THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN ESTABLISHING AND FACILITATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Professional development for educators in K-12 schools has traditionally been one-shot workshops that were not built into their work (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Therefore, many educators have minimal sustained opportunities to augment their knowledge and skills during their careers. Schmoker (2004) recommends professional learning communities (PLC) as a method of professional development that gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate in context to improve teaching and learning. Pennel (2008) believes that librarians can be critical members of PLCs, as they have much experience collaborating and nurturing relationships with teachers.

Since librarians can be valuable members of PLCs, the purpose of this qualitative case-study was to determine how librarian-teacher PLCs develop, identify the role of the librarian in a PLC, and determine behaviors or practices that contribute to an effective PLC in a specific high school setting. The researcher identified the librarians as the initiators of the PLC. Their roles included leader, supporter, collaborator, and learner. Lastly, their specific behaviors and practices were based on a theoretical framework that was rooted in Hord (1997, 2003) and DuFour’s (2004) models. The researcher contributed to PLC research with this case study about the development and evolution of a librarian-teacher PLC in a Hawaii high school.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Professional development for educators in K-12 schools has traditionally been viewed as “one-shot workshops rather than more effective, problem-based approaches built into teachers’ ongoing work with colleagues” (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Therefore, many educators have minimal sustained opportunities to augment their knowledge and skills during their careers. Schmoker (2004) further elaborates that traditional professional development, such as one-shot workshops, have been used to assist in school reform but have not worked well as they usually have not considered the day to day activities of educators and typically separated ideas and actual actions. Consequently, Schmoker recommends professional learning communities (PLC) as a method of reform that gives teachers the opportunity to work together in context to improve instruction. PLC activities include planning, designing, researching, evaluating, and preparing teaching materials. Some of the outcomes of PLCs are higher quality solutions to instructional problems, increased confidence among faculty, increased support between teachers, more assistance to beginning teachers, and greater ability to examine and expand ideas from a variety of teachers (Schmoker, 2004).

PLCs are a derivative of Wenger’s communities of practice (CoP) framework. Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002) state that “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). CoP serves as a foundation for our current view of learning communities.

PLCs are also rooted in Senge’s (1990) theory of the learning organization. Learning organizations are “organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the
results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together” (p. 3). A defining feature of the learning organization is the active participation and shared vision of its members, where they collaborate to effectively identify and solve problems.

**Challenges in PLCs**

Even though PLCs can help to improve professional development for educators, they pose several challenges. DuFour, Eaker and Dufour (2005) indicate that three major challenges exist when implementing PLCs:

- Developing and applying shared knowledge
- Sustaining hard work for change
- Transforming school culture (isolation versus collaboration)

The first challenge, developing and applying shared knowledge, represents the importance of members of the PLC agreeing on critical concepts and issues and developing a common language for addressing them. If PLC members do not have the same knowledge base, then PLCs have difficulty resolving problems, as they tend to raise unrelated concerns and present conflicting solutions.

The second challenge, sustaining hard work for change, is difficult to accomplish as teachers can get burnt out. Therefore, DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour recommend celebrating all victories, including small ones, to maintain the PLC’s energy. Roberts and Pruitt (2003) suggest several strategies to keep groups working including developing short-range plans, assessing progress, using interactive processes, and giving faculty control over what and how they learn.

The third challenge, transforming school culture, requires moving all staff contributing to student learning from working in isolation towards working collaboratively. Teachers have
traditionally viewed instruction as a job done in isolation, where they did not share their lessons or were reluctant to let other teachers know how or what they were teaching. However, to successfully implement PLCs, the school must promote a collaborative spirit where teachers are willing to share their resources with others and work collectively to improve teaching and learning at schools. This challenge takes a lot of time and effort to overcome. Leadership is also a key to changing school culture, as Leech (2008) indicated that teachers should be empowered by administrators to be a part of the decision making process. If the faculty and administration have a shared vision, they can move forward together toward their goals.

Significance of the Study

Pennell (2008) indicates that librarians “are a valuable resource to facilitate the [PLC] process,” because they understand how teachers work (p. 26). They build rapport with a range of teachers at their schools and strive to nurture collaborative relationships that bring teachers out of isolation. Since librarians are in a unique position to work with teachers, gaining an understanding of their role in librarian-teacher PLCs can help them assume leadership roles in their schools’ learning communities.

Although PLCs have been established in many schools (Cohn & McCune, 2007; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008; Wells & Feun, 2007), there is a lack of documented studies that involve librarians in PLCs with teachers. The researcher will be contributing to PLC research with this case study about the development and evolution of a librarian-teacher PLC in a Hawaii high school.
Purpose of the Study

The researcher focused on the development of a PLC in Lokahi High School, the librarians’ roles within the PLC, and the impact of the PLC on teaching practices. The study addressed the following questions:

1. How does a librarian-teacher professional learning community develop?
2. What is the role of the librarian in a librarian-teacher professional learning community?
3. What are specific practices or behaviors that contribute to an effective PLC?
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to briefly explore existing principles of organizational groupings and their relationship to PLCs, identify characteristics of PLCs, and examine existing studies on the effectiveness of PLCs and the role of the librarian in PLCs. The review began with the historical works supporting PLCs and moves towards the current state of PLCs in education and the role of librarians.

Communities of Practice

Many of the ideas for PLCs in education are rooted in theories such as organizational management and social learning (Hord, 1997; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004; Wenger, 1998). Organizational management principles, such as the learning organization, are based on all members contributing to the well-being of a continuously evolving organization (Senge, 1990). Senge (1990) advocates for the organization to focus on learning, where people in the company “continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continuously learning how to learn together” (p. 3).

The learning organization concept was used as a foundational aspect of the CoP framework, as the members of a learning organization need to negotiate meaning of shared concepts (Wenger, 1998). This negotiation is a basis for the social learning aspect of CoP that occurs when people learn through interactions with one another in real world settings. Wenger indicated that CoPs are everywhere, as people participate in them at home, work, and school. At home, families work together to develop norms and a way of life, where they work to maintain their cohesiveness. At work, employees strive to create personal and group practices to
accomplish tasks, regardless of their official job titles. Even if they are a part of a large institution, workers usually function in smaller communities to accomplish their daily tasks. Students can also formally or informally establish teams to accomplish tasks. In these cases, much of the transformative learning takes place in teams, or CoPs. Regardless of the CoP, the shared knowledge base serves as a foundation for their interactions. If people do not have the same knowledge base, it becomes more difficult to move the community forward.

