple of my eye. I love you all very much!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in a high school setting is challenging for assistant principals because they typically handle multiple responsibilities, making it challenging to be instructional leaders (Liu, 2018). Assistant principals are often preoccupied with addressing management duties and may lose focus on building their instructional leadership skills (Liu, 2018). Assistant principals may also feel incompetent supporting a PLC based on their experiences as a teacher; the supporting administrator may not have taught the subject (Pirtle & Tobia, 2015). Nonetheless, administrators are expected to be instructional leaders who provide guidance and support for teachers.

Administrators are key stakeholders who play a vital role in establishing and maintaining effective PLCs (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Teachers should be given a clear picture of government policy mandates and district policies through clear expectations from school administrators and leaders regarding PLC effectiveness and functioning outcomes (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019). Confusion can occur from any task that lacks a clear direction. Therefore, administrators need to communicate clear expectations to teachers. The PLC implementation process centers around teachers, the central figures who transfer their learning to the classroom with students (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019).

Research for effective implementation of PLCs shows that successful execution does not occur overnight (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Teachers and administrators need professional training, trusting relationships, collaboration time, and resources to help guide teams to focus on

student learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). When administrators provide freedom to teachers, they are less likely to feel micromanaged (Spencer, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The assistant principals and teachers at Gadsen High School have encountered several challenges with implementing the PLC process. In the 2020-21 academic year, the annual retention rate for course team teacher leaders was 50%. Teachers expressed various reasons for being apprehensive about leading a course team. Teachers with less experience and expertise were chosen because the administration had limited personnel options. The assistant principals voiced concerns about fully supporting their course team if they had never taught the subject. Another concern from the assistant principals was the lack of consistent support of course teams of all teams. The leadership styles of the assistant principals varied so the support level was nuanced across all course teams. Some of the course teams performed well on standardized assessments, while others performed poorly. The administrators believed low student achievement was caused by low-quality instruction, unengaging student activities, and common assessments that were not aligned with the district's standards. The principal identified course teams as a critical area of improvement to help raise student achievement.

Overview of the Research Site Context

The action research occurred at Gadsen High School, located in a large urban school district in the southeast region of the United States. The Gadsen school community consisted of three elementary schools and one middle school that shared a focus on project-based learning. In the 2021-22 academic year, Gadsen High School had approximately 2,000 students. The student demographics at Gadsen High School were 38% White, 28% Hispanic, 21% Black, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% Multi-racial. The free-reduced lunch (FRL) rate was 33%. The

average teacher retention rate was 90%, and over 70% of the teaching staff held a Master's Degree or higher.

The high turnover of course team leaders created challenges for assistant principals to implement the PLC process. The majority of the course teams that retained course team leaders were more consistent in implementing the PLC model with fidelity in their course team meetings. The culture of each team was impacted by high turnover in course team leaders.

Course teams with high teacher leader turnover made it difficult for teachers to adjust their teaching styles, instructional resources, and student activities. High turnover among course teams can hinder trust among teachers. A new course team leader expressed how her team was resistant to analyzing student data and modifying assessments. Teachers expressed that trust is built with course team members over time. As a result, teachers used various testing platforms that did not feature the ability to share student achievement data with their course team members. Course teams that exhibited high retention and trust utilized testing platforms that allowed everyone on the course team to access student achievement data.

The assistant principals in this study were responsible for supporting the course teams within their department by attending meetings regularly and contributing to the discussions. Course team leaders were responsible for setting the agenda and facilitating course team meetings every week. The assistant principals expressed that they were unsure how to support course teams beyond attending course team meetings. One contributing factor to this context may have been the lack of training provided at the local level. The district's staff development department provided professional learning to assistant principals and course team leaders on the topic of implementing authentic PLCs. Professional learning that was offered by the district was

optional, and therefore, not all assistant principals experienced the same amount of professional learning.

The district assigned a PLC coach to work alongside several assistant principals to provide additional support to course teams. The PLC coach met with assistant principals who led course teams with low student performance on state standardized tests. In the 2020-21 academic year, the high school in this study performed poorly on the End of Course (EOC) state assessment in four subject areas. Due to the low performance on state assessments, the school did not earn a single point on the district's Weighted School Assessment (WSA). The WSA was an evaluative tool the district used to measure expected levels of performance based on the school's FRL population.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to examine the discussions and interactions of high school assistant principals and course team members working as a PLC. Three research questions guided the purpose of this action research study.

Research Questions

1. How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school?
2. How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?
3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?

The next section contains a list of key terms that will be used throughout this dissertation. The key terms are comprised of well-known terms throughout the profession of education and terms that apply to Gadsen High School.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this study.

- "Assistant Principal" in the context of Gadsen High School is an administrator who handles multiple instructional responsibilities and primarily provides direction to course teams who operate as PLCs.
- "Collective Efficacy" is the belief that the collective actions of a course team can improve student achievement (Donohoo et al., 2018).
- "Common Assessment" in the context of Gadsen High School is a student assessment that is created by teachers within a course team and the assessment contains identical questions and answers.
- "Course Team Leader" in the context of Gadsen High School is a teacher who is responsible for facilitating course team meetings by setting a weekly agenda and leading discussions in the meetings.
- "Course Team" in the context of Gadsen High School is a team of teachers who teach the same course and collaborate every week to discuss ways to improve teaching and learning.
- "Course Team Member" in the context of Gadsen High School is a teacher who collaborates with a course team.

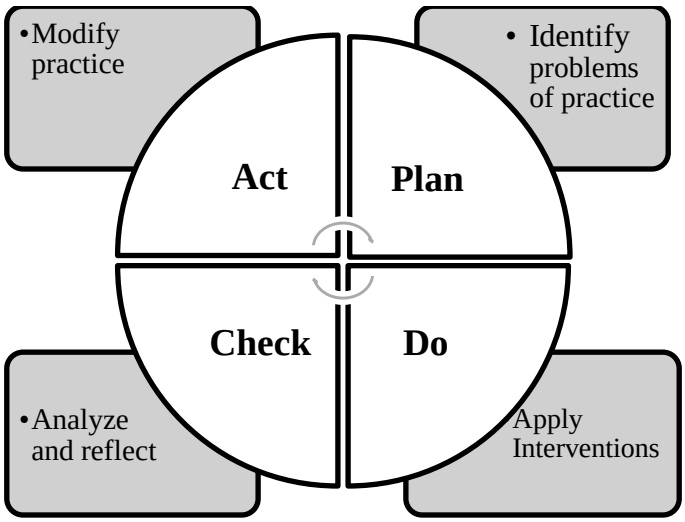
- "Distributed Leadership" consists of leaders, followers, and situations over time. The role of leaders and followers may become interchangeable depending on the specific task (Spillane, 2005).
- "Professional Development" in the context of Gadsen High School is training for educators that may be led by local or district personnel.
- "Professional Learning Community" in the context of Gadsen High School is a team of teachers (course team) who teach the same course and collaborate every week to discuss strategies to improve teaching and learning.
- "Standardized Assessment" in the context of Gadsen High School is a student assessment that is created by district or state professionals.

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the idea that high school assistant principals interact with course teams of teachers through distributed leadership theory. This study explored how assistant principals supported course team teachers using distributed leadership methods to improve teacher collaboration and teaching and learning processes. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 showed how assistant principals supported the course team teachers through a continuous improvement cycle. The spiral of self-reflective processes included the stages of the plan, do, check, and act (PDCA). The PDCA cycle is a well-known process originating in manufacturing that has translated into the education field to facilitate continuous improvement (Morgan & Stewart, 2017). The PDCA loop argues for the importance of extensive upfront preparation and the use of information to assist in identifying challenges and facilitating data-driven solutions.

Figure 1

Action Research Cycles adapted from Morgan & Stewart (2017)



Overview of Methodology

The primary researcher and Design Team reviewed research on PLCs and distributed leadership theory to identify interventions for teachers and assistant principals to implement with course teams. The Design Team also focused on how course team teachers could receive better support from assistant principals by reviewing local surveys and interview responses from course team teachers. Preunderstandings of the organizational environment by the Design Team are necessary to carry out action research with fidelity (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Action research was selected as the methodology for this study because it provided a structure for the primary researcher and Design Team to identify problems and implement interventions within the school's context. Action research provides a cyclical structure of continuous improvement that prompts reflection and solution-oriented action that is repeated over time (Glanz, 2014).

Teacher collaboration is not a new practice in secondary education, but many teachers and administrators struggle to implement PLCs (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019). The Design Team and Implementation Team collaborated to improve the functionality of course teams

operating as PLC in a large suburban high school. Researched literature and data from local surveys and interviews were used to guide the Design Team in identifying interventions for the Implementation Team. Observations notes were gathered each week during course team meetings, and the Design Team met at the end of each cycle to reflect on and plan interventions.

Multiple forms of qualitative data were collected to ensure the validity of the study. Surveys responses from course team teachers and assistant principals were administered and collected at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. The researcher conducted individual interviews with assistant principals who supported course teams at the beginning of the study. The researcher also interviewed course team leaders at the beginning of the study to gain perspectives of teacher leaders working within a collaborative PLC environment. Lastly, a group interview with the Design Team was conducted to gather final reflections.

Interventions

The Design Team was primarily responsible for identifying the appropriate intervention for each action research cycle. The Design Team consisted of the primary researcher who served as an assistant principal, four course team leaders, and three additional assistant principals. The Design Team's focus was to identify how assistant principals can better support course teams to improve the process of teaching and learning. The Implementation Team consisted of four assistant principals (including the researcher) and 19 course team members (including four course team leaders). The Implementation Team included the subject areas of U.S. History, Biology, American Literature, and Geometry.

The interventions were applied after the Design Team reviewed the literature on PLCs, collective efficacy, and distributive leadership theory. Data from local surveys and interviews were also a contributing factor to the selection of interventions. Interventions that were selected

included a common testing platform for all course teams, differentiated small group instruction professional learning, and targeted remediation strategies for low-performing students. The purpose of using the interventions was to positively impact student achievement and improve the collective efficacy among assistant principals and course teams.

Significance of the Study

This study focused on the dynamics of assistant principals and course teams operating as a PLC in a large suburban high school. The majority of research surrounding professional learning communities does not elaborate on the dynamics between high school assistant principals and course teams (Calvert, 2016; Donohoo & Hattie, 2018; Loughland & Ryan, 2020). Typically, research on PLCs is linked to general K-12 settings and the key actions of principals (Calvert, 2016; Donohoo & Hattie, 2018; Loughland & Ryan, 2020). This study addressed a gap in the literature regarding how PLCs impact the dynamics of high school assistant principals with course teams. This study occurred during the downswing of the COVID-19 pandemic. After spending several months learning from home in a digital school environment, students returned to school buildings. Many students throughout the country suffered learning loss due to the impact of the pandemic (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020).

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research conducted for this dissertation and a description of the research questions, the problem of practice, and the techniques used in the study. Chapter 2 offers a literature review that is relevant to the study and addresses professional learning communities, administrative leadership, and teacher collective efficacy. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and qualitative approaches as they pertain to this study and provides further information on the setting in which the study was performed.

Chapter 4 provides in-depth information about the findings from the action research in this study. Chapter 5 analyzes the findings from the action research case using action research cycles relevant to the study's research questions. This chapter also explains and evaluates the interventions conducted by the researcher and the action research team. Chapter 6 summarizes the entire study, discusses the research questions' findings, and gives recommendations for school administrators.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature surrounding PLCs, which many teachers and administrators have experienced over the past twenty years (Visone, 2016). There are many actions that teachers and administrators must carry out to implement effective PLCs. This chapter provides an overview of literature about Professional Learning Communities, Best Practices, and Collective Efficacy.

Professional Learning Communities

Traditionally, teachers in the United States were accustomed to working in isolation until PLCs were introduced in the 1960s (Dufour, et al., 2006). On an international scale, educators in China were accustomed to collaborating on lesson plans since the 1950s (Zheng, et al., 2016). The PLC model did not become mainstream in the United States until the late 1990s as more prominent literature and research revealed data correlating teacher quality to student achievement (DuFour, et al., 2006). Teacher collaboration became a higher priority when George W. Bush spearheaded a big attempt to raise student achievement when he signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act into law in January 2001 (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). In 2015, Barack Obama reintroduced another model of school reform known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization (ESEA). This school reform model was the primary federal statute affecting education in grades K-12, which now compels schools to enhance the quality of teacher pedagogy and considerably increase student results (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019).

The definition of a PLC is a group of educators working together to improve overall student learning for a shared group of students (DuFour, et al., 2006). A PLC can be a group of

educators from separate school districts or a high school team of teachers who teach the same course, such as U.S. History or Geometry. According to research, PLCs have made significant improvements in student achievement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Jones & Thessin, 2017; Levine, 2019; Zheng, et al., 2016). Members of a PLC should explore and reflect upon their current practices and modify them to increase student achievement (DuFour, et al., 2006). DuFour & Reeves (2016) noticed that schools have loosely used the term PLC without implementing the strategies with fidelity; the researchers refer to this as "PLC Lite." There are five key characteristics that PLC must implement (DuFour & Reeves, 2016): a) work together as a team with a common goal, b) establish what the students need to know, c) develop common assessments, d) analyze common assessments results to differentiate and adjust instruction, e) create a system to remediate students who need more support. This section will highlight the challenges of implementing PLCs and building trust among teachers and administrators.

Challenges with PLC Implementation

Effectively utilizing PLCs for school improvement can challenge many school systems (Doğan & Adams, 2018). Effective PLCs necessitate several levels of professional learning (Jones, 2020). A PLC must involve learning through professional development and continuous evaluation of its effectiveness and areas of growth (Jones, 2020). Given the limited time available to teachers, it is vital that their common planning time focuses upon items that will directly impact their students' achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). The information teachers acquire in PLCs may have minimal positive effects on student progress if the meetings are not focused on student learning (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

Low Supply

Teachers are typically responsible for assuming the role of facilitating weekly course team meetings amongst their peers (Meeuwan et al., 2019). Administrators may struggle with selecting a teacher to lead a course team based on the small number of teachers from which to choose (Smylie, 2018). For example, a principal or administrative team may only have three algebra teachers from which to choose. More than likely, the teacher who has the most leadership qualities will be voluntold to become the course team lead (Smylie, 2018).

No Compensation or Time

Teachers who are asked to take on a formal leadership role in a school may not receive a stipend if the district or local school does not have funding available (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016). It can be unreasonable to ask someone to take on additional responsibility without some form of compensation. Lacking proper funding or allocation for teacher leaders means that the school leader must find creative ways to compensate for the additional time and effort staff members have put forth (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016). Course teams may not have common planning time during the school day. A former teacher explained, “Because we had no common time to meet during the school day, scheduling meetings was always a challenge” (Melville, 2016, p. 50).

Ambiguous Expectations

Course team leaders need to have clear expectations of their duties and responsibilities. Too often, teachers are asked to take on additional leadership roles without being given clear expectations (Hunzicker, 2019). Administrators can cause tension among staff members if they do not understand or clearly communicate the scope of responsibilities (Hunzicker, 2019). The

vagueness around accountability and responsibilities of the role can serve as a deterrent for teachers to embrace leadership roles (Hunzicker, 2019).

Distrust

Many challenges arise for PLCs while building and sustaining trust (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). High or even moderate staff turnover can break up teams yearly (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). A new team must start from scratch to build trust and learn how to collaborate. “Some teams found it difficult to establish a sense of trust and confidence among team members, making it a challenge to build a safe environment for teachers to share results suggesting that students are not performing as expected” (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 20). Chizek (2013) described teachers getting defensive and apprehensive if their students did not perform well on common assessments. “If I’m putting myself out there by asking for help, I need to know that my questions and concerns are valued and don’t make me a ‘bad’ teacher just because my students are struggling” (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 20).

In personal and professional relationships, trust is the bedrock that influences thoughts and actions between people. Trust among teachers and their administrators allows teachers to be vulnerable and comfortable with exposing their areas of growth. Pirtle and Tobia (2015) mentioned, “school leaders must model and maintain trusting relationships in all that they do and develop the conditions where teachers can be vulnerable with one another and open to engaging in the kinds of professional conversations that get them to reflect deeply about their teaching — the cornerstone of a true PLC” (p. 4). The continuous improvement process is stifled if team members are afraid to be open and honest about their areas of growth. Teachers will trust their administrators more if they feel supported and can have a voice in the process. Spencer (2016)

suggested, “those who function most often in an authority role must allow teachers to pose the ideas for PLC work and control the direction of the group” (p. 84).

Trust and collaboration can become difficult in districts that utilize a merit system for student achievement (Fahey, 2011). “School leaders are asked to build schools that are reflective, collaborative communities, despite the fact that they often work in competitive, isolated, non-reflective administrative cultures that are very far from the professional learning communities that the literature highlights” (Fahey, 2011, p. 30). Teachers who are competing for their students to earn the best test scores may be reluctant to share ideas and collaborate with their colleagues.

Teachers and administrators garner commitment with persuasion and influence instead of harsh mandates (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). Teachers are willing to be vulnerable and share their areas of improvement when trust levels are high (Riveros et al., 2012). A teacher stated, “A way my team helped alleviate this is by building relationships outside of work and starting our PLC meetings with a celebration from each of us” (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 20). Teachers are more willing to be vulnerable with teammates if their administration is supportive and not heavy-handed with documentation when mistakes in implementation occur (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). “The building leadership team strives to create this sense of trust by giving teams time to practice discussing and analyzing student data, encouraging teachers to discuss questions about students’ progress, and emphasizing throughout the process that everyone is a learner” (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 22). The next section provides information on best practices that are associated with PLCs.