**Professional Learning Communities**

Professional learning communities (PLC) are an offshoot of communities of practice. While CoPs might be established for a range of collective initiatives, PLCs focus on educational concerns, namely, increased student learning (DuFour, et al., 2005). PLCs target actual student performance as opposed to the curriculum being taught. Unlike traditional faculty meetings that center on information dissemination by school leaders, PLCs wrestle with deeper issues of student learning as they relate to the curriculum. Marzano (2003) identifies three helpful approaches to reviewing curriculum: intended curriculum, implemented curriculum, and attained curriculum. The intended curriculum refers to the curriculum that has been developed for the students. The implemented curriculum focuses on what actually happens in the classroom delivery of the curriculum. The attained curriculum, which is considered the most critical to student learning, refers to what students actually gain from the implemented curriculum. Marzano’s (2003) research shows that students’ perceptions of the learning objectives are often quite different from the objectives teachers assume they were teaching. Therefore, one of the major challenges for PLC members is to focus on the attained curriculum using evidence from actual student performance to ensure that students “acquire the intended knowledge, skills, and dispositions” (DuFour et al., 2005, p. 2).
Development of PLCs

PLCs are typically implemented in educational institutions as school-wide initiatives and formalized by administration (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Reeves (2005) also discussed the importance of formal structures for PLCs by using common assignments and tests to drive assessment of instructional practices. This approach to PLCs is the results-oriented approach and focuses on grade or department-level teams analyzing common assessment data to determine methods of modifying instruction. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) recommended a different approach that focused on an inquiry-based orientation. Their practices emphasized peer observation, analysis of student work, and study groups. This method is viewed as a more teacher-directed approach to PLCs than the results-oriented strategy. Both of these approaches require faculty dedicate time to improve student learning.

Since participation of the faculty is typically required, developing and sustaining motivation and effort are important. In Bennet’s (2010) dissertation on effective strategies for sustaining PLCs, she found that collaboration, supportive conditions, supportive leadership, relationships, and a focus on student learning were critical to sustaining efforts in PLCs.

A current example of PLC implementation in the Hawaii Department of Education is the creation of Data Teams. Data Teams are grade-level or department teams that systematically examine student-generated work using common formative assessments to determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies (Peery, 2011). These teams have scheduled structured meetings that focus on student learning based on the following five-step process:

1. Collect and display data

2. Analyze data and prioritize needs
3. Set, review, and revise specific, measureable, achievable, relevant, and timely goals.

4. Select common instructional strategies to be employed to address the learning challenges discovered in step 2.

5. Determine results indicators (evidence).

PLCs can also be informal in nature; however, DuFour and Eaker (1998) wrote that professional learning communities must be deeply institutionalized or they will remain “extremely fragile and subject to regression” (p. 105).

**DuFour’s Big Ideas for PLCs**

DuFour (2004) identifies three features of PLCs as Big Ideas that are foundational to the work of PLCs:

- Ensuring that students learn
- Fostering a faculty culture of collaboration
- Focusing on results

*Ensuring that students learn* goes beyond the act of simply teaching students—it embraces knowing if they actually acquired what was taught. Key questions that drive the inquiry include (DuFour, 2004, p. 7):

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

*Fostering a faculty culture of collaboration* requires the nurturing of collegial relationships; however, it also necessitates a systematic process for improvement, where “teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (DuFour, 2004, p. 8).
DuFour contends that students perform tasks and skills at higher levels of proficiency when teachers work together on an ongoing improvement cycle informed by the thoughtful examination of student work. As faculty members interact in such a culture, they remove barriers and divisions between the intended curriculum, implemented curriculum, and the attained curriculum (Marzano, 2003).

**Focusing on results** ensures that the PLCs determine teaching effectiveness based on demonstrated student performance (DuFour, 2004). PLCs participate in an ongoing process of evaluation to determine current levels of student achievement, establish and achieve goals, and provide evidence of students’ progress. DuFour (2004) states that many schools and teachers are rich in data, but lacking in information. Effective PLCs realize that systematic collection and analysis transforms data into vital information for decision making and action. PLCs develop and implement common formative assessments by allowing team members to reflect and help each other identify possible problems and solutions.

To successfully implement DuFour’s Big Ideas (2004) requires a group commitment to hard work. PLC members must focus their efforts on student performance to ensure they are meeting the intended learning objectives. They also need to work collaboratively and hold each other accountable for results.

**Hord’s Attributes of PLCs**

Hord (1997, 2003) identifies five major attributes of PLCs that provides strategies for operationalizing these learning communities. These strategies complement DuFour’s Big Ideas as practical modes for implementing PLCs. Hord’s attributes are:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Collective creativity
• Shared values and vision

• Supportive conditions

• Shared personal practice

Supportive and shared leadership refers to the roles and responsibilities of administrators and teachers at schools with PLCs. School administrators must support the goals of the PLC and include faculty in the decision making process for instructional and curricular decisions. This type of relationship leads to collegial leadership within the school, where teachers and administrators grow together professionally while learning how to address issues dealing with student learning. Including PLC members in the decision making process promotes the growth of teacher leaders and moves them towards increased levels of ownership in their work. When administrators include teachers in making decisions, it creates a shared leadership as opposed to a top-down approach to management.

The idea of collective creativity is grounded in Senge’s (1990) idea of the learning organization, where each member of an organization contributes to an organization that is continuously learning and changing. Having members contribute innovative ideas in a safe environment, allows the PLC to have rich and diverse alternatives. An example of collective creativity is a teacher recommending a possible teaching strategy for a unit of instruction to improve student learning across a grade level. In their PLC, the teachers at the grade level discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the strategy and suggest modifications before implementing it. Another example is a teacher recommending alternative assessments for students to reflect on their learning. The PLC studies the different assessments, tweaks them to fit different learning situations, and determines how to implement them with students.
Shared values and vision refer to the members of the PLC having the same understanding of their goals (Hord, 1997, 2003). Although members of a PLC may favor different strategies and approaches to teaching and learning, they must agree on a common vision of what students are expected to achieve. These common values and visions typically lead to building norms in behavior that the PLC members share.

“Supportive conditions determine when and where and how the staff come together as a unit to do the learning” (Hord, 1997, 2003, p. 20). Support is essential in terms of the physical setup for PLCs as well as the building of human capacity (Boyd, 1992; Louis & Kruse, 1995). Physical setup involves arranging for meeting times and the physical proximity of PLC members, and viable means of communication. Building human capacity, which includes the competencies, knowledge, social and personal attributes inherent in a group, is crucial to the success of a PLC. Attributes that must be nurtured include a willingness to accept constructive feedback and to improve on practices based on self reflection and peer feedback (Louis & Kruse, 1995). Hord (1997, 2003) also indicates that respect, trust, cognitive ability, and socialization among PLC members are critical enabling factors in building human capacity.