Best Practices

Teachers collaborate more effectively when principals encourage continuous improvement and identify effective teachers who can facilitate course teams (Park, Lee, & Cooc,

2019). A strong culture of teamwork is evident in schools where principals encourage teachers to collaborate with one another (Johnson & Voelkel, 2019). Administrators need proper training to gain credibility and competency so teachers may trust their supporting administrator's leadership (Hansen, et al., 2013). This section describes the structure, tools, and professional learning needed for teachers and administrators while implementing the PLC process.

Administrative Support

School improvement is more likely when teachers and administrators work together to increase student achievement. Collaborative teams must have a student achievement goal in order to increase student learning and professional development (Hargreaves, 2019). Administrators should encourage teachers to set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time) goals and agree on what each member of the team will do in order to maximize student growth (Schaap, & Bruijn, 2018). Members of a team are more prone to struggle and will form their own agendas if they do not have a clear goal and purpose (DuFour, & Reeves, 2016). Administrators and teachers should attempt to agree on how to track their progress toward reaching their goals.

The presence and support of administrators contributes to a collaborative environment for PLC meetings (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Collaborative planning time allows teachers and administrators to focus their discussions on student learning and instructional strategies. The discussions from the PLCs often do not translate into practice with fidelity if the classrooms are not observed consistently by administrators (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Administrators should conduct classroom walkthroughs to ensure teachers are implementing the instructional strategies that were discussed in their PLC.

Professional Learning in PLCs

Teachers and administrators must modify their attitudes and habits if they are to implement a new collaborative culture (King, 2019). Furthermore, teachers who are actively involved in their schools' PLCs are more likely to benefit from them than those who are not (King, 2019). Teachers who are leading a PLC need strong support from their administrators (Wilson, 2016). “A team of facilitators, using methods specifically designed for assessment for learning, worked with principals and teachers, honing participants’ skills to lead and engage in collaborative teams” (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 23). The training provided video clips of PLCs that demonstrated how to effectively run a collaborative meeting so that teachers and administrators could see concrete examples of the various roles and skills needed to facilitate and contribute during team meetings (Hansen, et al., 2013)

Professional learning should primarily focus on collaboration skills and how meetings are structured (Hansen, et al., 2013). “Both teachers and Chizek say the assessment for learning protocols and routines helped staff move from “collaboration lite,” where interactions tended to be more convivial” (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 22). Teachers working in collaboration may decrease team conflicts by structuring the meeting with members having clear, defined roles, such as recorder and timekeeper.

Collegial walks are ideal for teachers to see what other teachers are doing and can spark engagement among staff. Visone (2016) mentioned, “It is so much more powerful to borrow what one has seen in practice versus what one has merely read about or discussed in a conference room” (p. 68). Effective professional development can be executed informally through peer observations and teaching demonstrations. Collaborative learning teams observe each other’s teaching and provide feedback to improve instructional practices in a low stakes environment

(Hansen, et al., 2013). It is beneficial for teachers to reflect and constantly engage in discussions about their instruction to identify the strategies that improve students learning (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). As a result, when teachers engage in discussions about instructional strategies that increase student achievement, they are better able to contribute to the school's overall mission of continuous improvement (DuFour, et al., 2006).

PLC Structure

Teachers need time to meet and collaborate, but it is important to note providing time does not ensure effective collaboration (Spencer, 2016). Administrators and teachers must agree upon shared best practices for PLCs so meetings can be productive and meaningful (Spencer, 2016). The researchers in this study suggest that each collaborative learning team reflects on their teaching practice by using a self-assessment tool to identify areas the team needs to focus on (Hansen, et al., 2013). All teams meet at least weekly during the contracted school day, and some meet more often to design lessons, student activities, and formative assessments (Hansen, et al., 2013). Teams may use shared spaces such as Google Docs to work together effectively.

Instructional coaches may be utilized to support PLCs at the primary level since the administrative teams are much smaller than at the secondary level. The research conducted at four elementary schools by Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) “reveal that the four schools had access to instructional coaches who worked with students and/or teachers to varying degrees; some were assigned to the school full-time, others were district staff who schools could tap for assistance” (p. 212). The next section will explain the definition, challenges, and best methods to build teacher collective efficacy.

Collective Efficacy

Collective teacher efficacy has a 1.57 effect size on student achievement, meaning that research has shown that there is a strong correlation between the two variables (Donohoo et al., 2018). Collective teacher efficacy is simply the belief that teachers can work together to raise student achievement (Donohoo et al., 2018). The next section will discuss the hurdles to building teacher collective efficacy and how to create an environment that builds efficacy among teachers.

Hurdles

One may assume that teachers believe that their team of colleagues can make a change, but there can be many hurdles that yield doubt and hinder collective efficacy. One hurdle that teachers can face is the absence of motivational sources. Loughland (2020) states, "motivational sources of teacher collective efficacy are mastery and vicarious experiences, social persuasion and affective states" (p. 3).

The principal and the administrative team need to be intentional about how they will carry out the critical task of building the leadership capacity of others (Levine, 2019). Ongoing administrative support is critical for teacher leaders to overcome obstacles and continue to embrace leadership opportunities (Hamzah & Jamil, 2019). With the high demands and emphasis placed on student achievement, educational leadership has shifted from being a managerial role to an instructional leadership role (Khadka, 2019).

Best Practices to Build Efficacy

Two major components must be working together for teacher collective efficacy to thrive (Calvert, 2016). "The degree to which a teacher acts with agency in professional learning depends on several factors including both a teacher's internal traits, such as the motivation to engage in professional learning, as well as a school's structural conditions" (Calvert, 2016, p. 4).

A school leader is not able to control internal traits, so the focus must be on providing an environment and structural conditions that build teacher efficacy (Calvert, 2016).

Teacher collaboration can decrease the amount of individual supervision necessary since the teams regulate and improve their practice through their team meetings (Davidhizar, et al., 2006). Less supervision is a very attractive selling point to any supervisor who juggles multiple responsibilities. Regardless of the career field, the supervisor must be prepared and intentional about supporting their subordinates through collaboration efforts.

Distributed Leadership

The concepts of distributed leadership have been defined in a variety of ways by researchers. The term distributed leadership refers to a system in which a group of people in various roles work together to accomplish a common goal (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). Distributed leadership involves utilizing people in the decision-making process at multiple positions in the school rather than relying only on administrators (Spillane, 2005). Teachers should have frequent interactions with their school leaders and make decisions that impact students during the process (Hamzah & Jamil, 2019). Due to the high accountability that administrators have for student achievement, teachers should have a voice in deciding what actions will impact their students' academic performance (Khadka, 2019). Research suggests that the actions of administrators have an impact on teacher engagement and the academic achievement of students (Hamzah & Jamil, 2019; Khadka, 2019; Weddle, 2022). Teacher quality is influenced by their participation in distributed leadership practices within a professional learning community (Weddle, 2022).

Empirical Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of research conducted in educational settings involving teacher leadership and administrators' role in PLCs. Teacher leaders need job-imbedded professional learning to feel competent and confident about their leadership role among their peers (Abramovich & Miedijensky, 2019). Job-imbedded professional learning can occur locally and informally through paired observations, reflections, and discussions that are relevant to the learner (Buttram and Farley-Ripple, 2016). Observations of collaborative meetings can be used to spark reflection on best practices and is useful for the teacher and supporting administrator (Wilson, 2016). Administrators may not feel they are able to provide quality professional learning for teachers due to their heavy administrative workloads. However, all administrators should be able to utilize protocols and frameworks that will help start the conversation on best practices so team members can reflect upon their current practices (Carpenter, 2015).

District staff developers play a critical role in the implementation of PLC at the local school level (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Administrators may not attend professional learning designed for teachers, which can negatively impact how teachers are supported. District-led professional learning is more effective when administrators and teachers attend the training together so that plans of implementation can be discussed within their own context and roles (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Also, administrators need to attend professional learning that is designed for teachers so they can understand how to distribute leadership to teachers best. Distributed leadership practices are not a form of delegation. Rather, they are a shared responsibility between the leader and the follower (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). Shared responsibility for reaching and learning requires high trust relationships between administrators

and teachers. Lastly, teachers should feel comfortable sharing their mistakes or areas they need to improve upon with their administrators (Zhing, et al., 2016).

Table 1

Overview of Research

Author	Title of Study	Purpose	Results	Conclusions
Abramovich, A., & Miedijensky, S. (2019)	From a guided teacher into leader: A three-stage professional development (TSPD) model for empowering teachers.	The purpose of this study was to examine how a Teacher Leader program influenced ES teacher performance in the classroom and empowered them to be leaders in the ES teacher community.	Teachers described that the leadership program provided training and support that was job-imbedded	The teacher leader model developed and described was deemed successful with some reservation and with specific areas that need to be addressed.
Bredeson, P., & Kelley, C. (2013).	Introduction to the special issue: Distributed instructional leadership as a reform strategy--activating teacher leadership to improve student learning in urban high schools.	Research the importance of teachers as instructional leaders	Several articles and studies were summarized to show the importance of distributed teacher leaders and how they impact professional learning in a formal and informal sense.	The research suggests that there is a strong undercurrent of teacher leadership operating in many urban high schools; the leadership challenge is in recognizing, supporting, and enlarging this important leadership role.
Buttram, J. L., & Farley-Ripple, E. N. (2016)	The role of principals in professional learning communities	To identify how principals shape the adoption and implementation of professional learning communities.	In spite of a common emphasis in districts and schools that PLCs were a vehicle of for improving instruction, data revealed differences in how principals articulated and communicated the role of PLCs in their larger improvement efforts.	High expectations alone are likely to create dysfunctional educational environments for both teachers and students. Ongoing professional development and coaching are needed to build and extend teacher knowledge and skills. Resources are also required to support these improvements.
Carpenter, D. (2015).	School culture and leadership of professional learning communities. International Journal of Educational Management	To explore supportive and shared leadership structures at schools as a function of school culture policies and procedures.	This study concludes that school leaders must provide supportive and shared leadership structures for teachers in order to ensure a positive school culture and effective professional learning communities that impact school improvement. Leaders in schools must work directly with teachers to create policies and procedures that provide teachers the leadership structure to directly impact school improvement through professional learning community collaborative efforts.	Shared leadership is a central component of effective professional learning in collaborative groups such as professional learning communities. Shared leadership provides the venue for continuous improvement and therefore shared values and vision. Ensuring each member of a group of collaborators focusses on common outcomes of the continuous improvement cycle requires commonality in what and how the group functions.
Jones, C. M., & Thessin, R. A. (2017).	Sustaining continuous improvement through professional learning communities in a secondary school. Journal of School Leadership	To see how school leaders effectively develop, implement, and sustain PLCs	The work of building PLCs is not linear and the principal plays a critical role in building a continuous improvement culture	As districts advocate for schools to use the PLC model, the district hold the responsibility to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for principals to be able to effective develop, implement, and sustain PLCs.

Vanblaere & Devos, (2018)	The Role of Departmental Leadership for Professional Learning Communities	As PLCs are seen as promising contexts for teachers' continuous professional development, it is highly relevant to study how department heads can facilitate PLC characteristics in their department.	Teachers' perceptions of both group-oriented and development-oriented departmental leadership are significantly related to the reported frequency of teachers' reflective dialogues	This study suggests that department heads play a critical role in facilitating interpersonal PLC characteristics in departments. As a result, department heads need to be carefully selected and adequately supported.
Wilson, A. (2016).	From professional practice to practical leader: Teacher leadership in professional learning communities	The first purpose was to describe and explain the perceptions and lived experiences of eight high school teachers through their involvement in a PLC. The second purpose was to identify influencing variables that either contributed to or hindered teacher leadership amongst participants.	Teachers perceive shared values and vision and supportive conditions as strongest in their schools. The data also reflects evidence of supportive conditions, such as scheduled meetings, processes, and procedures, within their learning communities. Conversely, participants perceived shared and supportive leadership as limited amongst their administration. The data indicates that shared decision-making is reserved to a few staff members and does not regularly include the entire staff. In addition to a weak perception of shared leadership, the survey also indicates infrequent shared practice amongst participants.	Based on emerging themes in this study, two distinct conclusions regarding teacher leadership in PLCs are identified: (1) cultivation of teacher leadership begins with principal leadership and (2) school culture significantly impacts the sustainability and success of PLCs.
Zheng, Yin, Liu, & Ke, (2016)	Effects of Leadership Practices on Professional Learning Communities: The Mediating Role of Trust in Colleagues	This study explored the relationship between leadership practices and professional learning communities, with a particular focus on the mediating role of trust in colleagues within the context of mainland China.	The results showed that leadership practices and trust in colleagues had positive effects on five factors of professional learning communities, namely a shared sense of purpose, collaborative activity, collective focus on student learning, deprivatized practice, and reflective dialog. Trust in colleagues also mediated the influence of leadership practices on professional learning communities.	In schools with greater trust among colleagues, teachers tend to have more authentic and effective collaboration. Therefore, both principals and teachers need to realize the importance of trust building

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on PLCs in relation to elementary and secondary school administrators and teachers. A PLC is defined as a group of educators who collaborate to improve overall student learning for a common set of students (DuFour, et al., 2006). According to research, PLCs have resulted in considerable gains in student achievement (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Jones & Thessin, 2017; Levine, 2019; Zheng, et al., 2016).

Administrators must be present during PLC sessions to monitor and offer help in order to preserve a collaborative environment (Jones & Thessin, 2017). PLCs are most effective when teachers have autonomy and time to collaborate. Professional development should prioritize collaboration skills and meeting structure (Hansen, et al., 2013). However, in many educational

systems, effectively employing PLCs for school reform might be challenging (Doan & Adams, 2018).

Numerous obstacles confront PLCs when it comes to establishing and maintaining trust (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Year after year, teams can disintegrate due to high or even moderate worker turnover (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). A fresh team must begin from the ground up in order to establish trust and learn how to work. "Some teams struggled to develop a sense of trust and confidence among team members, making it difficult to create a safe environment in which teachers could communicate data indicating that pupils are not performing as expected" (Hansen, 2013).

Additionally, administrators should participate in teacher-led professional development to have a better understanding of how to share leadership effectively among teachers. Distributed leadership is not synonymous with delegation. Rather than that, they are a joint responsibility shared by both leader and follower (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). The purpose of this study was to examine the discussions and interactions of high school assistant principals and course team members working as a PLC.

Chapter 3 describes the action research design and methodology of this study. A description of the Design Team is provided and the researcher’s methods of data collection. The interventions, reliability, and limitations of this study were also addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to examine the discussions and interactions of high school assistant principals and course team members working as a PLC. Action research was utilized to allow the researcher and participants to reflect and modify their interventions in this study continuously. The action research questions for this study are the following:

1. How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school?
2. How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?
3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?

The information in this chapter details the methodology used for this study. It explains why action research was suitable for this research, how participants were selected, and how data were gathered to inform the study. This chapter explains why qualitative research was applied in this study. It also details the type of action research utilized in this study and how it was implemented.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The research for this study was executed using a qualitative design approach. Using multiple forms of gathering qualitative data provided a sufficient amount of information to adequately inform the study. The qualitative data consisted of observation notes from course

team and Design Team meetings, surveys and the participants' responses from semi-structured interviews.

This study aimed to address the literature gap on the dynamics of high school assistant principals with course team members when they collaborate as a PLC. The researcher documented how assistant principals supported course team members while implementing strategies related to student achievement. "Quantitative research attempts to describe outcomes, the "what" (product) of a study; qualitative studies examine the "how" (process) and the "why" questions" (Glanz, 2014, p. 107). The researcher chose to gather qualitative data to answer the research questions in depth since each question is rooted in processes and procedures.

Theoretical Framework

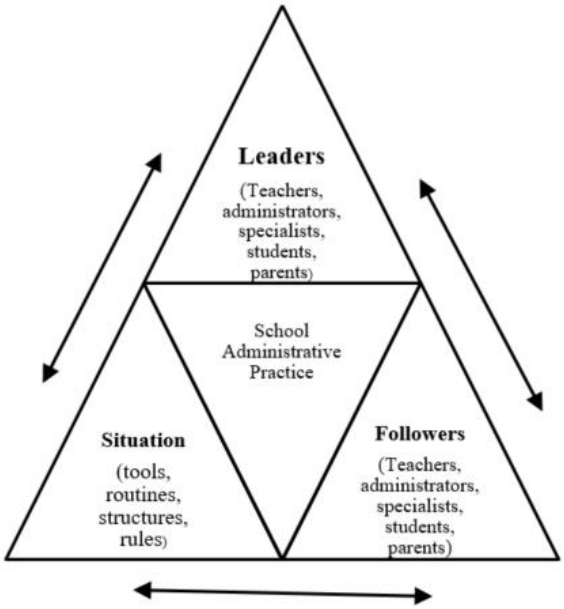
This action research study focused on assistant principals collaborating with course teams. Assistant principals collaborated with teachers in course team meetings to improve instruction, student activities, and assessments depending on the needs of the students. The theoretical framework of distributed leadership set the foundation for the action research cycles in this study. Distributed leadership provided insight into how administrators and teachers collaborated to improve teaching and learning processes in this study.

James Spillane is a leading expert in distributed leadership theory, and he examined how leadership is dispersed between followers and leaders depending on the situation. "Distributed leadership is a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation" (Spillane, 2005, p. 150). A leader can be any staff member who influences the core work of the organization regardless of position or title. A follower is anyone in the organization who is influenced by the leader's activity. The dynamics of leader and follower are interchangeable depending on the situation. A follower can become a leader based

upon the tasks that are performed and their influence. The situation includes all aspects of the context that leaders and followers are working in. The history, culture, environment, policies, tools, routines, and procedures are all examples of situations that leaders and followers must interact and take action. The distributed leadership model depicted in Figure 1 shows the interchangeable dynamic of leaders, followers, and specific examples of situations upon which leaders and followers collaborate.

Figure 2

Distributed Leadership Model (Spillane, 2005)



Distributed leadership theory is a conceptual tool that encourages teachers and administrators to put their position titles aside and be willing to be leaders or followers based on the situation. This theoretical framework highlighted how teachers and administrators interacted and transitioned from leaders to followers and vice versa, depending on the situation.

Distributed leadership was appropriate for this study because the assistant principals' roles transitioned back and forth from leader to follower depending on the situation. By

examining the interchangeable nature of leaders and followers, this framework brings attention to the balancing needs of teacher autonomy and administrative direction. Teachers needed the opportunity to lead, and administrators needed to decipher when it was appropriate to follow their teachers. The next section details the processes and procedures of this study through a conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework

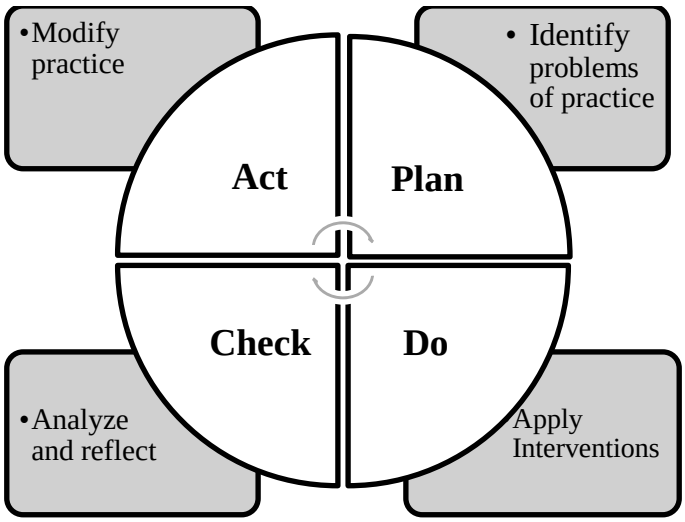
Continuous observation, reflection, and response processes are used in action research to uncover effective solutions to challenges and concerns encountered by people in their daily lives or during periods of crisis (Ortiz Aragón & Stringer, 2020). Prior to this study, the assistant principals and course teams at Gadsen High School followed a design of continuous improvement cycles that originated from W. Edward Deming who is globally recognized as one of the founding fathers of total quality management. The plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle, also known as the Deming cycle, includes a four-stage cycle that focuses on the continual improvement of a product or process (Crowfoot & Prasad, 2017). The Deming's cycle has been used and modified in many sectors and organizations.

The researcher decided to incorporate a similar continuous improvement cycle that coincides with the district's cycle of improvement for collaborative teams. Drawing on the experience of Morgan and Stewart, the action research in this study involved a revolving cycle of learning phases (2017). The spiral of self-reflective processes included the stages of plan, do, check, and act (PDCA). The PDCA cycle is a well-known process originating in manufacturing that has translated into the education field to facilitate continuous improvement (Morgan & Stewart, 2017). The PDCA cycle requires preparation and the use of information to assist in identifying challenges and facilitating data-driven solutions (Crowfoot & Prasad, 2017).

The PDCA cycle was chosen for this study because the Design Team members were accustomed to cyclical improvement processes. The foundation of this study is based on distributed leadership with the notion that administrators and teachers share leadership roles as a PLC. This study examined how assistant principals used distributed leadership to support teachers who desired to impact student achievement. The conceptual framework provided a structure for assistant principals and teachers to collaborate and identify interventions to address the problem of practice. Figure 3 is the action research cycle that was used by the Design Team to prompt reflection and implement interventions and repeated cycles.

Figure 3

Action Research Cycles adapted from Morgan & Stewart (2017)



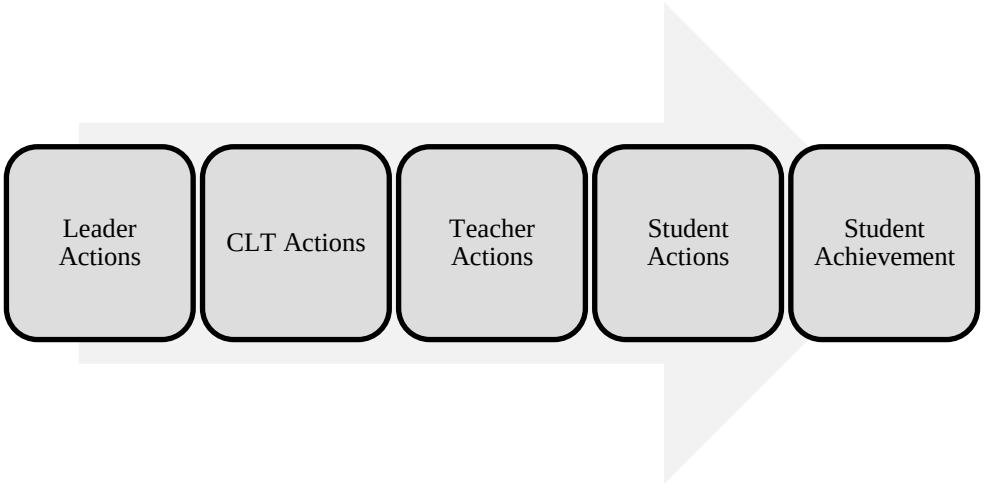
Action Research

Course team (teacher) leaders and assistant principals met to analyze survey data and identified problems of practice. The problems that course team leaders and assistant principals discussed emerged as the focus of intervention planning. The action research structure assisted with identifying interventions that would impact student achievement. “Applied research is conducted chiefly to improve practice by solving a specific problem” (Glanz, 2014, p. 29).

Assistant principals and course team leaders discussed the effectiveness of the interventions while also exploring other areas of concern. Assistant principals were responsible for setting expectations and supporting the work of their course teams. A flowchart provided by the district's staff development office depicts how administrators and teachers can impact student achievement through their collaborative efforts in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Actions for Improved Student Achievement



There are three forms of action research that educators can investigate as areas of concern in their school: individual, collaborative, and schoolwide (Glanz, 2014). The researcher chose to utilize a collaborative action research model that included assistant principals and course team leaders as Design Team members to improve the PLC process within their course teams. Implementation of the PLC model requires teachers and administrators to share information, reflect on practices, and solve problems (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). In essence, collaborative action research is integrated into the fabric of PLCs since they both contain similar elements of the continuous improvement process.

Action research enables educators to improve the efficacy and quality of their practice (Ortiz Aragón & Stringer, 2020). For this study, the action research Design Team engaged in three cycles over a 12-week period. The Design

Team convened and developed interventions prior to the start of each cycle. The Design Team planned interventions for each cycle based on information that was gathered from meetings, observations, surveys, and interviews that occurred throughout the study.

Action Research Design Team

The action research Design Team consisted of the following members in Table 2.

Table 2

Design Team

Position	Amount
Assistant Principal	4
Course Team Leaders	4

The Design Team consisted of individuals who were influential as instructional leaders. The researcher selected the assistant principal and course team lead based on their involvement with leading and supporting a course that requires an EOC. The Design Team sought to learn more about the assistant principals' critical role with supporting course team leaders. Administrators inquired how to effectively support course team leaders and members of the course team.

Action Research Implementation Team

The Implementation Team consisted of four assistant principals and 19 teachers who were assigned to a course that required an EOC. Four assistant principals were responsible for attending and contributing to their assigned course team meeting. The assistant principals were

also responsible for contributing to course team discussions. The 19 teachers involved with course teams were responsible for meeting weekly to discuss teaching strategies, modify practices, and analyze student data. Course team (teacher) leaders were primarily responsible for facilitating their course team as a PLC.

Research Plan and Timeline

The timeline of the study occurred over 12 weeks. The first cycle for the Design Team began in September 2021. Each action research cycle occurred over four weeks, and the final cycle concluded in November 2021. A breakdown of the timeline is detailed in Table 3. It is important to note the Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) assessment rubric is a school-based metric and was not primarily used as a data source for this study. Prior to this study, the CLT tool was commonly used by course teams at Gadsen High School to identify areas of growth within their course team.

Table 3

Action Research Timeline

Timeline	
July 26, 2021	Researcher Invites Participants to Introduction of Study Meeting
August 25, 2021	Researcher Introduces Study to Participants
August - September 2021	Researcher Interview Course Team Leaders and Assistant Principals
September 8, 2021	Researcher Administer CLT Survey to course team members
September 10, 2021	Researcher Analyze CLT Survey Results
September 14, 2021	Design Team Meeting #1: Analyze CLT Assessment Rubric and Interview Results with Design Team and Plan First Cycle of Interventions (Cycle 1 Begins)
September 14 – October 2021	1st Cycle of Action Research – New Testing Platform Course Team Meeting Observations (a)
September 20, 2021	Administer first-course team perception survey digitally (Cycle 1)
September 21, 2021	Training on New Testing Platform
September 21 – October 2021	Teacher create new assessments in testing platform
September 28 – October 2021	Assistant Principals share student performance analysis data in course team meetings

October 20, 2021	Design Team Meeting #2: Analyze responses from the initial course team perception survey and discuss themes from course team observations (Cycle 1 Ends – Cycle 2 Begins)
October 21 – December 2021	2nd Cycle of Action Research – Differentiated Small Group Instruction PD Course Team Meeting Observations (b)
October 25 - December	Instructional Coach conduct Classroom Observations, Feedback, and Lesson Planning with course teams
October 25 – December 2021	District-led Weekly Bite-Size Professional Development
December 9, 2021	Design Team Meeting #3 "Intervention Meeting" – document meeting notes (Cycle 2 Ends – Cycle 3 Begins)
December 10 – January 2022	3rd Cycle of Action Research – Remediation Strategies Course Team Meeting Observations (c)
January 20, 2022	Administer second-course team perception survey (Cycle 3 Ends)
January 25, 2022	Design Team Meeting #4 – Final reflections and conclude action research

Contextual Setting

The action research occurred at Gadsen High School, which is located in a large urban school district in the southeast region of the United States. The district's mission is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards. Gadsen High School started in 2010 as a new school in the district that served students in the county's northern and more affluent areas. In 2014, the superintendent selected Gadsen High School to transition from a traditional model high school into an academy model high school. The shift to an academy model presented logistical challenges for teachers and administrators to focus on PLCs.

In the 2017-18 school year, the principal decided to make a shift towards focusing on course teams operating as PLCs. Over the next three years, improvements were made to the functionality of course teams operating as PLCs, according to the principal. However, there was still room for improvement based on the variation of how course teams operated and the support level they received from assistant principals.

The COVID-19 pandemic spurred in March of 2020, which caused the school to close for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. All students and teachers transitioned to a virtual learning environment until May of 2020. In August of 2020, teachers returned to in-person instruction, but parents were given the option to send their child back to school or remain virtual during the fall and spring semester. Forty percent of students did not physically attend school and remained in a virtual learning environment for the 2020-2021 school year. Over 98% of the students returned back to in-person when this study began in the August of 2021. More details on the context of this study are described in Chapter 4.

Selection

The action research in this study was designed to address the high turnover of course team leaders and low student performance on standardized tests at Gadsen High School. The literature review in Chapter 2 showed that collaborative teams need professional learning and support from their school leaders. This study aimed to examine the dynamics of high school assistant principals and course team members working as a PLC. The researcher obtained the perspectives of course team leaders and assistant principals through observation tools and interviews.

Participants

Four assistant principals participated in this study and were responsible for providing administrative guidance and support to a course team. The researcher collected observation notes, survey responses, and interview data from course team members and assistant principals. The researcher also selected 19 teachers who were members of a course team operating as a PLC. Table 4 provides a numerical list of the participants according to their position and assigned course team

Table 4

Implementation Team

Course	Teachers (includes course team leader)	Assistant Principal
U.S. History	4	1
Biology	6	1
American Literature	5	1
Geometry	4	1

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria were based on obtaining a diverse set of teachers who were members of a course team and taught one of the four core subject areas of Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies. The teachers represented the four core areas and were the primary instructors for the following courses: United States History, Geometry, American Literature, and Biology. The teachers who taught these courses were selected because their students were required to take district standardized assessments. The primary researcher focused on these course teams due to their students' low performance on district assessments. One assistant principal from each of the subjects was selected to gain their perspective on supporting their course team from an administrative perspective.

Data Collection Methods

The qualitative data collection process for this study was designed to ensure that each research question was answered through the collection and analysis of interviews, surveys, and meeting notes. It is important to note that safety protocols were followed due to the safety threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the data collection process, masks were worn properly, and participants practiced social distancing to decrease the spread of the coronavirus. The researcher organized all the data using a coding scheme to identify themes in the study.

The researcher sent an informational zoom meeting invite by email to three assistant principals and 19 teachers involved with the four course teams on July 26, 2021. The researcher discussed the study's intent, protocols, privacy/confidentiality safeguards, as well as potential threats, inconveniences, and advantages. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they desired. Participants who expressed an interest in participating were given a hardcopy and online version of the consent forms to provide their digital signatures. All of the signed forms were compiled digitally, and participants retained the hard copy of the consent form for their records. The researcher was able to gain 100% acceptance from all of the participants to complete the entire duration of the study.

Interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the leaders of the course teams and the assistant principals individually. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to give participants the flexibility to give detailed answers to open-ended questions. The researcher designed each open-response question so that the conversation during the interview would align with the main point of this study. The researcher also provided the action research team with guiding questions that were discussed during Design Team meetings. Table 5 displays each research question and the alignment between the research and interview questions.

Table 5

Research Questions Connections to Interview

Research Questions	Interview Questions
Research Questions 1 How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school?	Individual Interview with Assistant Principals 1. What is your approach to setting goals with your course teams? 2. How do you monitor student progress with your course team? 3. How do you promote student incentives?

	4. Why do you feel it is necessary to have administrative support for course teams operating as PLCs? 5. What type of training do you feel is needed for administrators supporting course teams? 6. How have you supported course teams? Probe: How do you support your course team leaders specifically? 7. What qualities do you look for when selecting a course team lead? 8. What resources do you believe should be available to course teams to operate as a professional learning community? 9. What do you believe should be on the agenda? Probe: What should be discussed during the meeting?
Research Question 2 How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?	Group Discussion Questions with Design Team Members 1. Who should we select as our targeted audience? 2. What data will be used to show there is a need for PD? 3. Who will be involved with delivering the PD? 4. What is the feedback from the targeted audience about the PD? 5. What evidence will be used to prove the PD is effective?
Research Questions 3 How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?	Individual Interviews with Course Team Leaders 1. What motivates you to lead a course team as a PLC? 2. How often and how long do you think your course team should meet on a weekly basis to impact teaching and learning in a positive fashion? And for how long? 3. What does your assistant principal expect from you as a course team leader? 4. What actions do you believe administrators should take to support course teams? 5. What area do you feel your course team needs to improve upon? 6. What are the challenges that hinder your team from collaborating or focusing on student achievement? 7. What keeps you motivated to continue to lead your course team? 8. How do you manage the workload of teaching and leading a course team? 9. How do you build trust among your course team members?

Observation Notes

There were four course teams that participated in the study within the following subject areas: United States History, Biology, Geometry, and American Literature. The participants were chosen from the following criteria:

1. Teacher or administrator of a course team (PLC)
2. Low student performance on state assessment (EOC)
3. Course team representation in each core area (MA, LA, SC, & SS)

The four course teams consisting of 19 teachers met weekly to share teaching practices, analyze student achievement data, adjust instruction, and analyze student work. The researcher attended one course team meeting of every subject area during each cycle and documented observation notes. The observation notes were shared with the course teams and confirmed as objective and accurate by the participants.

The Design Team consisted of four assistant principals (including the researcher) and four course team teacher leaders. The researcher selected the seven Design Team members to participate in this study because they were positional leaders of the four course teams. Three Design Team meetings were held to implement the cycles of action research for this study. Meeting notes from the three Design Team meetings were documented by the researcher, and they were sent to all members of the Design Team to confirm the information was objective and accurate.

Survey

A close-ended response survey was sent digitally to the teachers of the four course teams that participated in this study. This researcher chose to use a close-ended response survey for various reasons. Close-ended response surveys are easier to complete for participants, which may

help increase participation. Secondly, this survey was administered twice, so the analysis process was seamless when comparing the first and second set of responses. The survey responses were based on a Likert scale, and the data was analyzed qualitatively. The information provided the perspective and attitudes of all 20 teachers participating in this study's Implementation Team.

Interventions

The selected interventions were based upon the discussion from the Design Team and the literature review of distributed leadership theory and PLC implementation. Data from local surveys and interviews were also a contributing factor to the selection of interventions. The Design Team selected interventions that included course team teachers using a common testing platform, professional development on implementing differentiated small group instruction and providing low-performing students with remediation. The interventions listed in Table 6 show the intervention, target group, and frequency.

Table 6

Intervention Activities

Intervention Activity	Target Group	Frequency
Common Testing Platform	Course Team Teachers and Assistant Principals	Monthly
Differentiated Small Group Instruction Professional Development	Course Team Teachers	Monthly
Student Remediation	Course Team Teachers and Assistant Principal	Monthly

Data Analysis Method

Glanz (2014) explains that data analysis, “can also be applied during, and not only after, data collection. The purpose of this initial stage in data analysis is to take all the data that have been collected and organize and separate them into workable units” (p. 207). The study analyzed

observation notes, survey responses, and interview data. Codes were identified immediately after data was collected from observation notes, surveys, interviews, and meetings. Analyzing data during the study provided useful information to the Design Team while interventions were being selected. The researcher highlighted quotes from meetings and interviews that were relevant to the research questions and theoretical framework. Survey responses and observation notes were analyzed and coded into single words or phrases.