Shared instructional practice allows members of the PLC to observe and provide feedback on each member’s educational practices. The focus can be on the teaching, planning, or assessment processes (Hord, 1997, 2003). This requires that members must have mutual respect and trust of one another.

In summary, Hord’s five attributes are interrelated and impact one another. For example, shared personal practice depends on nurturing human capacity, where colleagues in a PLC must be willing to accept and act on constructive criticism. There is also a link between shared leadership and collective creativity. If members of a PLC collectively develop instructional
approaches for their classes, they will need the shared leadership to be able to implement them. If the administrations does not allow the PLC to implement approaches and assessments they developed, it would likely prevent the team from improving student learning. All of the features are essential in building and maintaining a community of learners.

**DuFour’s and Hord’s Models**

DuFour (2004) focuses on the *big picture* of PLCs, while Hord’s (1997, 2003) attributes focus on the operational aspects of PLCs. When combined, these two models present a more holistic view of PLCs (Figure 1).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1. Theoretical framework for PLCs based on DuFour’s and Hord’s models.**

DuFour’s Big Ideas articulate the overall goals for enhancing student learning through effective teaching strategies while Hord provides strategies to establish PLCs. DuFour’s framework were selected as a basis for this thesis, as it has been used as a framework for several studies on PLCs (Lujan & Day, 2009; Sakshaug, 2010; Thessen, 2011; Zander, 2009). It should be noted that Hord’s work is based on her research in the Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement Project (2004), where she conceptualized the major attributes of effective
PLCs based on an extensive review of studies dealing with PLCs. Hord and her staff initially searched in a five-state region for schools that practiced the attributes and found that they were rare (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). In the next phase of her study, Hord invited 30 educators from across the country to participate in her program and create PLCs in schools. Over the next three years, these schools implemented PLCs based on their training. From the data that Hord’s team collected, they confirmed the five attributes essential for the successful school-wide implementation of PLCs.

**Effectiveness of PLCs in Education**

Along with readings on DuFour’s and Hord’s frameworks, the researcher also examined existing literature on the effectiveness of PLCs in improving student learning. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) conducted a meta-review of 11 studies of PLCs, which included qualitative as well as mixed methods studies in schools K-12. The 11 studies indicated that participation in PLCs resulted in critical changes to classroom teaching practices including more student-centered instruction, increased flexibility and differentiation in working with students, and modifications in pacing to account for varying student levels of understanding. Most of the studies included small sample sizes and followed few teachers. Data were collected through interviews and observation. One of the larger studies conducted by Louis and Marks included 910 teachers in the quantitative portion of the mixed methods study and 144 teachers in the qualitative portion.

Another study reported by Vescio et al. (2008) indicated that participation in PLCs also affected a school’s learning culture in the following ways:

- Many of the participants were more open to collaboration as teachers worked together to examine, share, and modify their teaching practices.
• Participants were focused on student performance rather than just how and what they were teaching.

• Administrators gave participants increased authority to make decisions about their curriculum and teaching practices. This led to the development of innovative strategies to improve learning.

• Participants were more greatly engaged in a culture of continuous professional learning when they were in control of the things that they learned and implemented in their PLCs.

Eight of the 11 studies noted that student achievement improved when the PLCs focused on demonstrated student performance. All of the PLCs documented in this study collaborated on the analysis of student data to drive changes in their instructional practices. This led to gains in student achievement.

Still, other studies reported a correlation between the establishment of PLCs in schools and gains in core subjects and increases in retention rates. In a national study of 787 schools conducted in 1995, Lee, Smith, and Croninger (reported in Hord & Sommers, 2008) indicated that students at schools with PLCs demonstrated greater educational gains in reading, math, science, and history than students in schools without PLCs. Similarly in a 2002 state-level study by Bobbett, Ellett, Teddlie, Oliver, and Rugutt (also reported in Hord & Sommers, 2008), students were less likely to cut classes or drop out of school as a result of practices implemented through the PLCs. Both of these studies used quantitative evidence to support their findings that PLCs improved students’ achievement in school and lowered truancy and increased retention.

Not only do students improve but teachers also feel a greater sense of empowerment by participating in PLCs. Roberts and Pruitt (2003) found that PLCs impacted teachers as leaders,
learners, and instructors, who in turn positively influenced their students. Teachers assumed new leadership roles enabling them to make decisions about how they taught their students and develop a stronger commitment to long-lasting change. They grew as learners by focusing efforts on learning about their students’ achievement and the pedagogy that would foster student improvement. As instructors, they learned new strategies to account for specific needs at their school. These changes revolved around teachers being more reflective regarding their practices. One of the authors was a facilitator for a group of high school mathematics teachers where she observed how reflection impacted the teachers’ focus on learning about their students’ achievement. She stated that the group moved from being hesitant to discuss ideas to centering their discussions on what and how students learned. A final case study of three high schools (Ancess, 2000) also confirmed that an ongoing process of teacher learning led to instructional practices that “resulted in increased graduation rates, improved college admission rates, and higher academic achievement for their students” (p. 11).

**Librarian’s Role in PLCs**

Literature is emerging on the specific roles of librarians within PLCs (Howard & Eckhardt, 2005; Pennel, 2008). Yukawa and Harada (2011) described instances of librarians as leaders of professional learning communities in different school settings. Similarly, Dees, Mayer, Morin, and Wills (2010) produced short vignettes about librarians who have been leaders of PLCs. In both cases, the articles stopped short of detailing specific behaviors and practices that helped the communities to form and grow.

In one of the more descriptive narratives to date, Kirio and Yamamoto (2012) recounted their experiences as leaders in developing and implementing PLCs in their high school. As members of the leadership group, they also served as facilitators for PLC teams within their
school. Their case study provides evidence that librarians can be instrumental in the development, growth, and sustainability of PLCs. This thesis contributes to the emerging body of literature by focusing on the librarian’s role in the evolution of a PLC and the strategies employed by librarians to support teachers in a PLC.

Summary

The development of PLCs is a promising direction in professional development that engages teachers in practices resulting in successful learning (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003). The effectiveness of PLCs, however, depends on how they are implemented and how they are sustained (DuFour, 2004; Vercio et al., 2008). Librarians are potentially valuable partners in the PLC process, as they bring experiences in collaborating with diverse faculties and understand the issues that teachers face (Pennel, 2008). While examples of librarians as leaders of PLCs are beginning to appear in the literature (Dees, et al., 2010; Kirio & Yamamoto, 2012; Yukawa & Harada, 2011), there is a need for additional research regarding the librarians’ roles, behaviors, and practices within PLCs.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used a qualitative research design to answer the questions posed in this case study. In this naturalistic research, the author studied the participants in their school setting (Patton, 2002). The study was conducted in two phases, the participant observation phase and the follow-up interview phase.

Senior Project

The study was conducted at Lokahi High School, a public school for grades 9 through 12 in the Hawaii Department of Education. There were approximately 2,000 students and 130 faculty members at the school. In the 2008-2009 academic year, the school implemented the Senior Project as a culminating option for students. It is also a component of the Board of Education Recognition Diploma. Along with the Senior Project, students must successfully complete 25.0 credits and a personal transition plan to be eligible for the Recognition Diploma (HIDOE, 2011). The Senior Project was initially developed to allow students to “demonstrate advanced proficiency in the attainment of the General Learner Outcomes (GLO), career and life skills demonstrating workplace readiness” (HIDOE, 2011). Students were also required to demonstrate a “learning stretch” that is relevant to the student. A learning stretch refers to the student pushing herself to learn beyond what the student already knows and thinks she can accomplish.

Figure 2 summarizes the major components of the Senior Project including the research paper, culminating activity, portfolio, and presentation. The research paper can be a position paper, problem-based, or persuasive in nature. A sample research paper rubric is included in Appendix A. The culminating activity typically reflects a career focus, service learning, or a
Figure 2. The Senior Project process (HIDOE, 2011)

A student’s personal interest. Career focused culminating activities include job shadowing or mentoring, such as job shadowing a nurse at a local hospital. Service learning integrates community service with the project to create a synergistic learning experience for the students. For example, a student studying cultural preservation worked with local community to develop a mural for the bus station. Student personal interest activities may be project-based or performance-based. An example is a student who developed a video game based on his interest in becoming a video game programmer. The final components of the Senior Project are the portfolio and presentation. Students document their process throughout the Senior Project and include their reflections in a learning portfolio that is shared with judges when they present their projects. The panel of community members judge the students’ overall learning using rubrics created in the different schools. A sample rubric is included in Appendix B.

Lokahi High School allowed their students to complete the Senior Project in their junior or senior year in high school. Initially, students were required to complete their Senior Project in their senior year of high school. However, the school gave students the opportunity to complete their Senior Project in their junior year to enable them to place its completion on their college applications. Students worked on the Senior Project in an advisory period or Senior Project
class. Advisory periods met for thirty minutes every week. When students opted to complete their Senior Project in advisory periods, they had less face-to-face time with their Senior Project teacher than those enrolled in the Senior Project course. Students enrolled in the Senior Project class met with their teacher for three hours and 10 minutes per week, while advisory periods met for 30 minutes per week.

**Participants in the Study**

The participants included two librarians and three teachers, who were the Senior Project instructors. Librarian A and Librarian B had been licensed librarians for 22 and 17 years respectively. Both librarians had been involved in the Senior Project program since its initial development at the school. Teacher A had taught for 8 years, Teacher B for 16 years, and Teacher C for 5 years. Teacher A had served as the coordinator of and teacher with the Senior Project program from 2010 to 2012. Teacher B was a Senior Project teacher for the 2010-2011 year while Teacher C joined the Senior Project in the 2011-2012 year. The librarians’ and teachers’ backgrounds are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Librarian A</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian B</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Sources**

**Participant Observation**

The researcher was a participant observer in the 2011-2012 school year. As a practicum student in the library, he was part of the instructional team and assisted in the planning,
development, and implementation of library-related lessons. As the researcher and observer, he took field notes on the activities of the PLC and interviewed five members of the PLC.

**Teacher and Librarian Interviews**

The researcher employed a semi-structured interview format and created an interview guide (Appendix C) to ensure the same basic line of inquiry for all interviewees (Patton, 2002). This format allowed the researcher to build a conversation and elucidate or illuminate different emerging themes. Each interview was approximately one hour in duration. The interviews were recorded for transcription and coding.

**Verification of Findings**

**Member Checks**

The researcher conducted member checks to verify findings from the participant observation and interviews. Member checking is the process in which participants are asked to corroborate findings to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Triangulation of Findings**

Triangulation strengthens the validity and reliability of a study by combining multiple sources and methods (Patton, 2002). The researcher triangulated the findings by source and method. He initially coded the data from the field notes. Subsequently, the data from the interviews were coded and used to verify the findings from the participant observation data. Lastly, the member checks were used to ensure that the interpreted findings were accurate from the participants’ perspectives.

**Data Analysis**

The data were coded using an open and axial coding method and the NVivo software to identify themes related to the research questions (Figure 3). The researcher initially used an
Figure 3. Coding Methods

Participant observation

Open coding

Initial findings for research questions

Develop interview questions to verify and extend findings

Interviews

Axial Coding

Findings

Verification of findings

Member Check
open coding strategy to explore the data without making prior assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This strategy allowed him to illuminate leads prior to identifying findings. The axial coding process facilitated the building of connections between codes developed in the open-coding process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This process helped the researcher shape the findings for the study.

The researcher analyzed the participant observation data by using an open coding strategy to do the following: describe how the teachers and librarians formed a PLC, identify the role of the librarians, determine how this PLC fit within the theoretical framework that combined the DuFour and Hord models, and distinguish aspects of the PLC that were not covered in the DuFour-Hord framework. After identifying the preliminary findings, the researcher developed a guide to interview the teachers and librarians. Upon completion of the interviews, he used an axial coding strategy to compare the themes of the completed interviews and the participant observations to develop the findings. Finally, he employed member checks to verify all of the findings of the study.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was the theoretical framework. The researcher may not have discovered critical attributes of PLCs that were not part of the DuFour-Hord framework. Another limitation was the danger of bias since the researcher served as a participant observer. To accommodate for this possibility, he used triangulated data and member checks to improve the reliability and validity of the findings.

Summary

The researcher conducted the study in two phases. The first phase included participant observations in the 2010-2011 school year. During this time, the researcher collected data in the
form of field notes. After the data were coded, the researcher developed a guide to use in interviewing the PLC members to verify the findings from the initial data source. The interviews were also used to flag themes that did not appear in the initial findings. After the interview data were coded and the researcher identified the findings for the study, he conducted member checks with the participants to ensure that he did not incorrectly interpret the data.

Two limitations were identified in the study: the use of a theoretical framework that might have limited the data collected and the researcher as a research instrument.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The researcher organized his findings around the study’s three research questions.

RQ1: How does a librarian-teacher professional learning community develop?

School Context for the Lokahi PLC

This PLC focused on the Senior Project. One year prior to the initial implementation of the Senior Project at this school, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction led a school-wide committee to develop an implementation plan. This committee included members from each of the departments on campus and the two librarians. The librarians joined the Senior Project Committee because they felt that the library program was critical for the students conducting research. During the planning year, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction did not receive much feedback from the different constituent groups, as they were not sure how the Senior Project would work. However, the librarians indicated that the committee met one of its goals, which was raising awareness across the school for the Senior Project.