Glanz notes, “Once you are familiar with the data and have taken preliminary notes that identify keywords, phrases, or events that seem relevant, you are ready to generate categories or themes that might emerge from the data” (p. 207). Qualitative data that were collected were coded into descriptive words or phrases as the researcher was conducting the study and were categorized into themes. The most frequently used technique for identifying themes is repetition, which is based on the notion that if a concept recurs across transcripts, it is usually a theme (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Researchers use descriptive coding to efficiently categorize qualitative data in a single word or brief phrase (Saldana, 2015). The data were coded manually for this study without the use of computer applications that automatically develop categories. Once all the data was collected, the researcher analyzed the data multiple times to create additional codes and themes based on the holistic information.

Thematic Analysis

The coding process allowed the researcher to identify themes for analysis purposes. The researcher utilized a thorough analysis of the themes illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

Phases of Thematic Analysis adapted from Nowell et al., (2017)

Phases of Thematic Analysis	Means of Establishing Trustworthiness
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data	• Prolong engagement with data • Triangulate different data and collection modes • Document theoretical and reflective thoughts • Document thoughts about potential codes/themes • Store raw data in well-organized archives • Keep records of all observation notes and transcripts
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	• Researcher triangulation • Field Notes • Use of coding framework • Audit trail of code generation
Phase 3: Searching for themes	• Researcher triangulation • Diagramming to make sense of the connections • Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	• Researcher triangulation • Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	• Researcher triangulation • Documentation of theme naming
Phase 6: Producing the report	• Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient details • Thick descriptions of context • Description of the audit trail • Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

Triangulation methods were used to provide multiple data sets to assist in providing answers to all three research questions. Collecting data using triangulation may increase the validity of data by providing multiple data sources (Glanz, 2014). Each research question was

linked to multiple data collection sets to solidify the study was valid. Data from the observation notes, interviews, and surveys provided the collection of qualitative data. Table 8 depicts the variety of data that were triangulated.

Table 8

Research Questions Connections to Qualitative Methods

Research Questions	Qualitative Methods
1. How do administrators conceptualize their ability to support the course team meeting and PLC implementation in one large suburban high school?	• Opening Interviews with Assistant Principals • Action Research Design Team Meeting Observations Notes
2. How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?	• Action Research Design Team Meeting Observation Notes • Collaborative Learning Team Survey
3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?	• Course Team Leader Interviews • Course Team Meeting Notes Observations • Action Research Design Team Meeting Notes Observations • Perception Survey

The researcher clarified to all participants that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they would not be subjected to any retaliation if they chose to withdraw or opt-out. The researcher informed teachers that they were able to refuse to participate or stop without incurring any consequences. Participants in the study were informed by the researcher that the information they supplied through observations, interview responses, and perception surveys would have no impact on their job or performance evaluation. The researcher indicated that participants may be honest without fear of repercussions to ensure that their input was accurate and reliable.

Some questions could make teachers feel uncomfortable since some items prompted about their fellow teachers and supervisors. Participants were told that they could skip any questions they did feel comfortable answering. Staff who participated in the study were able to access the study results, but there were not to be any identifiable results. Individual responses from the questionnaire were not shared with others. Every interviewee was able to verify their statements were accurately depicted in the transcription notes of the study. Research participants verified their survey responses and approved the observation notes via member checking. Member checking allowed interviewed participants to confirm the researcher's data was accurate and a true depiction of their expressions. The purpose of "member checking" is to decrease the amount of subjectivity and bias from the primary researcher (Stringer, 2014).

Subjectivity Statement

As an assistant principal at Gadsen High School for seven years, the researcher was a participant in the study as an administrator supporting the U.S. History course team. Previously, the researcher taught health and math to elementary, middle, and high school students. During his time at Gadsen High School, the researcher was responsible for evaluating the Social Studies Department. The researcher had attended numerous professional development sessions pertaining to the topic of high school course teams operating as PLCs. Members of the design and Implementation Team were colleagues of the researcher for several years, so it was imperative that he utilized observation tools that prompted objectivity.

Field notes are subject to observer bias and subjectivity, it is highly recommended to record data anecdotally without drawing conclusions or making value judgments (Glanz, 2014). As a result, observations are inherently limited and cannot be used exclusively for data collection (Glanz, 2014). Due to the limitations of observation notes, the researcher triangulated data

sources to answer each research question, which improved the validity of the findings even further. Field notes were used during course team observations that occurred each week by all four course teams. The researcher attended at least one course team meeting each week. The field notes provided documentation about the agenda items and discussions that occurred during course team meetings.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that the researcher noted. The action research study occurred for 12 weeks. Observing changes over an extended period of time would help assess the study's long-term impact. The 12-week schedule was necessary to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral program. A longer-term action research would have exceeded time constraints.

A further limitation of this study is that prior to the beginning of the study, the school's leadership made attempts to improve the PLC model with course teams. The assistant principals and course team leaders planned and implemented their own interventions before and during the research study. The researcher was also a participant in this study. The perspective and influence of the researcher may have impacted the data that was collected. Lastly, the context of the study took place in a large suburban school district. The findings and implications may not apply to similar or rural settings. Further details of this study’s limitations is presented in Chapter 6.

Chapter Summary

The Design Team sought to learn more about the critical role assistant principals play in supporting course teams. Administrators need to know how to effectively support course team leaders. There is a low response to teacher leadership, so we need to identify the causes of

disengaged staff at our school. Teachers who are accustomed to being told what to do without having a voice are more likely to be disengaged from their work (Smylie, 2018).

The insight gained from this research is primarily beneficial to teachers and administrators who are implementing the PLC model at their schools. However, continuous improvement models can transcend many work environments and career fields. Organizational leaders will be able to reference this research to inform their continuous improvement process.

This chapter detailed how the data were collected and analyzed for this action research study. Action research was chosen as a qualitative method for this study because of the constant reflection and continuous action that occurs during the intervention process. Teachers and administrators collaborated to identify barriers, act on solutions, and reflect on the outcomes. The data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and observation notes were useful to inform this study.

The interviews with course team members were primarily used to gain their perspectives of teacher collaboration and how assistant principals support them through the PLC process. The interviews with the assistant principals were primarily used to understand how they support course teams operating as a PLC. Observation data were used to capture the discussions of the Design Team and course team meetings to further inform this study. Trending patterns were identified in the collected data that will inform how assistant principals can improve their support of course teams that operate as PLCs. The next chapter will present the findings of the study at Gadsen High School.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE

The administrative team at Gadsen High School analyzed student achievement data on state standardized assessments in various content areas. The administrators identified four specific course teams that needed interventions to improve student achievement. It was difficult to retain teachers as course team leaders, and the level of support that course teams received from their assistant principal varied. Administrators came to a consensus that collaboration among course team members and assistant principals needed to improve. Teachers' and assistant principals' variant levels of collaboration were identified as the highest need for improvement. The Design Team focused on how four assistant principals supported course teams while the Implementation Team applied interventions to raise student achievement. This study was designed and implemented by action research team members in a large suburban school district. This chapter provides a detailed context of the study and the interviews, Design Team meetings, interventions, observations, and survey responses.

The Context

Gadsen High School started in 2010 as a new school in the district that served students in the county's northern and more affluent areas. In 2014, the superintendent selected Gadsen High School to transition from a traditional model high school into an academy model high school. Academy high schools were designed to prepare students for the workforce by focusing on project-based learning activities and the completion of career pathways for students. Teachers were responsible for creating student projects that were tied to students' career interests. Collaboration among teachers occurred in cross-curricular teams, and those teams did not often

collaborate as course teams based on their content areas. Teachers' classrooms were assigned based on their academy affiliation instead of their department. The separation among departments caused a barrier to teacher collaboration among course team members.

Assistant principals were assigned to evaluate teachers in various subject areas that were members of the same academy rather than being assigned to evaluate a department that consisted of the same subject area. Course teams meetings were not built into the schedule during the school day, so teachers had to meet before/after school or whenever they could find time to meet. Teachers were accustomed to teaching 50-minute periods and seeing their students daily to teaching 90-minute block periods and not seeing the same students each day. In summary, the shift to an academy model presented many challenges for teachers and administrators to focus on PLC work within course teams and increasing student achievement on state standardized assessments.

In the 2017-18 school year, the principal decided to shift towards focusing on course teams operating as PLCs. The academy model structures of block schedules and organizing academic teams based on the academy affiliation were decreased. Three of the five days each week were non-block days so that teachers could see all their students more frequently throughout the week. Course team meetings were built-in during teachers' planning periods. Teachers' classrooms were assigned nearby throughout the building based upon their department instead of their academy affiliation. Assistant principals were assigned to evaluate teachers within the same department to focus on supporting the implementation of PLCs within course teams.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic erupted, forcing the school to close for the duration of the 2019-2020 academic year. Teachers instructed students in a virtual learning

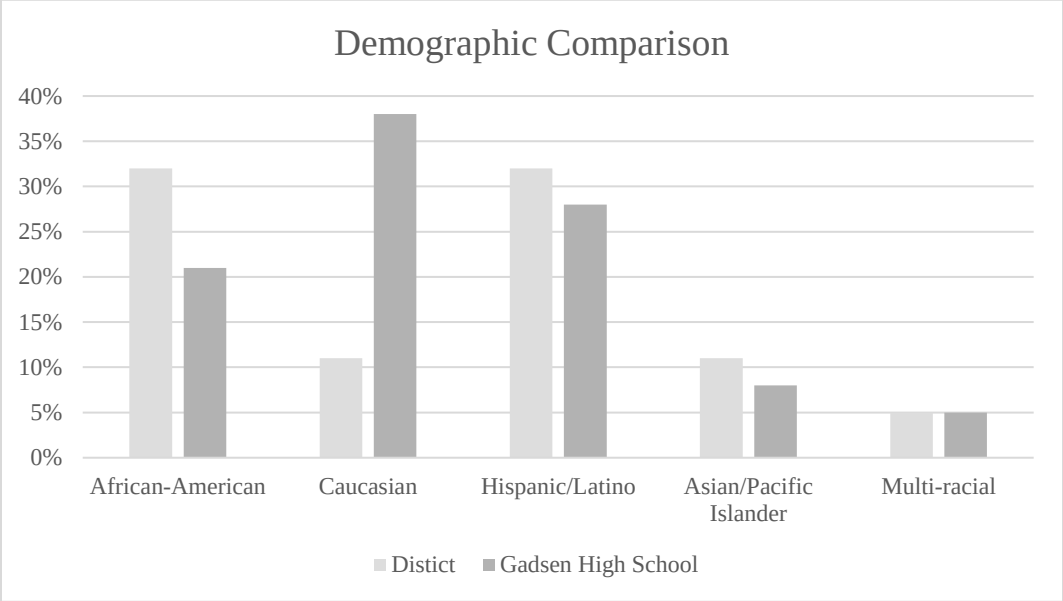
environment until May of 2020. Teachers returned to in-person instruction in August 2020, but parents were offered the option of sending their child back to school or remaining virtual during the fall and spring semesters. For the whole 2020-2021 school year, 40% of students did not attend school physically and remained in a virtual learning environment. When this study began in August 2021, almost 98 percent of students returned in person.

In the 2021-22 school year, Gadsen High School remained an academy model high school. However, the administration adjusted several structures over the years to meet the demands of an academy model pertaining to students' soft skills while also supporting high accountability of student achievement with state standardized assessments. According to the principal, improvements were made to the functionality of course teams operating as PLCs. However, there was still room for improvement based on the variation of how course teams operated and the support level they received from assistant principals. There was also an issue with retaining course team leaders from each year. The administrators believed that these areas of improvement were hurting student achievement.

In the 2021-22 academic year, there were over 180,000 students enrolled among 140 schools, including 80 elementary, 29 middle, 23 high, two charter, and seven specialty schools. The racial and ethnic distribution across the district was 32% African American, 32% Hispanic/Latino, 21% Caucasian, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% are Multiracial. Figure 5 shows the student demographic comparison of the district to Gadsen High School.

Figure 5

Demographic Data

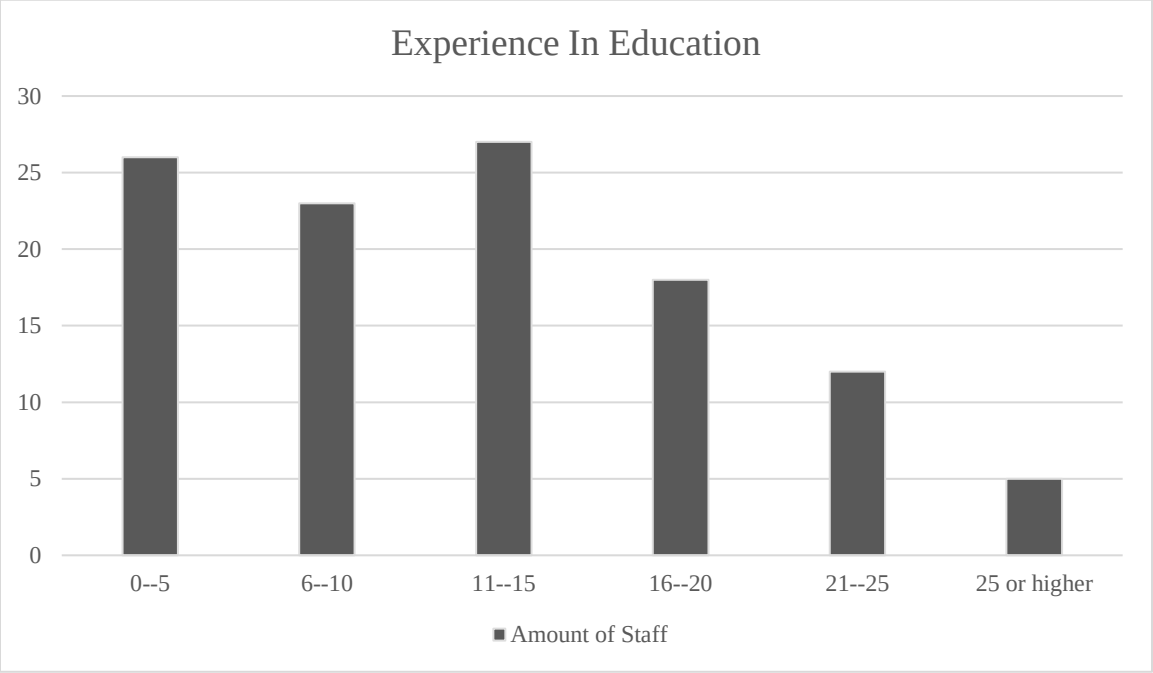


Local Demographics

The Gadsen school community consisted of three elementary schools and one middle school that shared a focus on project-based learning. Gadsen High School had approximately 2,000 students, and the student enrollment was projected to increase significantly due to the construction of new subdivisions in the area. In the 2021-22 academic year, the student demographics at Gadsen High School was 41% White, 28% Hispanic, 19% Black, 7% Asian, and 5% Multi-racial with a free-reduced lunch (FRL) rate of 33%. Ninety percent of the teacher were retained from the previous academic year and over 70% of the teaching staff held a Master's Degree or higher. The average number of years of teacher experience is outlined in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Staff Experience



At the time of the study, the administrative team consisted of seven assistant principals, athletic director, and principal. The assistant principals had worked together for five years, and the principal had served for four years.

District Accountability

The district targeted Gadsen High School as a school in need of significant improvement in the area of student performance on high-stakes assessments. District-level executive leadership relied on an internal measure called the Weighted School Assessment (WSA). The WSA ranks all schools in the district based on student performance in combination with the schools' FRL population. Based on the WSA score algorithms, schools with a low FRL population are expected to perform better on district and state assessments than schools who

have a higher FRL population. In the 2020-2021 school year, Gadsen High School was number 18 out of 19 schools when ranked by the WSA but was the fifth wealthiest school.

Researcher

One of the primary researcher's responsibilities as an assistant principal was leading the PLC process for 12 high-stake course teams. The researcher classified high-stakes course teams as any course team requiring students to take a standardized assessment. The results were reflected on the state and district's school accountability structure. Each core subject had three course teams that administered a high-stakes district and/or state assessment. The master schedule was structured to ensure all high-stake course teams had common planning so they were able to meet at least once a week for 45 minutes. The researcher collaborated with the administrative team to establish clear expectations for all course teams to follow in their weekly meetings.

The researcher was responsible for facilitating a monthly meeting with all course team teacher leaders and assistant principals to research best practices, share ideas, and discuss challenges with implementing the PLC model. The researcher facilitated course team lead meetings for four years and collaborated with district personnel to select professional learning for all course team members at Gadsen High School. The researcher was responsible for evaluating teachers in the Social Studies Department and supporting the U.S. History, World History, and Economics course teams. The researcher would also periodically observe course team meetings in other subject areas to evaluate how other teams collaborated.