Replacing the Senior Project Coordinator

In the second year, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction implemented the Senior Project. Students were allowed to participate even if they were not planning to qualify for the Board of Education Recognition Diploma. Librarian A, indicated that they (librarians) had the foresight to see that the research component would be important for all students participating in the Senior Project. In the middle of the school year, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction retired but she volunteered to help the first cohort of Senior Project students complete the program. In the graduating semester for the inaugural Senior Project class, the librarians saw a need to recruit a new coordinator for the Senior Project program. The administration gave them
permission to recommend a replacement. They considered different teachers for the position and concluded that Teacher A was best suited for the job because of her strong people skills, which would help her to work with diverse faculty members in the program. In addition, Teacher A’s roots as a Lokahi graduate would help her to understand the needs of this student population. While Teacher A was on maternity leave, the librarians asked if she would volunteer with the Senior Project program. She agreed and spent several months as a volunteer. During this time, the librarians asked her if she would become the Senior Project Coordinator. They encouraged her to attend a week long professional development session available for teachers and librarians who were involved in Senior Project research. Teacher A agreed to be the coordinator and participated in the training program with the librarians and Teacher B, another Senior Project teacher.

**Forming a Bond through Training**

After the summer training program, the librarians and teachers returned to their school to implement the Senior Project. They indicated that the summer institute allowed them to bond and develop a strong working relationship that carried into the school year. They felt that they were able to informally work together towards a common goal. Librarian A summed up the benefits of the summer training as follows:

It [collaborative professional development] gave us that kind of common language and common background. So, when we worked with Teacher A and Teacher B, we were all starting from the same place because we had experienced it together. So I think that when they struggled with it, they could come to us and we could talk with them and try to figure out what might be best course of action.
Replacing Teacher B and Establishing the PLC

At the end of the school year, the Senior Project team found out that Teacher B would no longer be part of the team and that they would need to enlist a new group member. At this point, the librarians and Teacher A reviewed the possible teachers to determine an appropriate replacement for Teacher B. They decided that Teacher C would be a good choice given his ability to work well with students and the principal supported their choice. After discussions with the principal and the project members, Teacher C agreed to join the team that evolved into an informal professional learning community.

Evidence of Librarian Leadership

The leadership roles of the two librarians were evident in the formation of this particular PLC. After learning about the impending retirement of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, they decided to recruit a new Senior Project coordinator to fill the void and ensure that the program grew. To help the team develop as a PLC, the librarians leveraged the opportunity for collaborative professional development to build a common knowledge framework. After Teacher B left the team, the librarians worked with Teacher A to identify a new Senior Project teacher. They were able to give their input and collaboratively select Teacher C as the incoming member of their PLC. These findings demonstrated the librarians’ knowledge of the school community, their ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with the administration, and their skills in collaborative problem solving and decision making.
RQ2: What is the role of the librarian in a teacher and librarian professional learning community?

The librarians’ roles in the PLC evolved through the years that they participated in the Senior Project program (Table 2). Therefore, the findings for the second research question are organized by the librarian’s roles.

Table 2. Roles of Librarians and Teachers in the PLC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Librarian role</th>
<th>Librarian practice</th>
<th>Teacher role</th>
<th>Teacher practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>• Recruit</td>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>• Develop an understanding of Senior Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask logistical questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Articulate goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>• Participate in teacher-led inquiry</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>• Ask questions targeting pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Share resources based on teacher-led inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask questions about student learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>• Co-plan</td>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>• Co-plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Co-teach</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Co-teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Co-assess</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Co-assess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>• Ask questions of other members about teaching and learning</td>
<td>Learner</td>
<td>• Ask questions of other members about teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer advice and support others’ inquiry</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer advice and support others’ inquiry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Librarians as Leaders

Initially, the librarians served as leaders within the PLC when the teachers joined the program. When the Director of Curriculum and Instruction retired, the librarians actively recruited Teacher A to join the Senior Project team and become the coordinator. As the coordinator, Teacher A had difficulty understanding her role; therefore, both librarians served as her mentors. Librarian A explained, “Initially we were mentors to her [Teacher A] because we
knew the background and we were the bridge between the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and her.” They guided her in developing the Senior Project program, which included the development of the logistics, student recruitment process, instructional procedures, and the Senior Project course. They were also instrumental in encouraging their team to participate in the research training summer institute. Teacher A supported the librarian’s statements by saying,

When I first started, I really didn’t know what was going on or what to do. So, having Librarian A and Librarian B there with me, and leading me in the right direction by letting me know where we should be going, that was important. Like they asked me to go to the Summer Institute, which really helped me understand how we can help the students.

As Teacher A began to understand the Senior Project program, the librarians focused their mentoring efforts on Teacher C. He referred to himself as a “newbie” and initially was not sure how he could contribute to the conversations. He learned about the different aspects of Senior Project by listening and, at first, a majority of his questions were logistical in nature. For example, he asked the librarians and Teacher A when assignments were due and which forms the students needed to complete at a given time. The librarians recognized Teacher C’s apprehension to ask deeper questions and encouraged him to ask more questions about his teaching practices and how well the students were learning. An example of Teacher C’s pedagogical questions had to do with different teaching strategies to help students find credible sources of information. He asked, “I know that the kids are aware of the different databases and how they give good information. But, how can we get students to use them because they still give me a list of Google sources.” This question sparked a deep discussion between Teacher C and librarians.
The librarians were instrumental in initially developing and articulating goals for the PLC. Goals included ensuring students met learning objectives and how they could implement the Senior Project with the entire student body at Lokahi High School. When setting the first goal, the librarians indicated that their team needed to determine how many students met the overall objective of successfully completing the Senior Project. Therefore, they reviewed the overall completion data from the first year to compare with data from subsequent years. Next, they determined that the PLC needed to better track students at each of the stages of the Senior Project. Initially, they were able to acquire the software, Senior Project Tracker. However, they were unable to get the software to work correctly, so the librarians helped Teacher A develop a method of tracking the students. Librarian A said,

We knew that we really had to keep track of the students, so we worked with the coordinator [Teacher A] to get support and get the software. But, that just made the process harder, so we worked with Teacher A to keep better track of the students, so they do not fall through the cracks.

Since there were approximately 100 students involved in the Senior Project, the librarians suggested that Teacher A develop a spreadsheet in Excel to centralize the student data. The spreadsheet included the students’ names and progress at each of the stages of research. Therefore, the PLC could view the students’ progress and achievement quickly, which also allowed them to identify areas of research that students struggled to complete. The second goal, developing a way to implement the Senior Project with all students at Lokahi High School, was critical to program at the time, as the Hawaii Department of Education wanted all students to complete a Senior Project to graduate high school. This particular goal had the PLC working
hard to find ways to help all students, even those enrolled in the Special Education program.

Teacher A commented,

Librarian A and Librarian B both indicated that it was important to develop the Senior Project program in such a way that all students be able to complete it, due to the Hawaii Department of Education requiring all students to do it. So, we worked hard and even allowed Special Education students to join the Senior Project class early on and learned a lot about how to make adjustments for these students without losing rigor. Like, Jimmy, he was blind and we had to make a lot of changes for him like using optical character recognition on all of his documents and working with him individually when he read research, but he was still successful.

Librarians as Supporters

When Teacher A began to understand and become comfortable with her role as the coordinator, she began to take the lead in the PLC and the librarians assumed a supportive rather than a mentoring role in the PLC. They served as a sounding board, assisting Teacher A in implementing her decisions. Teacher A explained her growing independence and the value of team support as follows

Now, I take the lead in trying to develop things and do the background research. Right now, I know that they [the students] are weak in developing a thesis, so I have been researching how colleges or other high schools teach their students. I also asked the English teachers at our school for advice. Then I take that information to Librarian A, Librarian B and Teacher C to see what they think.
Librarian A and Librarian B give good insights about the big picture, while Teacher C really looks at the implementation with the kids.

As instructional partners, the librarians also shared a variety of resources with the teachers throughout the process. For example, Librarian A was aware of the different Senior Projects that the students were completing and often shared newspaper articles or database resources that were pertinent to the students’ topics. Teacher A stated,

I remember this one student was doing his Senior Project on the Senior Project. It was hard to find resources for her topic because they really needed to be local.

Then Librarian A shared the article about how the Board of Education may change some of the requirements statewide and my student found it really useful.

Along similar lines, as Teacher C also became more comfortable with the logistics of the Senior Project and more reflective about his students’ learning, he began asking deeper questions about his students’ learning styles and his own strategies in connecting with them. For example, as he saw many of his students having difficulty with writing thesis statements, Teacher C consulted with the librarians about strategies to help his youngsters. In response, the librarians demonstrated several methods that involved chunking a thesis statement into smaller parts so that students could see the components that they had to include in a coherent and logical statement.

As they had done with Teacher A, the librarians gradually shifted from being mentors to supporters with Teacher C. Teacher C noted this change

I felt that I was the rookie, which I was. I was just soaking up information from them [Librarian A, Librarian B, and Teacher A] about the student expectations. I also asked a lot of questions about due dates and other logistical stuff. Once I got comfortable with the requirements, I felt that I could talk about how the students
learned and Librarian B and Librarian A were always so nice about it. I felt welcomed to ask.

**Librarians as Collaborators**

The librarians also supported both teachers in co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing lessons with the students. For these jointly planned and implemented lessons, the team selected key phases of the research process where the librarians had considerable expertise to share. One such area was helping students to select researchable topics for their projects. After the four collaborated on a library lesson for the students on topic selection, the teachers brought their classes to the library, where the librarians and teachers team taught the lesson. All team members took turns teaching and working with the students on their research projects. In a post-lesson debriefing session they focused on what worked, what did not, and how they should follow up.

The team also worked on the joint assessment of students’ final papers. This allowed the team to see how the students in the different classes performed. They also discovered differences in how they each assessed students’ work and identified gaps in their own grading procedures. Teacher A admitted, “I didn’t realize till we switched grading papers that I did not always see the big picture; [instead] I caught a lot of grammatical mistakes. The others saw it and I realized what I was missing and needed to work on to better help my students learn.”

While they jointly planned, taught, and assessed lessons, they never had a formal meeting time. Instead, they elected to meet as needed before school, during recess or lunch, and after school.


**Librarians as Learners**

Throughout the study, the librarians were learning about teaching and student learning alongside the teachers. They often asked questions about student learning and teaching techniques to improve their instructional approaches. Librarian B said, “I always wonder about how students learn and ask the question, ‘how can we help them?’ Whenever I read their papers, I always see them making the same mistakes and wonder what we can do to help them improve.” The questioning and reflection was a dynamic process; all team members constantly asked questions that might help them collectively improve their teaching. They found the process a dynamic and spiraling one as questions and discoveries spawned even deeper and more challenging areas to explore.

**RQ3: What are specific practices or behaviors that contribute to an effective PLC?**

The findings for the third research question are organized according to DuFour’s Big Ideas and Hord’s dimensions of PLCs.

**DuFour’s Big Ideas**

The actions of the PLC reflected the three Big Ideas posited by DuFour: ensuring students learn, developing a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results.

Ensuring students learn was the target of their meetings. A few of the major questions they addressed were: 1) How can we help students learn? and 2) What are the best ways to teach the different parts of the research process? One of the members would typically start the informal meetings with a question about improving some aspect of student learning. For example, Teacher A asked, “So, we just graded their first drafts and noticed that a lot of kids had problems with their thesis statement. How can we get them to focus and do this part better [and] earlier because it really sets the tone for the rest of the paper?” After the question was posed, the
PLC members discussed the different possibilities to improve the students’ thesis statements including chunking it into smaller components before adding it to their paper. The smaller components included the specific topic, argument, and how they plan to make their argument. They felt that this approach was less intimidating to students learning to write research papers. The PLC met at every stage of the research process, i.e., selecting researchable topics, pre-searching and exploring large topics before making final selections, generating questions, developing thesis statements, devising research plans, searching for information, and synthesizing information.

**Culture of collaboration:** Culture is developed through group socializations, where behaviors and practices are repeated over time (Rai and Panna, 2010). This PLC was able to develop a culture of collaboration by continuously working together to address learning problems for Senior Project students over the years. They felt that collaborating with each other was critical to improving their instruction and raising the students’ achievement. Teacher C reported that the collaborative culture helped him to open up and become a contributor to the team. He stated

They [librarians] are open to collaboration. They didn’t tell me to talk with them tomorrow. They weren’t that kind of a teacher or mentor. They sat down and took the time from their everyday job of being a librarian to help me out. They understood that I was new to Senior Project and how to get me to really think about the kids’ learning.