Evidence of the Problem

The assistant principals were responsible for overseeing course teams at Gadsen High School. Assistant principals verbalized that there is ambiguity about the best methods to support

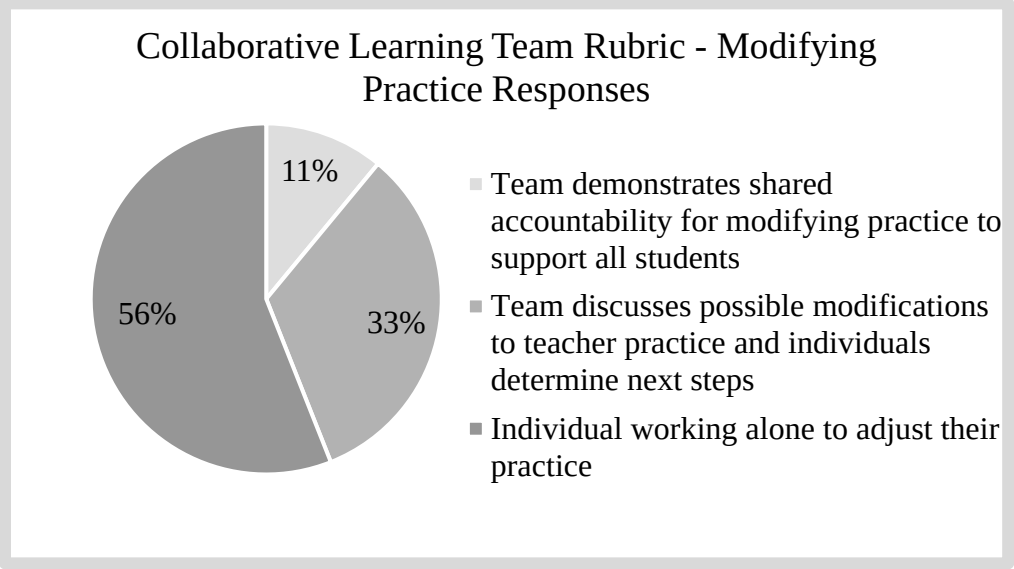
course team leaders. Within the district, each school handled the implementation of PLCs differently, so administrators at Gadsen High School assisted with identifying problems of practice at their school. The district's training was optional, often broad, and overly philosophical based on the feedback the assistant principals provided from Gadsen High School. Multiple people are involved with the PLC process in a high school, making it more difficult to implement consistently. The following paragraphs refer to tables and figures showing evidence of variation in teacher practice, low student performance, and school climate compared to the district.

Survey Data

Course team members submitted a Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) self-assessment survey that provided information on how their team collaborated as a PLC. The CLT self-assessment survey contains four components that pertain to essential qualities of collaborative teams working as a PLC: structure, accountability, norms, and continuous quality improvement. Within each component were several sub-components for which teachers rated their team level as a group of individuals, collaborative group getting work done, or a collaborative learning team. For this study, teachers selected the level of collaboration that aligned with their perspective by identifying descriptive observable and measurable actions. Figure 7 shows the variation in responses from teachers at Gadsen High School regarding how teachers are influenced by collaborative meetings to modify their teaching practices.

Figure 7

Teacher Survey Responses to Modifying Practice



Another survey was sent to course team leaders to solicit feedback for the administrative team. The survey requested responses to two items: 1) What training or support do you need to improve as a course team lead? 2) Please offer feedback as to how we can improve our Instructional Team. The 12 course team leaders provided varied responses to the first question, including seeing models of effective course teams, strategies to provide enrichment and remediation, fewer non-course team meetings, and more project-based learning strategies. The second question also elicited varied responses such as reviewing more data and best practices, including more teachers in decision-making, providing strategies for meetings as a PLC in course team meetings, and making PLCs a part of the staff culture.

The teaching staff completed a climate survey and the results were compared to other high schools within the district. The 2019-2020 staff climate survey results indicated that Gadsen

High School was below the district average. Gadsen High School scored an average of 3.31 compared to the district average of 3.47. The survey responses were based on Likert scale, and the maximum point value for each response was four points. Scores below the district average reflected a need for improvement based upon the direction of district personnel. Staff climate can have an impact on student achievement and teacher collaboration. The climate survey required the staff to answer 24 questions. Two items provided insight that was specific to the climate of PLCs. The two items that the researcher analyzed were: 1) I have been provided with the professional development necessary to teach the AKS, and 2) the focus of our school is teaching and learning. Table 9 showed that Gadsen High School is below the district average by 4.3 points on item 1 and 9.4 points on item 2.

Table 9

Climate (Likert) Survey Results

Item	Level	Count	Don't Know/Not Applicable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I have been provided with professional development necessary to teach the AKS	Gadsen HS	123	13.8%	1.6%	4.9%	30.9%	48.8%
	District	3,317	10.9%	.9%	2.4%	32.6	53.1%
2. The focus at our school is teaching and learning	Gadsen HS	123	0%	1.6%	2.4%	43.9%	52%
	District	3,299	1.4%	.8%	2.4%	34%	61.4%

Student Achievement Data

The WSA is an accountability measure for all the local schools in the district where this research was conducted. Schools were given an overall score and rank comparisons to other

schools in the district. Gadsen High School ranks 18 out of 19 high schools in the district on the WSA in the 2020-2021 school year. Student performance in context attributes to 70% of the WSA score. The expected level of performance is based on the free-reduced lunch population. Table 10 displays each student performance indicator that is measured, and the actual performance is measured against the Full Point category that was set by the district.

Table 10

Weighted School Assessment

Weighted School Assessment Indicator	Student Performance in Context Indicator	No Points	Performance Standard	Full Points	Max Points	Points Earned
EOC 9th Grade LA	71.7	65.8	72.8	79.7	5.0	2.1
EOC 11th Grade LA	55.5	54.9	61.3	67.8	5.0	0.2
EOC Geometry	54.4	53.8	62.0	70.2	5.0	0.2
EOC Biology	62.1	56.8	64.2	71.7	5.0	1.8
EOC US History	54.2	55.4	63.7	72.0	5.0	0.0
EOC Economics	61.5	57.3	65.6	73.9	5.0	1.3

There were six EOC subjects that had a maximum value of five points each on the WSA. After the Graduation Rate and AP/IB/DE Performance, EOC subjects had the highest point category. The EOC performance indicators accounted for up to 30 points; Gadsen High School accumulated 5.6 points in this category. Teachers who taught an EOC course met weekly as a PLC to share data and adjust instruction and learning material based on the needs of the students. Low student performance may be an indicator that students are not being exposed to enough quality instruction, learning activities, and assessments that are aligned to the standards.

Academic Priorities

The principal of Gadsen High School provided a targeted support plan to the assistant principals supporting course teams. The administrative team at Gadsen High School discussed the areas that need improvement.

- The overall PLC must function at a high level. Individual and course team planning must effectively align the district standards, assessment of student learning, and instruction so that students create work that is at the level of rigor expected at the proficient and distinguished levels of the standards.
- There must be consistency of practice across classrooms. Teachers must have content knowledge in their curriculum that matches the level of rigor expected at the proficient and distinguished levels of learning of the district standards.
- The instructional leadership capacity of teacher leaders and administrators must be consistent and reliable. Administrators and teacher leaders must effectively monitor individual and course team planning that leads to continuous improvement in student learning as measured by local, district and state assessments.

The focus plan outlined areas of improvement by first identifying the gaps in student achievement per subject. The administrators at Gadsen High School strategically planned to raise student achievement by focusing on instructional leadership and implementing the PLC model.

The Researcher

During this study, the researcher served as an assistant principal with the primary responsibility of evaluating the Social Studies Department and facilitating meetings with course team leaders. He had six years of teaching experience and 10 years of administrative experience. Gadsen High School was the location of this study and was where the researcher served as

assistant principal for seven years. Aside from teacher evaluations, he was in charge of 12th-grade student discipline and graduation rates at Gadsen High School. He worked with members of the action research team for several years prior to the start of this study. Prior to the study, assistant principals assisting course teams faced issues due to the academy model, and several teacher leaders decided to step down from being a course team lead.

The Design Team

The Design Team consisted of eight members, including four assistant principals (including the researcher) and four teachers. The researcher selected the assistant principals who were previously responsible for supporting a course team. Teachers were selected based on their position as course team leaders. Each Design Team member was requested individually to participate in the study and all accepted with the understanding they could remove themselves at any moment for any personal or professional reason. The Design Team had its initial meeting on September 23, 2022. The following paragraphs contain more in-depth information about the Design Team members involved in this study.

Sarah Clayborne

Sarah Clayborne served as a Biology teacher and course team lead during this study. Mrs. Clayborne has taught for five years and had been the course team leader for three years. During the first two years of her teaching career, she taught sections of co-taught special education Biology. She was also the varsity girls' soccer Head Coach. Mrs. Clayborne decided to become a course team lead early in her career. She felt obligated to lead the Biology because she was asked by her assistant principal.

Timothy Johnson

Timothy Johnson was the course team leader for U.S. History during this study. Mr. Johnson had taught for four years and has served as course team leader for two and half years. Throughout his teaching career, he has enjoyed teaching honors sections of U.S. History. Mr. Johnson also served as an assistant varsity baseball coach and head coach for junior varsity. He decided to become a course team leader because he was driven to improve the learning materials for all students in U.S. History courses. Mr. Johnson is interested in obtaining a leadership position outside of the classroom at some point shortly.

Rachel Ellington

Rachel Ellington was the course team leader for Geometry during this study. Mrs. Ellington had taught for 11 years and has served as course team leader for seven years. During her teaching career, she has taught other courses such as Algebra, Statistics, and Pre-Calculus. Mrs. Ellington does not coach and enjoys spending time with her family after the school day. She decided to become a course team leader because there were many personnel changes in the Math Department, and she had previous experience as a teacher leader. Mrs. Ellington stated that she enjoyed learning new teaching strategies through professional development and sharing ideas with her colleagues.

Bethany Gordon

Bethany Gordon was the course team leader for American Literature during this study. Mrs. Gordon had taught for 20 years and has served as course team leader for two years. Mrs. Gordon taught middle school for 16 years and high school for four years. She decided to be the course team lead for 9th-grade literature during her first year as a high school teacher because she was asked by the department chair and the principal. She stepped down course team lead

after not feeling supported by the administration. Two years later she decided to become a course team leader for a different grade level after feeling more supported by the administration.

Kelley Metcalf

Kelley Metcalf was an assistant principal who supported the Geometry course team during this study. Mrs. Metcalf taught Spanish for five years before she became an assistant principal for 21 years. She has 10 years of experience supporting course teams. She also had experience with working at the district level as a curriculum leader for three years. Mrs. Metcalf has served as an assistant principal at Gadsen High School for three years. In addition to overseeing the Math and World Languages Department, her primary responsibilities as an administrator were leading the English Language Learners (ELL) program, school-wide professional development, and new teacher induction.

Tamika Strahan

Tamika Strahan was an assistant principal who supported the Biology course team during this study. Mrs. Strahan taught Biology for five years before she became an assistant principal for 15 years. She had 10 years of experience supporting course teams. Mrs. Strahan has served as an assistant principal for 10 years at Gadsen High School. In addition to overseeing the Science Department, her primary responsibilities as an administrator were student discipline for 11th grade, and testing.

Mary Samford

Mary Samford was an assistant principal who supported the Language Arts course team during this study. Mrs. Samford taught Language Arts before becoming an assistant principal for 15 years. Similar to the other assistant principal, she also has 10 years of experience supporting course teams. Mrs. Samford had served as an assistant principal for nine years at Gadsen High

School. In addition to overseeing the Language Arts Department, her primary responsibilities as an administrator were building the master schedule, special education, and managing the curriculum.

Introduction of Study (August 25, 2021)

The initial meeting with participants in this study was held in a digital format to ensure everyone could attend or view the recording of the meeting presentation. The purpose of the meeting was to present the problem of practice, research questions, intervention cycles, and members of the Design and Implementation Team. Participants understood that they would be interviewed, observed, and questioned. The Design Team met three times during the 12-week cycle to brainstorm new interventions for this study. The Design Team agreed that they need to come to a consensus on which interventions prior to the implementation process. All participants were assured by the researcher that their participation in the study would have no bearing on their job evaluation.

Design Team Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used by the researcher to give participants the flexibility to give detailed answers to open-ended questions. The researcher interviewed three assistant principals and four course team leaders individually during the months of August and September of 2022, prior to the initial Design Team meeting. The assistant principals and course team leaders were Design Team members who were directly involved with the course team members that participated in this study. The researcher used a recording device to transcribe their responses. Following each interview, the researcher manually coded their transcripts and themes were identified.

There were four major themes that surfaced from the interviews with the assistant principals. They mentioned the importance of their actions outside of the course team meetings, providing teachers with additional time, applicable professional learning, and trust is built through transparency and multiple positive interactions. Their actions outside of course team meetings included: holding course team members accountable, communicating clear expectations, sharing student performance data, and advocating for course team leaders.

Providing course teams with additional time to collaborate was expressed with the rationale that course team members are expected to constantly modify and adjust their instructional practices as part of their PLC, but that requires a significant amount of time. The responses from the assistant principals about professional learning indicated that all training should be applicable to their work. They expressed that training should include the best methods of supporting PLCs and utilizing tools that assist course team collaboration. Advocating for course team leaders was mentioned because the assistant principals felt that their role was more pivotal than the department chair and they are not usually compensated for their additional duties as team facilitators.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with course team leaders who were responsible for facilitating course team meetings in this study. Before the initial Design Team meeting, the researcher interviewed four course team leaders individually during the month of August 2021. Four themes emerged from the discussions that pertained to accountability, time, remediation, and shared responsibilities. Course team members mentioned that their assistant principal should consistently attend their meetings and hold teachers accountable by monitoring what they agreed upon as a course team. Time was another reoccurring theme that the course team leaders expressed as a hurdle. They discussed how the lack of additional planning time was

a hurdle, and unfinished tasks fell solely on the course team leader. The course team leaders elaborated on remediation strategies as a point of improvement for their course teams. They mentioned the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how learning gaps have increased due to students being in virtual learning environments for an extended period of time. They felt transparency with data builds their collective efficacy and trust by addressing low student performance, analyzing data results, and sharing ideas on instructional strategies. Lastly, sharing the workload among all course team members was mentioned to retain course team leaders and build a collective sense of ownership among course team members.

Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) Survey

Course team members completed the CLT survey on September 10, 2021. The CLT survey was a self-assessment tool that provided a response rubric for each statement. Respondents selected the appropriate rubric rating that was the most accurate depiction of their course teams functionality. The results from the CLT survey showed that the majority of the course teams reported that they were functioning at a high collaborative level. Ninety percent of course team indicated that they believed that their actions as a course team impact student achievement. However, the survey revealed that 47% of teachers indicated that their course team did not have a sense of shared accountability to modify their practice to support all students. At the initial Design Team meeting on September 14, 2021, the researcher shared the CLT survey results to guide their selection of the first intervention.

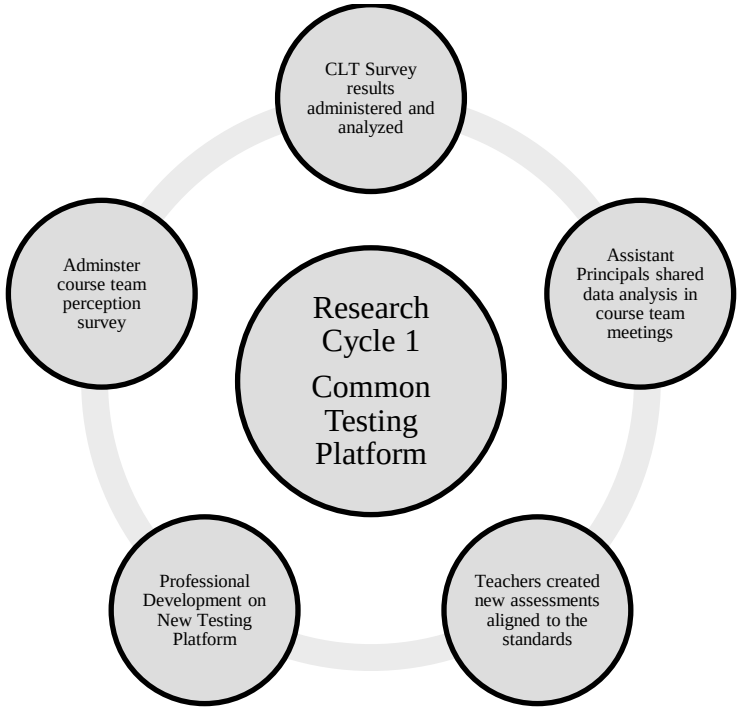
Research Cycle 1

The Design Team met on September 14, 2021, to decide on an intervention for the first action research cycle based on the results of the CLT survey, literature review, and interview responses from the assistant principals and course team leaders. The Design Team agreed that

the first intervention was transitioning all course teams to a common testing platform. The new testing platform allowed course team members to see everyone's student performance data and the assistant principal could share analysis reports that teachers discuss in course team meetings. Figure 8 illustrates the activities in the first action research cycle.

Figure 8

Research Cycle 1



Design Team Meeting #1 (September 14, 2021)

The initial Design Team meeting occurred during an asynchronous digital school day, allowing staff to meet during school hours. The first discussion by the Design Team marked the first cycle of the planning phase by overviewing the problem of practice, research questions, and intervention cycle. All the Design Team members were present, and everyone reviewed the results from the CLT survey and interview responses that were administered during the first two weeks of September 2021.

The assistant principals mentioned that having multiple testing platforms used by various course teams presents challenges for them in navigating the various features. Design Team members discussed the testing platforms lacking transparency with student performance data. The researcher also shared the common responses from the course team leaders, who expressed the same challenge of not being able to have access to their course team members' student achievement data. The course team leaders expressed that it is difficult to have meaningful data discussions in course team meetings when they are not able to see each other data. The Design Team agreed that the lack of shared accountability among course team members may be due to the lack of transparency with student achievement data from common assessments. The Design Team members decided to implement the first intervention cycle by using a common testing platform for all course teams. A Design Team member stated that utilizing a common testing platform for all course teams would allow administrators to view all course team data in all content areas to identify best practices based on student achievement data. The assistant principals and teachers attended professional development about how to navigate the new testing platform. Assistant principals were tasked with ensuring laptops were available for teachers to use with their students in the classroom for assessment purposes. Lastly, the researcher presented the course team perception survey questions for Design Team members to view and agree upon as a method of data collection to inform the second cycle of interventions. Design Team members ensured that the perception survey included questions that would gauge administrative support, peer collaboration, trust, collective efficacy, and focus on student learning. Several items were added to the perception survey based on the feedback from the Design Team.