**Focus on results:** Learning results were measured by the PLC by looking at the overall number and percentage of students that were able to complete the Senior Project and reviewing the success of the students at the different stages of the Senior Project. As they taught the
different stages of research, the PLC members would assess a quarter of the assignment submissions to identify common mistakes. Next, they met to discuss the common mistakes and methods to improve instruction. Several of the PLC meetings focused specifically on the number of students who had successfully completed the Senior Project and the reasons those students passed. When they reviewed the data, they found that 52% of the students completed the Senior Project in its first year and 60% completed it in the second year. The team reviewed different factors that impacted students’ success. Juniors working in advisory had a low success rate because they had minimal direction and accountability. They decided to require juniors to complete the Senior Project in the official Senior Project class. The administration supported their decision based on the team’s past accomplishments in streamlining and improving the Senior Project process. An example of the PLC’s ability to streamline the Senior Project process was their recommendation to chunk the Senior Project into different stages of research, as opposed to having students complete the research paper as one step. When students were asked to complete the research paper without guidance at each of the stages of research, many became frustrated and did not succeed. Therefore, they taught the research paper as a process that included initial selecting researchable topics, pre-searching and exploring large topics before making final selections, generating questions, developing thesis statements, devising research plans, searching for information, and synthesizing information. This modification was based on sections of research that the PLC learned about at the Summer Institute. After implementing the stages of research and preventing junior students from attempting the Senior Project in advisory periods, their overall success rate improved to 96%.
**Hord’s Dimensions of PLCs**

The researcher categorized best practices of the Lokahi PLC based on Hord’s dimensions of PLCs (Table 3). In addition, illuminated practices that were not a part of Hord’s attributes, are also identified and discussed at the end of this section.

**Table 3. Practices that Contribute to an Effective PLC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Collective creativity            | ● Just-in-time learning  
                                 | ● Supporting ownership of ideas  
                                 | ● Openness to new ideas        |
| Shared values and vision         | ● Common beliefs about teaching and learning  
                                 | ● Similar work ethic           
                                 | ● Shared evolving vision for student learning |
| Supportive conditions            | Human capacity  
                                 | ● Respecting others’ views on teaching  
                                 | ● Openness to constructive criticism  
                                 | ● Positive feedback            |
|                                  | Physical setup  
                                 | ● Physical proximity of work areas  
                                 | ● Shared break times            |
| Shared instructional practice    | ● Co-planning  
                                 | ● Co-teaching  
                                 | ● Co-assessing                 |
| Supportive and shared leadership | ● Collaborative relationship with administration                           |
| Additional practices             | ● Informal nature  
                                 | ● Evolving role within PLC      |

**Collective Creativity**

Many of the ideas that the administration supported were the result of the team’s collective creativity best reflected in the projects they co-developed for the classes. This type of creativity was initiated when Teacher A suggested that juniors start on their post-high school plans when they were done with their Senior Projects in the third quarter. She felt that they might use this time to plan for their future since they rarely have time to accomplish this during
classes in their senior year. The PLC liked the idea and discussed possibilities for the students to continue their learning. Collaboratively, they decided that students could work in teams to research either colleges or work settings and then create Web sites on what they discovered. Collaborating for this project was an example of their just-in-time learning experience, as they met as needed to develop a plan for the project.

Students, who wanted to go to college, worked on Web sites about preparing for higher education, while students entering the workforce focused on life skills and preparing for a full time job. This project became larger than they anticipated, as the students used the research skills that they learned in completing the Senior Project to locate and synthesize information for their Web sites. The students also acquired new research skills, such as interviewing others to add primary data to their sites. In the end, the PLC members were pleased that the students transferred skills they had learned during the Senior Project and applied them to the post-high school plan project.

Shared Values and Vision

The PLC members shared similar values about effective teaching practices and student learning. They held a common vision about students in the Senior Project developing a greater ability to conduct meaningful research and having a stronger appreciation for inquiry-based learning. They also had similar working styles, which made it possible for members to plan and teach in a seamless fashion. Through discussions, they were able to develop a shared understanding of teaching and learning concepts that enhanced their work. For example, when the Hawaii Department of Education introduced the concept of “stretch learning” as an approach to incorporate robustness and rigor into assignments, the team explored how this concept could be integrated into their vision of students in the Senior Project.
Supportive Conditions

The teachers felt that the librarians were very supportive in helping them develop their instructional capacity. They said that the librarians never spoke negatively of their teaching methods and always offered positive advice on ways to improve their classroom instruction. The librarians were also open to giving feedback and receiving feedback about their own practices. Teacher A indicated that this creates a “two-way partnership, where we can give and receive feedback and learn from each other. We [Teacher A and Teacher C] are not offended if we receive constructive criticism and neither are they [librarians].” Teacher C agreed with Teacher A by saying, “I am for constructive criticism because we [the PLC] know that the only way we are going to get better is if we look at things and analyze what is going on and how we are going to move forward from there.” An example of constructive criticism offered to Teacher C was when the librarians cautioned him to be more careful when grading student work. This feedback proved to be helpful, as Teacher C said, “When Librarian A told me that I needed to work on my grading, I was pretty happy that she felt that I was good at seeing the big picture. But, it also made me see that I missed a lot of little things that were super important to the kids.”

The librarians emphasized openness in working with the teachers. They felt that the teachers invested great effort into their instruction with the students. Therefore, they honored the teachers’ efforts with justified praise and they tactfully suggested alternative methods of instruction as appropriate. Librarian B felt that they could provide the teachers with many ideas, but it would be up to the teachers to decide what would work best through trial and error. At all times, the librarians kept the conversations nonthreatening; their goal was to support the teachers in moving their instructional practices forward.
Along with building human capacity, Hord emphasized the importance of the physical and logistical structure of the PLC. As the Senior Project coordinator, Teacher A had an office in the library. The physical proximity allowed Teacher A to easily meet and discuss the Senior Project program with the librarians. Teacher A felt that being housed in the library gave her quick access to both librarians when she needed it, as opposed to carving out specific times to work with them.

Teacher C, however, taught in a classroom that was located halfway across the campus. In spite of the distance, he often found himself going to the library before school started, during recess, during lunch, and after school. On his visits, he spent five minutes to an hour discussing different aspects of the Senior Project with the PLC team. Teacher C felt that this time was very valuable to his learning, so he made sure that he always walked to the library. He said that it helped that the library was located near the office, where he checked-in in the morning. Both teachers agreed that the library was a good location to meet, as they often co-taught their classes with the librarians. In short, the team felt that the library was the ideal location for meeting, planning, and teaching.

**Shared Instructional Practice**

The members of the PLC were able to work collaboratively at different points in the school year. They spent most of the time co-planning for the different lessons. In these exchanges, they developed shared lessons and assessments to determine how well students were learning. For example, the four PLC members were able to jointly teach a lesson on pre-searching—developing background knowledge before selecting researchable topics—capitalizing on their different strengths and working with all the students to further facilitate their learning. They also debriefed on the lesson as a team to determine methods of improving the lesson in the
future. Teacher C summed up their shared practice best when he said, “being a part of a PLC goes back to being cooperative, taking things in, trying it out, experimenting with it, or even co-teaching. I never co-taught or co-assessed before this community. It wasn’t one person as the leader, but we were co-leaders.”