September 20 – Initial Course Team Perception Survey

The researcher administered the course team perception survey to all the course team members (except course team leaders) in this study. The survey contained 27 questions, and the responses were on a Likert scale. The responses from the survey indicated that a small percentage of course team members felt that course team leaders were not distributing the workload of course team actions equally. This data set contrasted with the interviews that revealed course team leaders feeling overwhelmed with their duties as a course team leader.

September 21 - New Testing Platform Training

The Implementation Team attended one training session led by the local school technology coordinator. Assistant principals were instructed on how to share data analysis reports with course teams. Course team members were shown how to create and administer assessments that were aligned to the district's standards and rigor level. It was determined that course team members would use the new testing platform on their upcoming unit test.

Course Team Meeting Observations

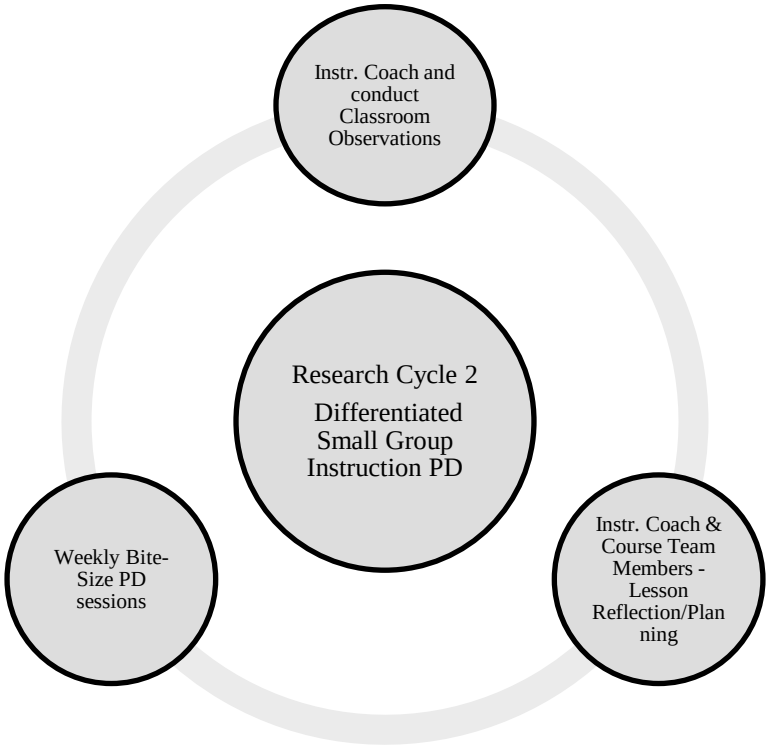
During the first action research cycle, the researcher attended four course team meetings in each subject area (Geometry, U.S. History, Biology, & American Literature). Observation notes from the course team meetings indicated that course team members valued the transparency the new testing platform provided, but it was time-consuming to get acclimated to the new software. Course team members were observed discussing student performance data on common assessments. The researcher noted that course team discussions were student-centered, and teachers collaborated on re-addressing standards that revealed low student performance.

Research Cycle 2

The results from the course team perception surveys and themes from course team meeting observations were discussed by the Design Team at the second Design Team meeting. There was also a discussion about the impact of the first intervention cycle. The Design Team agreed that the common testing platform provided transparency with student achievement data and therefore enriched the discussions in course team meetings. To further impact student achievement, the team agreed to undergo professional development on differentiated small group instruction as the second intervention. Figure 9 displays the activities that occurred during the second action research cycle.

Figure 9

Research Cycle 2



Design Team Meeting #2 (October 20, 2021)

The second Design Team meeting concluded the first intervention cycle and began the second cycle. The researcher started the check phase of the first intervention by opening a discussion about the impact of using a common testing platform for all course teams during the first intervention cycle. It was mentioned by several course team leaders there were some challenges during the transition phase of using a new testing platform for their course team. Timothy Johnson provided a statement on behalf of his U.S. History course team:

> The new common assessment platform is not the easiest to give students immediate feedback such as missed questions. Since all classes have to use the same test code, we need to leave the testing window open an extra week or so. From my understanding, the new testing platform does not allow students to view questions missed until the test officially closes. With the amount of content that we cover, reviewing test questions a week later is nearly impossible.

Sarah Clayborne reported out for the Biology course team by mentioning that the new testing platform takes a lengthy amount of time to enter assessment items and that the limited access to laptops to administer the assessments was challenging. Bethany Gordon shared feedback from the American Literature course team by expressing that the new testing platform was not user-friendly to navigate and the assessment bank of questions did not align with the district assessments. Rachel Ellington from the Geometry course team stated:

> The challenge has been more "technical" in the respect of finding devices, printing tests, scanning answer documents. The actual new testing platform contains many item bank questions that are helpful, but generating the tests is sometimes frustrating for the teachers.

The assistant principals also expressed that the challenges have been the logistics such as organizing laptops to distribute. Teachers are responsible for printing assessments and scanning answer documents when laptops are not available. The researcher shifted the discussion towards the benefits of using a common testing platform for all course teams. The assistant principal supporting the Geometry course team, Kelley Metcalf stated:

> The new testing platform helps keep our team aligned with a common goal for instruction and assessment. It provides immediate data feedback which can be discussed within the course team. We can address gaps in standards, A-ha's, student performance, areas of strength and weakness.

The U.S. History course team lead, Timothy Johnson mentioned that the most helpful aspect to the new testing platform is the ability to track student performance based on standards. Mr. Johnson stated that:

> In our course team meetings, we can reflect on lower-scoring standards and develop remediation plans to review the content. Our state assessments have started to include different question styles such as inner response, click & drag, and checklist-style questions. Our new testing platform has been the only platform that allows us to provide these questions to our students.

The consensus from the Design Team discussion on the new common testing platform was that teachers should have access to their teammates' student performance results to enrich data discussion during course team meetings. Most of the challenges stemmed from learning a new system and adapting to change. The majority of the course team leaders and assistant principals agreed that the new testing platform enabled course teams to have standard-based conversations about student data. The support that course teams needed from assistant principals was sharing

the course teams' performance results and ensuring there were adequate laptops so that teachers could avoid administering a paper version and scanning the answer documents.

The researcher shared the results from the course team perception survey. Course team leaders discussed how they noticed a discrepancy in perceptions among course team members and leaders about the workload being equally shared among the team equally. Course team leaders mentioned that they must be more intentional with assigning specific tasks to their course team members rather than asking for volunteers. Course team leaders discussed the challenges of utilizing everyone's strengths on the course team. One course team member expressed that he is hesitant to assign tasks to course team members because they did not get the tasks completed in a timely manner or it was of low quality.

The researcher shifted the discussion to establish the "act phase" of the next intervention cycle. The Design Team discussed possible interventions for closing achievement gaps of students who suffered learning losses from the pandemic. Design Team members began brainstorming how to help students that needed additional support since the new testing platform provided reliable student performance data. The Design Team decided to provide professional development on "differentiated small group instruction" as the second intervention in the next cycle. District support was being offered through professional development to schools that elected teachers and assistant principals to participate. The Design Team received approval from the principal to have the district's instructional coaches work with course team leaders and assistant principals involved in this study.

Weekly Bite-Size PD

The weekly bite-size professional development sessions were designed to provide lesson ideas and resources for teachers implementing differentiated small group instruction. The

professional developments were held after school in a digital format for 20 minutes. Each subject area had an assigned day of the week. The researcher attended one session from each subject area during the second action research cycle. The researcher's observation notes indicated that each content area's professional development presentation style was similar. Teachers communicated their successes and struggles, and conversations focused on overcoming their hurdles with applying differentiated small group instruction.

Course Team Meeting Observations

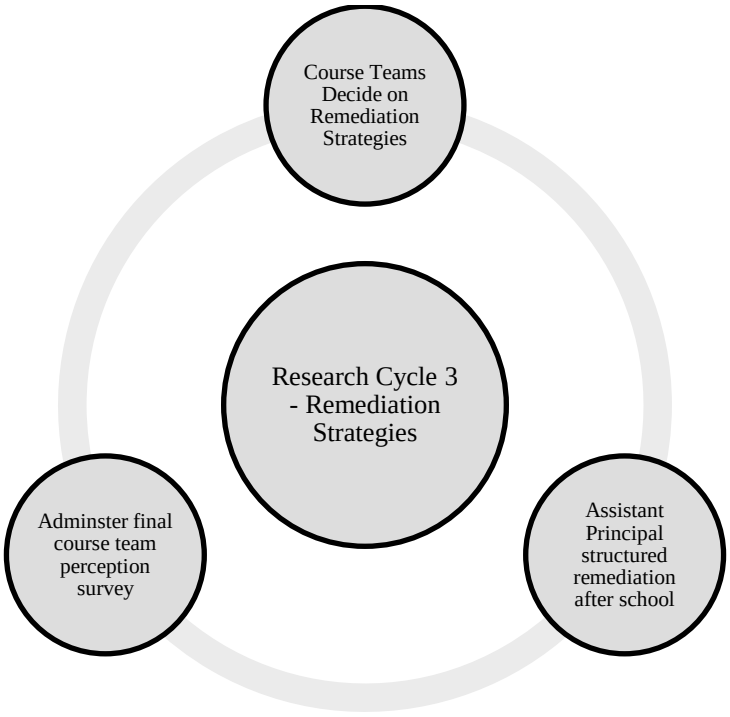
The researcher attended three course team meetings during the second research cycle (U.S. History, American Literature, and Biology). The Geometry course team meeting was not attended by the researcher due to schedule conflict. The researcher noted that the conversations in the course team meetings he attended were focused on analyzing common assessment data. Course team members discussed plans for remediation for students who were currently failing their course. The assistant principals showed their support by offering additional planning time and stipends to teachers willing to provide remediation after school or on Saturdays.

Research Cycle 3

The last intervention selected by the Design Team involved course team members providing remediation to their students. Remediation efforts were applied during and after school. Assistant principals were responsible for providing support to teachers by sharing student achievement data analysis at course team meetings and structuring after school remediation. Teachers discussed the various strategies they would implement as forms of remediation in the course team meetings. The course team perception survey was administered again to analyze any changes from the initial results. Figure 10 displays the activities that occurred during the third and final action research cycle.

Figure 10

Research Cycle 2



Design Team Meeting #3 (December 9, 2021)

The third Design Team meeting marked the end of the second cycle of interventions as members began the "planning phase" for the third and final intervention. The first point of the discussion was reviewing the second intervention of attending professional development and implementing differentiated small groups with students who exhibited learning gaps. Assistant principals and course team leaders elected to attend "bite-sized" virtual professional developments that were designed to be 20 minutes in length once a week. Assistant principals were paired with the district's instructional coaches to observe course team members implement differentiated small group interventions in the classroom with students. The district's instructional coaches facilitated follow-up feedback and planning sessions with the teacher and

assistant principal. The district's instructional coaches sent weekly emails to the administrators at Gadsen High School of documented feedback from the classroom observations conducted during the week. The course team leaders and assistant principals contributed to the discussion by providing constructive feedback about the professional development that was led by district personnel and the implementation of differentiated small group instruction. Timothy Johnson shared insight on how the district's instructional coaches provided resources:

> The county personnel have been helpful in creating small group lessons in U.S. History. It did take a lot of time to plan and losing some of our planning to discuss small groups was not ideal. However, I have started to rethink how effective small group instruction can be in a high school classroom.

Sarah Clayborn added to the discussion about her experience working with the district's instructional coaches that did not have any teaching experience within her content areas:

> Collaborating with the district's instructional coaches was burdensome. It takes time away from planning, feedback post-lesson was not provided consistently and the district's instructional coach wasn't knowledgeable about my content (Biology) and therefore was not a knowledgeable thought partner for planning meaningful differentiated small group lessons.

Rachel Ellington also mentioned that the process was burdensome on top of her regular duties as a Geometry teacher but the advice on implementing differentiated small group instruction was helpful. Bethany Gordon stated that the district's instructional coaches were not able to support her on a weekly basis due to logistical issues such as conflicting schedules and absences. The assistant principals mentioned that it was challenging to align their schedules with the district's instructional coaches schedule for classroom observations.

The Design Team discussed the impact of "bite-size" professional development that was led by the district personnel. There was consensus from assistant principals and course team leaders regarding the effectiveness of the "bite-size" professional development sessions. The assistant principals and course team leaders expressed that they appreciated the "bite-size" professional developments being only 20 minutes, especially since they occurred after school when everyone is exhausted. They also mentioned that the short amount of time was packed with useful information that could be applied to their classroom immediately.

The Design Team shifted the discussion to focus on assistant principals supporting the process of implementing differentiated small group instruction. Sarah Clayborne mentioned that professional development, feedback, and planning sessions with the district's instructional coaches should have occurred during course team meetings instead of planning periods or after school. Timothy Johnson mentioned that assistant principals should consider providing additional time to teachers. Mr. Johnson stated, "providing us with the time to develop these sorts of lessons is something you have done that is extremely helpful and we are grateful for it." Bethany Gordon elaborated on administrators must be patient with the process and how critical supportive low stakes environments are for effective adult learning:

> Keep in mind that Rome was not built in a single day. In order for differentiated small group instruction to be successful, teachers will need to be trained in a low-stakes environment and allowed a reasonable amount of time to begin implementation.

The Design Team reviewed the perception survey that was administered to course team members that participated in this study.

The Design Team concluded the second intervention cycle and began to plan the “do phase” of the third and final intervention cycle. The Design Team started to discuss additional ways they could design remediation for students who were failing and/or accumulated multiple absences from contact tracing. The federal government provided additional funding to public schools to combat the pandemic's negative impact on student learning. The Design Team decided that the remediation would occur during study hall periods and after school. The assistant principals and course team leaders agreed that students needed additional academic support beyond their regular class periods. The researcher concluded the meeting after everyone provided their student remediation plans for their course teams that were set to start in January 2022.

Course Team Meeting Observations

The researcher attended one course team meeting for all content areas involved in this study (U.S. History, Biology, American Literature, and Geometry). Course team members and assistant principals discussed strategies to best address students' learning needs who were failing and had excessive absences. Course team members expressed the challenges with getting students to attend remediation. Digital remediation lessons were created to address students who were not attending school regularly.

January 20 - Final Course Team Perception Survey

The researcher administered the final course team perception survey that was completed by course team members (excluding course team leaders). The purpose of administering the perception survey again was to examine any changes in course team members’ perspectives over the course of this study. The survey responses indicated that course team members' perspectives remained consistent throughout this study.

Design Team Meeting #4 (January 25, 2022)

This action research project came to a conclusion on January 25th, 2022, at Gadsen High School. This meeting marked the completion of the research cycles and this study. All Design Team members were present at the meeting to evaluate the impact of student remediation implemented by course teams and how assistant principals supported the process. Remediation efforts were set to continue beyond the parameters of this study, and the plan was extended to students who failed first semester courses required for a high school diploma. The researcher began the conversation by asking how current remediation efforts were going.

Bethany Gordon mentioned that teachers need help from administrators to get students motivated to complete assignments and study for assessments. Ms. Gordon felt that teachers want to solve the deeper cultural issues with student apathy by holding students more accountable. There was a general consensus from the Design Team that the students became more apathetic after returning back to school in person from a digital environment that was not academically rigorous. Design Team members felt that it was tough to implement the logistics of remediation with students after school because attendance was optional. The assistant principals mentioned that the students who were able to attend remediation were provided general instruction, and it was not based upon the specific academic needs of each student. The course team leaders expressed that they feel pressure from the administration to pass students and that it is frowned upon to have a high failure rate even if the students deserve to fail.

The researcher asked the Design Team if they believed the support from assistant principals improved from the first cycle of action rea. The majority of the course team leaders expressed that assistant principals needed to set clear expectations at the beginning of the year in regards to what is expected to occur in course team meetings. They also mentioned it is

important for assistant principals to attend every course team meeting because it changes the dynamic of the meeting. Course team leaders expressed that the other course team members are more likely to contribute and share the workload if the assistant principal is present at the course team meetings. They also mentioned that assistant principals should conduct informal observations to ensure every teacher on the course team is implementing what the course team has agreed upon in their team meetings. Course team leaders agreed that there are several barriers that hinder course teams from collaborating effectively. They mentioned that they were unsure how to overcome some of the barriers without damaging their relationships with team members. The meeting concluded after Design Team members provided their final reflections and key takeaways from the action research project.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided detailed information about the in-depth context in which the problem of practice was rooted. The Design Team members' background and current position were explained to provide additional context to this study. Direct quotes and summaries of the discussions from the Design Team meetings were outlined so readers could understand the decision-making that was involved with selecting interventions. Additional information about the purpose of interviewing assistant principals and course team leaders was provided to help readers understand the perspective of key school leaders. The next chapter will detail the findings and identify themes from the data that was collected before and during the intervention cycles.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the discussions and interactions of high school assistant principals and course team members working as a PLC. The researcher believed that this study could partially fill the gap in research about how high school assistant principals and course team members collaborate to impact student achievement. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from interviews, CLT survey responses, course team perception survey responses, course team meetings, professional developments, and Design Team meetings. The researcher reviewed all the qualitative data gathered from observation notes, survey, and interview responses. The researcher coded the data and identified themes throughout the data collection process. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher continued to analyze the entire data. After the third holistic analysis, the researcher identified repetitive codes and categorized them into themes that were discovered during that final stage of anaylsis. There were four key findings that were recognized in this study. Table 11 pairs each research question with the appropriate findings.

Table 11

Summary of Research Findings

Research Questions	Findings
Q1. How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school?	F1. Assistant principals reported that their actions outside of course team meetings are important to improve PLCs.
Q2. How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?	F2. The structure of professional development can impact teacher morale.

Q3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?	F3. The features of testing platforms can encourage course team collaboration. F4. Course team leaders reported barriers that hinder collaboration.

The next section provides details of each finding from all the qualitative data that was collected in this study. Each finding was derived from a variety of methods the qualitative data was collected.

Finding 1

Assistant principals reported that their actions outside of course team meetings are important to improve PLCs.

During the first action research cycle, three assistant principals were interviewed individually to discuss how they collaborate with their course teams. All of their interview responses and Design Team meeting discussions indicated that their actions outside of course team meetings were important to improve their PLCs. Particularly, they mentioned the importance of conducting frequent informal classroom observations to ensure the commitments made by teachers during course team meetings were being implemented in the classroom. One of the assistant principals mentioned, “we can have great discussions about student work, analyze common assessments results, plan lessons, align pacing, but the time is wasted if the teachers leave the meeting and fail to implement the professional learning in the classroom with students.” The other two assistant principals made similar comments by mentioning that course team leaders do not have the flexibility in their schedule to observe their course team members’ classrooms so that responsibility is suitable for administrators. During Design Team meetings , they also mentioned that sharing feedback notes from classroom observations during course team

meetings is valuable to the PLC process. Table 12 displays the themes from the researcher's data analysis.

Table 12

Finding 1 Summary Data

Q1. How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school?	
F1: Assistant principals reported that their actions outside of course team meetings are important to improve PLCs.	
Assistant Principal Actions	Participants *n = 3*
Frequent Informal Classroom Observations with Feedback	3
Set Clear Expectations	2
Attend Professional Development	3
Structure Time for Course Team Collaboration	3
Interact Frequently with Course Team Leaders	3

The assistant principals stated that frequent individual conversations with the course team leaders provide insight into who is sharing the workload. An assistant principal said, "we have experienced a high turnover of course team leaders over the years and one of the big reasons they decided to step down was because they felt overwhelmed from creating all the lessons and quizzes for the team, some were even making copies for everyone." All of the assistant principals mentioned that they encourage their course team leaders to delegate tasks to avoid burnout. Another assistant principal mentioned,

> *I tell my course team leaders to ask their team members how they would like to contribute to the workload or another approach I've suggested is pre-assigning team members to specific tasks and be courteous to your teammates by making sure they feel comfortable with what they were assigned.*

Another assistant principal expressed she has conversations with course team leaders about the meeting agenda and provides feedback about the quality of the meetings on a continuous basis.

Setting clear expectations for course teams was another unified response from the assistant principals. Two assistant principals mentioned that the teachers should be notified during pre-planning of the course teams' "non-negotiables". They mentioned how teachers need to know what they are expected to discuss during course team meetings and what unified actions they need to implement in the classroom with students. Another assistant principal mentioned having a balanced approach by avoiding too many "non-negotiables" and teachers should have some autonomy to decide on what is best for their particular students.

Attending district-led professional development on the topic of Collaborative Learning Teams (CLT) was another common statement that the assistant principals discussed. All of the assistant principals mentioned that attending the CLT professional development affords them the opportunity to discuss best practices with other administrators. One of the assistant principals stated,

> *When I taught in the classroom, so many years ago, we didn't have course team meetings and my principals didn't require me to collaborate with other teachers in my department, so I didn't get those experiences. The CLT professional development sessions provide a space to learn from my colleagues and the sessions have helped me to understand the purpose, concepts, and key elements of effective teacher collaboration.*

Lastly, assistant principals stated the importance of building the master schedule to include common planning time during the school day. All of the assistant principals recall previous years when their teachers were expected to collaborate after school. Fatigue and schedule conflicts due to extra-curricular activities were cited as barriers to teachers being able to

collaborate effectively. Two of the assistant principals mentioned that common planning time during the school day is necessary, but additional planning time along with a stipend should be provided over the summer. One of the assistant principals said, “I think course teams are held to a higher standard because their student performance reflects the entire school so they should get additional planning time and pay, especially the course team leads.”

Finding 2

The structure of professional development can impact teacher morale.

The Design Team met on October 20 to discuss the impact of the first cycle of action research and decide upon the next intervention for the second cycle. The team decided that the Implementation Team would undergo a multi-layered professional development on the topic of “differentiated small group instruction”. The professional development involved district-level support staff that collaborated with the assistant principals on the Design Team. Observation notes and transcriptions from weekly course team meetings and the Design Team meeting on December 9 showed that the professional development was stressful and exhausting to the teachers on the Implementation Team. Table 13 displays the themes that emerged from the researcher’s data analysis.

Table 13

Finding 2 Summary Data

Q2. How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?	
F2: The structure of professional development can impact teacher morale.	
Challenges	Participants *n = 19*
Ambiguous Classroom Observations	19
Multiple Classroom Observers	15
Lengthy Support	19
Loss of Planning Time	19
After School Professional Development	10

All of the course team members agreed in their course team meetings that the district personnel started their observations without providing any expectations on what they were looking for. Prior to the classroom observations, assistant principals from the Design Team met with district personnel and communicated to the teachers that the initial observations were for relationship-building purposes. The course team leaders expressed that there should be clear expectations and follow-up from classroom observations. They stated that relationships are not built while the teacher is teaching. One of the course team leaders said,

> *I was a bit anxious and I didn't know if they (district personnel) were checking me out to see if I was a good teacher or what. I was confused why they felt that being in my classroom without providing me feedback would build our relationship.*

Geometry, U.S. History, and Biology teachers verbalized in their course team meetings that the number of people observing classrooms were stress-inducing. One of the geometry teachers expressed that, "At one point I had three observers in my classroom, the AP, and two district personnel, which to me felt like a bit much." The course team leaders also mentioned that the duration of the classroom observations were too long. One course team leader stated,

> *Our classroom observations from our evaluators last no longer than 30 minutes and most are 10 minutes. Three people in the classroom observing me teach for the entire period is insane to me and I'm a seasoned teacher so I couldn't imagine how it made less experienced teachers feel.*

All course team members agreed in their course team meeting that the professional development duration of six weeks was extensive. The Design Team expressed they heard a lot of teachers complained that were required to plan a lesson that included "differentiated small

group instruction", get observed, and have a follow-up discussion. One course team leader stated, "I spent four hours last night planning a jig-saw activity so they could observe me with small groups." It was evident that the time and effort it took to implement what was learned from the professional development was overwhelming the teachers. Two of the Design Team members expressed that the district did not have resources for U.S. History, such as lesson plans or activities to implement in differentiated small group instruction.

The district personnel scheduled follow-up meetings to provide feedback to teachers after their classroom observations. Teachers in course team meetings expressed that the feedback was useful but it was time-consuming. All of the course team members present in the course team meeting observations agreed that the feedback meetings consumed too much of their planning period, which is sacred time for teachers to take care of tasks they cannot do while students are in their classroom.

Professional development for differentiated small group instruction was held weekly after school. The professional development was labeled as "bite-size PD" since they were set to last 20 minutes. The U.S. History and Biology course teams mentioned that their professional development was scheduled on Fridays after school for six weeks. The U.S. History course team leader mentioned that his coaching responsibilities conflicted with after-school meetings. Another course team leader stated in a Design Team meeting that, "Most teachers are tired from teaching all day. It's not advantageous to hold professional learning after school, even if it's bite-size." All course team leaders agreed that holding professional development after school when teachers are exhausted is not ideal.

Finding 3

The features of testing platforms can encourage course team collaboration

The Design Team met on September 14 to decide on the first cycle of interventions. Based on the consensus of the Design Team, it was decided that the Implementation Team would use a new common testing platform. The first professional development involved learning how to navigate a new assessment platform that featured a bank of pre-written test questions and common assessment data comparisons. Observation notes and transcriptions from the second Design Team meeting on October 20 indicated that the common testing platform and training were needed for course teams to improve their PLCs. The researcher also used observation notes from professional development sessions and course team meetings that were held during the first action research cycle. Table 14 displays the themes that emerged from the researcher's data analysis.

Table 14

Finding 3 Summary Data

Q3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?	
F3. The features of testing platforms can encourage course team collaboration	
Features	Participants *n = 22*
Collaborative Assessment Building	19
Question Bank	15
Test Security	22
Item/Standard Analysis	17

All course team members agreed that the common testing platform was beneficial because it allowed course team members to collaborate on creating assessments. One of the course team leaders mentioned, "I'm able to delegate building common assessments with my course team. Since we are able to add test questions on the same assessment, I can assign the amount of questions everyone is responsible for creating." Another course team leader

mentioned that his course team was able to build a common assessment during their planning time.

> *We could have never built any assessment in such a short time, the item bank, and the ability to collaborate on the same test have saved of us a lot of time. Normally, I would just create the test myself and share it with the team but that took some time or I would simply use an older test.*

The course team members from the U.S. History, Biology, and Geometry agreed that the assessment item bank in the new testing platform ensured that their test questions were aligned to the standards. One of the course team leaders stated,

> *We created most of our test questions from scratch and sometimes we found out later that the question was not aligned to the standard after the test was already assigned to students. My team used the item bank and what's nice is that each question is tagged with the standard it's assessing.*

Another course team leader commented that some of their standards require rigorous assessment questions. "The new testing platform has features that mimic the questions on state exams like open response and drag/drops are testing features that we were not able to utilize last school year."

The assistant principals and course team members expressed that course team members appreciated the amount of preparation time that was decreased because of the new testing platform. The researcher's observation notes indicated that teachers expressed their appreciation for secured tests. All of the course teams and assistant principals agreed that the test were more secured since the students were required to enter a test code to access the test and teachers can shuffle test questions for students who need test on a later date. One teacher in the U.S. History

course team mentioned that test security was a major issue during the pandemic so they allowed in-person and digital students to use notes during their assessments. All course team members and assistant principals agreed that test security ensures that students actually know the content without any assistance. Some course team members mentioned that it is misleading when students show proficiency on assessments that they cheated on.

The assistant principals and the majority of the course team members agreed that data transparency impacted the course team's sense of collective accountability. One of the assistant principals expressed, "The data comparison report allows my course team to see how their students performed on the standards and we have rich discussions on how certain standards were taught and the teachers share their instructional practices with one another." The course team members mentioned that sharing data motivates them to help each other if they notice their students are not performing well on their assessments.

Finding 4

Course team leaders reported barriers that hinder collaboration.

The last Design Team Meeting was held on January 25. Design Team members discussed the effectiveness of remediation strategies that were implemented in the third research cycle. The researcher noted that Design Team members agreed that providing students with remediation at the high school level is a daunting task since the students exhibit low engagement, misbehavior, or poor attendance. The course team leaders expressed their frustrations with student apathy and mentioned their student failure rates were higher than normal during the fall semester of 2021. They mentioned it is tough to maintain high expectations when students do not give effort or consistently do not turn in their class assignments on time. Course team leaders also discussed that support from their assistant principals is highly important, and facilitating their course team

to collaborate at high levels can be challenging depending upon their team members' strengths and weaknesses. The course team leaders expressed the barriers that hinder their course teams from collaborating effectively. Table 15 displays the themes that emerged from the researcher's data analysis.

Table 15

Finding 4 Summary Data

Q3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?	
F4. Course team leaders reported multiple barriers that hindered collaboration	
Barriers	Participants *n = 4*
Unreliable Team Members	4
Self-Centered Team Members	3
Heterogeneous Groups	4
Avoiding Conflicts	2

Assistant principals mentioned the importance of course team leaders avoiding teacher burnout by delegating tasks to the course team members. All of the course team leaders agreed that delegating tasks can be challenging when team members are unreliable. One of the course team leaders stated,

> *I know everyone has a lot going on during and after school so I do not have full confidence that some of my colleagues will do, what they say, they will do. Our tasks are time-sensitive so if someone is responsible for adding 10 questions to an assessment or providing activities for the upcoming week and they fail to do so, that's a major issue. I usually handle most things myself or I'll delegate tasks based on my teammates strengths or reliability.*

One of the course team leaders discussed her challenges with teachers who were not collaborative. She mentioned that course team members may need professional development on building their collaboration skills so that course teams collaborate more effectively. She stated,

> *One of the main reasons my role is exhausting as a course team leader is because some teachers want to do everything their way and when they don't, they get on the defense or upset that their thoughts and ideas are being challenged, not discounted, discredited, or undervalued, but just challenged.*

Three of the course team leaders agreed that their team members who do not collaborate well are typically self-centered in their teaching practices and meet the description of "old-fashioned" teachers who were accustomed to not collaborating.

Another concern presented by course team leaders was team members who consistently avoided conflict or difficult conversations in team meetings. The researcher noted a course team leader saying,

> *Our course team has varying opinions about grading practices, content that we should cover or revisit, appropriate student activities, but we struggle seeing eye to eye or compromising so now we just avoid conflict and it really defeats the purpose of meeting if we can't have healthy debates and value the thoughts and perspectives of our teammates.*

The researcher noted that two course team leaders expressed that conflict avoidance results in teachers becoming autonomous and collaborative meetings filled with empty commitments. A course team stated, "I feel it's critical for admin to address teams that avoid conflict but it can be hard to notice or detect for administrators if everyone is putting on a show."

Course team leaders agreed that collaborating with course team members with heterogeneous courses is challenging because of students' nuances and course rigor. One course

team member stated that collaborating with a special education teacher in a self-contained class presents many challenges. He said that special education teachers may use some of the common assessment questions and alter many others to make the questions less rigorous. Another course team leader expressed that English Language Learners (ELL) require a nuanced level of support than College Prep (CP) or Advanced Placement (AP).

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the researcher's findings after analyzing observation notes, meeting discussions, interviews, and survey responses. The findings provide an answer to the research questions involving the collaborative efforts of course team members and assistant principals. The findings fulfilled the purpose of this study by answering all three research questions. The first research question was answered with Finding 1, which asked: How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school? Findings 2 and 3 answered the second research question that asked: How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school? Findings 3 and 4 answered the third research question that asked: How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school? Chapter 6 elaborates on the findings and the implications for practitioners, district leaders, policymakers, and future research.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the discussions and interactions of high school assistant principals and course team members working as a PLC. This research study was guided by the following research questions.

1. How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school?
2. How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school?
3. How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school?

This chapter discusses the correlations between the literature review in Chapter 2 and the researcher's findings from Chapter 5. The researcher provides a summary of the findings and how it connects to the research questions and theoretical framework of distributed leadership. Lastly, implications for practitioners, district leaders, policymakers, and future research are offered.

Summary of the Findings

This study provided key information about how PLCs impact the dynamics between assistant principals and course team members (teachers). The researcher gathered his conclusions by connecting the findings to the literature. The key findings from the literature review related to the study were administrative support, professional learning, and trust. After the researcher

conducted his analysis, a description of the nexus of distributed leadership theory was associated with the findings.

Key Findings Related to the Literature

Administrative Support

Teachers who are leading a PLC need strong support from their administrators (Wilson, 2016). The literature review coincided with the findings in this study regarding administrative support with course teams. The literature indicated that administrators could cause tension among staff members if they do not understand or clearly communicate the scope of responsibilities (Hunzicker, 2019). The vagueness around accountability and responsibilities of the role can serve as a deterrent for teachers to embrace leadership roles (Hunzicker, 2019). This study revealed that major barriers existed for course team leaders when dealing with their team members. The researcher noted that course team leaders expressed some uncertainty and variation during their interviews when they responded to the question, “What does your assistant principal expect from you as a course team leader?”

Administrators must be present during PLC meetings to monitor and offer assistance (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Course team members in this study discussed the importance of assistant principal attending course team meetings and how it influences team members to fulfill their roles, participate in discussions, and share the workload. The discussions from the PLCs often do not translate into practice with fidelity if the classrooms are not observed consistently by administrators (Jones & Thessin, 2017). In this study, course team leaders and assistant principals expressed the importance of frequent classroom walk-throughs to ensure teachers are implementing the instructional strategies that were discussed in their course team meetings.

Professional Learning

Professional learning should primarily focus on collaboration skills and how meetings are structured (Hansen, et al., 2013). The researcher noted that one of the major barriers that course team leaders mentioned is their teammates' lack of collaborative skills. Course team leader discussed how some team members simply avoid conflict and view disagreements as personal. It is beneficial for teachers to reflect and constantly engage in discussions about their instruction to identify the strategies that improve students learning (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). As a result, when teachers engage in discussions about instructional strategies that increase student achievement, they are better able to contribute to the school's overall mission of continuous improvement (DuFour, et al., 2006). The researcher noted that the course team members expressed it was beneficial to undergo professional development on differentiated small group instruction. Still, it was so time-consuming that it impacted their morale.

Trust

Teachers are more willing to be vulnerable with teammates if their administration is supportive and not heavy-handed with documentation when mistakes in implementation occur (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). The researcher notes indicated that the assistant principals expressed to course team members (during training and course team meetings) that the purpose of the new testing platform was to enrich the collaborative efforts of course teams instead of making teachers feel incompetent. The researcher noted that course team members valued the transparency features of the new testing platform. During this study, assistant principals were able to share standard/item analysis with course team members. “The building leadership team strives to create this sense of trust by giving teams time to practice discussing and analyzing student data, encouraging teachers to discuss questions about students’ progress, and

emphasizing throughout the process that everyone is a learner" (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 22). The testing platform intervention in this study allowed every course team member to compare how they performed on each standard/item. The researcher's observation notes indicated that the majority of teachers were eager to analyze data results in course team meetings. Teachers are willing to be vulnerable and share their areas of improvement when trust levels are high (Riveros et al., 2012).

Key Findings Related to Distributed Leadership Theory

The theoretical framework of distributed leadership set the foundation for the action research cycles in this study. Distributed leadership provides insight into how administrators and teachers collaborate to improve teaching and learning processes. "Distributed leadership is a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation" (Spillane, 2005, p. 150). Distributed leadership theory is a conceptual tool that encourages teachers and administrators to put their position titles aside and be willing to be leaders or followers based on the situation. The theoretical framework correlated with the dynamics of teachers and assistant principals' interactions during course team meetings.

Distributed leadership was appropriate for this study because the assistant principals' roles transitioned back and forth from leader to follower, depending on the situation. By examining the interchangeable nature of leaders and followers, this framework brings attention to the balancing needs of teacher autonomy and administrative direction. Teachers and administrators garner commitment with persuasion and influence instead of harsh mandates (Bredeson & Kelley, 2013). The principal and the administrative team need to be intentional about how they will carry out the critical task of building the leadership capacity of others (Levine, 2019).

In this study, course team leaders expressed the need for building course team members' collaborative skills. Ongoing administrative support is critical for teacher leaders to overcome obstacles and embrace leadership opportunities (Hamzah & Jamil, 2019). With the high demands and emphasis placed on student achievement, educational leadership has shifted from a managerial role to an instructional leadership role (Khadka, 2019). The assistant principals expressed in Design Team meetings that their role as instructional leaders is interchangeable with course team leaders responsible for facilitating collaborative meetings with their colleagues.

Major Findings Related to the Research Questions

Question 1

The first research question was: How do assistant principals conceptualize their ability to support course teams operating as PLCs in one large suburban high school? The researcher discovered that assistant principals reported that their actions beyond course team meetings are important to improve PLCs. Five themes emerged as the basis of this finding. The researcher’s observation notes indicated that the assistant principals attended and contributed to course team meetings, but the course team leader was responsible for setting the meeting agendas and facilitating the discussions. The assistant principals’ actions outside of the course team meetings commonly mentioned were: setting clear expectations, structuring time for course teams to collaborate, classroom observations/feedback, attending professional development, and frequently interacting with course team leaders. Distributed leadership theory was evident in this dynamic, with assistant principals taking on a follower role in course team meetings, but outside of the meeting, the assistant principal returned to being a leader. It was also important to note that the researcher observed leader and follower roles change among the course team members and assistant principals during course team meetings.

Question 2

The second research question was: How do course team members describe how professional development impacts PLCs in one large suburban high school? During the second cycle of action research, the researcher noted the discussions in course team and Design Team meetings that course team members commonly expressed their dissatisfaction with the professional development that was provided for teachers to implement differentiated small group instruction. The researcher discovered that professional development can damage teacher morale throughout this research cycle. The teachers commonly reported that the following damaged their morale: ambiguous classroom observations, multiple classroom observers, duration of professional development, loss of planning time, and after-school professional development. The intent of the professional development in the second action research cycle was to build the knowledge and skills of the participants. The researcher noted that the purpose of the professional development was fulfilled, but the teachers discussed their dissatisfaction with the delivery structure.

Question 3

The third research question was: How do course team members and assistant principals describe the process of implementing a PLC model in one large suburban high school? Two findings emerged to answer the third research question. The features of testing platforms can encourage course team collaboration. The Design Team decided to use a new testing platform as an intervention in the first action research cycle. The purpose of the new testing platform was to add transparency and enrich the course team discussions about student performance data. Assistant principals and course team members stated in course team and Design Team meetings that the following features of the new testing platform encouraged course team collaboration: the

ability to build assessments collaboratively, access to an item bank of pre-written assessment questions, test security, and item/standard analysis reports. Prior to the study, course teams used a variety of testing platforms that lacked transparency which prevented course team members from seeing how all students performed on their common assessments.

The second finding was course team leaders reported barriers that hindered their collaboration with their course team members. The responses from course team leader interviews and Design Team meetings revealed four themes that led to the fourth finding: unreliable team members, heterogeneous groups, conflict avoidance, and self-centered team members. The course team leaders in this study were responsible for setting agendas and facilitating course team meetings. The researcher noted that most of the barriers are rooted in course team members' desire to work in isolation.

Limitations of the Current Study

Despite their limitations, case studies are particularly well-suited to the study of complex social groups (Merriam, 2009). The study's limitations stemmed from the essence of qualitative research as well as the study's context. This study had several limitations due to COVID-19, researcher bias, amount of participants, transferability, and the duration of the study.

The action research study occurred over 12 weeks. Observing changes over an extended period of time would help assess the study's long-term impact. The 12-week schedule was necessary to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral program. A longer term of action research would have exceeded time constraints.

Schools were shut down in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Course teams continued to collaborate, but it was far less frequent. During the 2020-2021 school year, teachers simultaneously taught digital and in-person students at Gadsen High School. It was challenging

for course teams to identify what students learned since all assessments were given digitally, and students were allowed to use learning materials and notes while taking their tests. Ninety-eight percent of students returned in person during the 2021-2022 school year at Gadsen High School. The two percent of students that remained digital were taught by full-time online instructors hired by the district. Course team meetings were able to focus on student learning again since students were not allowed to use notes or learning materials on their tests. Teachers were challenged with higher failure rates and larger learning gaps when the majority of students returned from digital learning environments during the time this study occurred.

A further limitation of this study is that prior to the beginning of the study, the school's leadership made attempts to improve the PLC model with course teams. The assistant principals and course team leaders planned and implemented their own interventions before and during the research study. The researcher was also a participant in this study. The perspective and influence of the researcher may have impacted the data that was collected.

The researcher used two surveys: Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) and Course Team Perception surveys (CTP). The CTP survey was administered twice to the participants during the first and third action research cycles. All of the CLT survey results reflected high ratings, and the CTP survey did not show any changes in the perceptions of the participants. The researcher was unable to identify any changes in perceptions or impact of the interventions based on the participants' survey responses.

This research was limited to the small number of participants involved in the process. This study included 19 teachers and four assistant principals, including the researcher. The Design Team consisted of four course team leaders and four assistant principals. The researcher conducted this study in a large suburban high school with a free-reduced student lunch

population that was below the state average. The findings, implications, and final conclusions may not be transferable in elementary and/or middle schools in rural settings. Also, this research may not be transferable to high schools that have challenges with their student demographics due to high poverty.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

Administrators at the local school level should provide additional planning time to course team members throughout the school year and during the summer. The course team leader role is more demanding and pivotal to student achievement than the department chair position. One of the course team leaders involved in this study stated, “providing us with the time to develop these sorts of lessons is something you have done that is extremely helpful, and we are grateful for it.” Teachers expressed the demand for additional time to adequately address the academic needs of their students consistently throughout the course of this study.

An additional planning period is needed for course team leaders so they can handle the workload and strategically plan for weekly course team meetings. First-year course team leaders will require additional support and frequent positive interactions from their supporting administrator. Teachers and administrators need professional training, trusting relationships, collaboration time, and resources to help guide teams to focus on student learning (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). The additional planning period for course team leaders would also allow them to collaborate with their assistant principal and conduct classroom observations.

Implications and Recommendations for District Leaders

Teachers' job descriptions and responsibilities change significantly once they become course team leader. District leaders may consider using separate standards of effectiveness for course team leaders. In addition, course team leaders should be placed on a higher salary

schedule based on their effectiveness and years of experience. Teachers who are asked to take on a formal leadership role in a school may not receive a stipend if the district or local school does not have funding available (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016). District leaders should consider compensating course team leaders because of their key role in instructional leadership. Lacking proper funding or allocation for teacher leaders means that the school leader must find creative ways to compensate for the additional time and effort staff members have put forth (Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016).

District-led professional development for course team members should not take planning time away but instead add planning time. In this study, a course team member mentioned that professional development, feedback, and planning sessions with the district's instructional coaches should have occurred during course team meetings instead of planning periods or after school. The teacher expressed her frustrations about losing her planning period, which she would typically use to grade student work to lessen her professional workload after school hours. The high turnover rate for teachers within the first five years of their career may be impacted by district-led professional development that extends teachers' workloads past contractual hours.

Implications and Recommendations for Policymakers

Heavy emphasis on student performance can translate into course teams streamlining their focus on teaching to the test and preparing students to be great test-takers instead of well-rounded learners. In this study, a course team leader expressed, "we were taught in undergrad that students do not learn by taking multiple choice tests but majority of our test questions are multiple choice." Tests can measure what students have learned but it does not effectively evaluate students' soft skills. The workforce needs skilled workers who can create, problem-solve, collaborate, communicate, and think critically.

> When communities commit to educating the whole child within the context of whole communities and whole schools, they commit to designing learning environments that weave together the threads that connect not only specific content areas such as math, science, the arts, and humanities, but also psychosocial aspects of the individual and learning. These are connections that tend to be too fragmented in the academics-above-all approach prevalent in too many countries that emphasize cognitive abilities above, and often to the exclusion of, all else" (Slade & Griffith, 2013, p.22).

The emphasis placed on test performance is short-sighted and does not evaluate the whole child adequately. Emphasis on the whole child and their social and emotional learning needs would be a turn in the right direction to address the recent climb in child depression and suicide rates.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers need to evaluate how administrators can support course team leaders to be effective facilitators of collaborative teams. This form of professional learning is available from experts in the field who are not employed at the local school level. "A team of facilitators, using methods specifically designed for assessment for learning, worked with principals and teachers, honing participants' skills to lead and engage in collaborative teams" (Hansen, et al., 2013, p. 23). The role of high school assistant principals as instructional leaders needs continual evaluations to better understand the dynamics of their role in course team meetings and how they support teachers.

Professional learning should primarily focus on collaboration skills and how meetings are structured (Hansen, et al., 2013). With the growing demands and responsibilities of course team leaders require a high level of knowledge and skill to lead a team of their peers. The demands may be unreasonable for teacher leaders who are not compensated and lack authority to keep

their peers accountable. . An assistant principal in this study said, “we have experienced a high turnover of course team leaders over the years and one of the big reasons they decided to step down was because they felt overwhelmed from creating all the lessons and quizzes for the team, some were even making copies for everyone.” Teachers are reluctant to notify administrators about their peer’s unsatisfactory job performance to maintain relationships and prevent a toxic work environment. However, administrators carry the authority necessary to hold teachers accountable. Future research should explore if teachers or administrators should be the primary facilitators of course team meetings.

Closing Thoughts

High school assistant principals play a critical role in student achievement due to their involvement in course team meetings and teachers' evaluation. Leadership is often distributed to course team members as they make important instructional decisions in collaborative meetings. Teachers set learning goals, plan lessons, analyze student performance data, create common assessments, share ideas, and reflect on their actions during course team meetings. This study examined the dynamic between high school assistant principals and course team members as they attempted to improve student achievement. The researcher found that the actions of assistant principals outside of course team meetings are critical to building the structure and support systems for teachers to garner a sense of collective accountability and efficacy. This study did not focus on the impact the interventions had on student achievement but instead focused on the collaborative process of PLCs. The researcher emphasized the journey rather than the destination to shed light on the multiple interactions of educators working to improve their practices for students. The researcher is convinced that the journey is far from over, and educators must continue examining and improving the PLC process.

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APPENDIX A
Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) Survey

Place a check in the box that best represents your team for each indicator. Add totals for each column at the bottom.

	Team Structure "Look Fors"		
Indicators	**Group of Individuals**	**Collaborative Group Getting Work Done**	**Collaborative Learning Team**
Meeting Space	Team meets in a teacher's room ☐	Team rotates meeting places to different rooms ☐	Team meets in room that is dedicated to the team meetings ☐
Seating Arrangement	Team members spread out around the room ☐	Team seating focused around the facilitator ☐	Team seating supports collaboration ☐
Meeting Time	Inconsistent / Interrupted ☐	Sacred time but focused mainly on business and getting things done ☐	Sacred time that is focused on getting things done and learning ☐
Team Focus	Little team focus or ineffective use of time ☐	Clear focus on maximizing efficiency and getting collaborative work done ☐	Clear focus on improving teacher practice through new learning and improved implementation ☐
Members' Knowledge & Skills	Team members keep their expertise to themselves ☐	Team members share their knowledge and skills ☐	Team members leverage their expertise and engage in new learning to inform practice ☐
	Each box in this column is **1 point**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **3 points**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **5 points**. Total=____

Team Accountability "Look Fors"			
Indicators	**Group of Individuals**	**Collaborative Group Getting Work Done**	**Collaborative Learning Team**
Team Leaders	External leader(s); team members comply ☐	Internal leader(s); team members comply ☐	Internal leader(s); distributed leadership among the team ☐
Shared Accountability	Team members are not accountable to the team ☐	Team members share strategies but are not accountable for implementing new learning ☐	Team members demonstrate a shared responsibility for all students and hold one another accountable for implementation ☐
Team Roles	No identified roles ☐	Limited roles such as leader and note taker; roles are fixed; focus is on efficiency ☐	Various roles based on team needs; roles promote team learning ☐
Team Measurement	Individual teachers measure their students' performance ☐	Team measures all students' performance with summative assessments; diagnostic only ☐	Team measures all students' performance using a variety of assessments to improve practice; cycles of continuous improvement ☐
	Each box in this column is **1 point**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **3 points**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **5 points**. Total=____

2

Team Norms "Look Fors"			
Indicators	**Group of Individuals**	**Collaborative Group Getting Work Done**	**Collaborative Learning Team**
Celebration	Team members celebrate individual success ☐	Team members celebrate peer success ☐	Team members celebrate team success ☐
Voice Equity	Team members are allowed to opt out and not engage in collaboration ☐	Team members participate with some dominating the conversation ☐	Team leaders are intentional about encouraging voice equity through the use of protocols and skillful facilitation ☐
Psychological Safety	Team members do not feel safe to engage; hesitant or shut down completely ☐	Team members engage through compliance ☐	Team members feel safe to engage and be vulnerable as learners ☐
Conflict	Team avoids conflict or engages in unproductive conflict ☐	Team recognizes conflict but is uncertain how to leverage it for team growth ☐	Team engages in productive conflict which results in team growth ☐
Norms	Team norms are not leveraged to support collaboration ☐	Team norms are created but not skillfully leveraged to support collaboration ☐	Team norms are created and skillfully leverage to support collaboration ☐
	Each box in this column is **1 point**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **3 points**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **5 points**. Total=____

3

Continuous Quality Improvement "Look Fors"			
Indicators	**Group of Individuals**	**Collaborative Group Getting Work Done**	**Collaborative Learning Team**
Team Data	Team does not look at data or members look at their individual data ☐	Team looks at data to focus on teacher practice and student learning ☐	Team analyzes data to focus on teacher practice/student learning and identify areas for new team learning ☐
Analyze AKS	Individuals develop and implement their own interpretation of the standards ☐	Team develops a common understanding of standards and focuses on activities and resources ☐	Team develops a shared understanding of the standards with clear learning targets and determines criteria for student mastery ☐
Develop Common Assessments	Individuals develop and implement their own assessments ☐	Team develops common summative assessments ☐	Team develops both common summative and formative assessments ☐
Develop Common Lessons	Individuals develop and implement their own lessons ☐	Individuals share lesson ideas implement individually ☐	Team develops and/or improves common lessons and instructional practices based on new learning ☐
Look at Student Work	Individuals do not look at student work samples ☐	Team occasionally analyzes a limited range of student work samples to inform next steps ☐	Team often analyzes a wide range of student work samples to inform next steps and determine the need for future team learning ☐
Modify Practice	Individuals work alone to adjust their practice ☐	Team discusses possible modifications to teacher practice and individuals determine next steps ☐	Team demonstrates shared accountability for modifying practice to support all students ☐
	Each box in this column is **1 point**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **3 points**. Total=___	Each box in this column is **5 points**. Total=____

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Scoring for Team Self-Assessment	
Team Structure	Subtotal score of all 3 columns=_____/25
Team Accountability	Subtotal score of all 3 columns=_____/20
Team Norms	Subtotal score of all 3 columns=_____/25
Team Continuous Quality Improvement	Subtotal score of all 3 columns=_____/30
	Total score=_____/100

APPENDIX B
Course Team Perception Survey

Respond to each statement with the following:
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

1. My assistant principal communicates clear expectations in regards to teaching and learning
2. My assistant principal allows the course team to make decisions that affect me
3. My assistant principal emphasizes the importance of student achievement data in course team meetings
4. My assistant principal ensures what was discussed in course team meetings is actually carried out in the classroom
5. My assistant principal treats me with respect and professionalism
6. My assistant principal celebrates the achievements of our course team
7. My assistant principal communicates clearly and frequently with the course team
8. My assistant principal is present at most course team meetings
9. My assistant principal contributes to the discussions in course team meetings
10. I trust all of my course team members and assistant principal
11. Meeting with my course team has helped me professionally
12. I believe it is important for course teams to meet on a weekly basis
13. I believe my course team has enough time to meet during the school day
14. I believe everyone shares the workload in my course team
15. I believe my voice is heard in course team meetings
16. I believe my course team has the ability to positively impact student achievement
17. I feel comfortable expressing my thoughts in course team meetings regardless if anyone disagrees
18. I feel comfortable sharing my student achievement data with my course team
19. I feel comfortable sharing my instructional resources and teaching methods with my course team
20. I believe my course team has been provided adequate resources to operate effectively
21. My course team lead treats me with respect and professionalism
22. My course team lead ensures we have set a student achievement goal
23. My course team lead sets team norms
24. My course team lead ensures that roles and work is distributed equally
25. My course team lead guides the course team through agenda items efficiently in meetings
26. My course team lead celebrates our achievements
27. My course team lead focuses majority of our discussions on professional learning items, such as; teaching strategies, analyzing student work and assessment data