**Supportive and Shared Leadership**

The librarians and teachers also had a collaborative relationship with administration, who supported the PLC’s recommendations. Throughout the course of the Senior Project, the PLC kept their administration up-to-date with their thoughts, recommendations, and actions. The administration was better able to understand how the PLC approached problems in the Senior Project program and supported their decisions. When the PLC found that the burgeoning Senior Project program did not have enough external volunteers to assess the final papers, they approached the administration about the problem. They posed the Senior Project as a school endeavor where all class work contributed to the research paper and project. The team felt that the faculty at the school could support the students by everyone serving as judges. The principal agreed and Teacher A was able to secure a Wednesday meeting time for the faculty to judge Senior Project papers alongside community volunteers. The librarians indicated that their work for the school over the years helped them to develop a deep level of mutual trust with administration. This enabled them to make recommendations in their PLC that were supported and moved forward on a school level.

**Additional Features Beyond DuFour’s Big Ideas and Hord’s Attributes**

Two features that were not directly addressed in DuFour’s Big Ideas or Hord’s attributes emerged from the observation and interview data: the possibility of successful informal rather than formal PLC structures and the importance of evolving leadership roles in a PLC.
Although Hord did not address the issue of formal structures, DuFour emphasized the importance of specific times being set aside in the day for PLCs. The Lokahi PLC preferred to function without formal requirements for meeting times. Librarian B elaborated that the lack of structured meeting times did not impede the effectiveness of the PLC but that it promoted rich and varied discourse. Teacher A confirmed this.

I don’t think it is necessary for us to constantly meet at a certain time and sit there for three hours trying to figure something out because that usually becomes unproductive. When you have things to discuss and really get into them, you can make a lot happen. And we did.

Teacher A also indicated that she enjoyed “popping in” on the librarians and asking for their input to her ideas. She indicated that she met with the librarians on a daily basis to discuss the different aspects of the Senior Project, while Teacher C visited the library to speak with Teacher A and the librarians three to four times a week. In spite of the informal nature of this PLC, the team members managed to assess student performance when they met. For example, the librarians and teachers jointly assessed students’ progress on different parts of the research process. In these meetings, they determined how well their collaboration helped the students to learn by identifying what worked, what did not, and how they could improve. They also conducted one formal assessment during the year, which was a review of the percentage of students that passed the Senior Project compared to previous years.

In facilitating the informal meetings, the librarians agreed that inviting the teachers to come up with the starting points to ideas gave a greater sense of ownership to the teachers and led to stronger implementations. They felt that it was important to use the informal meeting
times to empower the teachers in the PLC and they indicated that formal meeting times might have stifled creativity and spontaneity.

The second feature of the Lokahi PLC was the constantly evolving roles of the librarians. Neither DuFour or Hord mentioned this aspect of team dynamics. Initially, the librarians demonstrated strong leadership and mentoring to help newer members of the team. They moved to more supportive roles as Teacher A grew confident in her role as the coordinator. The same pattern emerged in the librarians’ working relationship with Teacher C. They began as mentors with this new teacher but moved to more facilitative roles as Teacher C became a more comfortable and proficient member of the team.

Summary

The first two research questions illuminated the importance of librarian leadership in developing and maintaining PLCs. Initially, the librarians demonstrated their leadership by identifying a gap that was left by the Director of Curriculum and Instruction retiring and finding a teacher to take her place. Even though the teacher was not initially ready to be a leader in the PLC, the librarians mentored her to become a teacher leader. The librarians also understood how their roles within the PLC continuously changed, as they were able to move from a leadership role to a supportive one as team members assumed greater leadership and ownership of the Senior Project initiative. By analyzing the librarians’ and teachers’ practices within the PLC, the researcher identified behaviors and practices that contributed to an effective PLC based on Hord’s attributes.

Of the different practices that supported effective PLCs, both the librarians and the teachers felt that building human capacity was the most important factor in developing a PLC that truly benefitted the students. Librarian A summed it up as follows
The underlying value of our PLC is personal relationships - with students, with colleagues, etc. Recognizing the importance of developing positive relationships with students and staff and then taking the time to nurture these relationships are critical to the success of anything we do. In our effort to be more efficient in what we do, we sometimes lose sight that having healthy relationships actually makes us more effective.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to determine how librarian-teacher PLCs develop, the roles that librarians assume in these PLCs, and the practices and behaviors that contribute to an effective PLC. This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the study and its implications for practice and further research.

Summary of the Study

A professional learning community is a form of staff development that allows teachers to learn from each other within the context of their schools. DuFour (2004) viewed PLCs as having three Big Ideas: ensuring students learn, fostering a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results. The researcher viewed the Big Ideas as the overarching concept of a PLC. To better operationalize PLCs, the researcher included Hord’s (1997, 2003) attributes of PLCs: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practices. These attributes defined different practices and behaviors that support PLCs. The researcher used a combination of DuFour’s Big Ideas and Hord’s attributes of PLCs as a framework for this case study.

The research questions addressed were:

- How does a librarian-teacher professional learning community develop?
- What is the role of the librarian in a librarian-teacher professional learning community?
- What are specific practices or behaviors that contribute to an effective professional learning community?
Discussion

The importance of librarian leadership emerged as a critical aspect of the development and maintenance of librarian-teacher PLCs. In this case study, the librarians exerted their leadership skills to identify potential issues and utilize their knowledge of the teachers at the school to fill existing voids. When the original Senior Project coordinator retired, the librarians searched for a replacement and mentored the teacher to lead the PLC. They capitalized on their knowledge of the teachers to select a new instructor for the Senior Project. The librarians also indicated that when the teachers in the PLC were ready to assume stronger leadership roles, the librarians modified their roles to support the teachers. In addition, they facilitated the joint planning, teaching, and assessment of project activities.

The researcher felt that three findings were especially critical in maintaining effective PLCs. The first finding, the importance of human capacity, was viewed as essential in having a successful PLC. The teachers felt that both librarians were very strong in this area, as they understood how to mentor and partner with the teachers. The librarians, in turn, believed that working on relationships and focusing on human capacity were vital to their work in the PLC.

Two additional findings were deemed crucial in the interaction of PLC members: the effectiveness of informal organizational structures for PLCs and the importance of modifying and adapting roles as librarians in PLCs. Although DuFour (2003) and Schmoker (2004) recommended that PLCs include specific meeting times that are set aside with explicit agendas, participants in this study disagreed. This PLC met as needed and members felt they were better able to focus on student learning and results using this just-in-time approach. They believed that having a more rigid meeting style would be counterproductive to their learning and working styles. The researcher believes that the shared values and vision of this PLC was the driving
force that kept them moving forward without a formal structure. However, this type of informal structure may not work for all PLCs and the actual implementation may need to differ based on community dynamics.

The second feature that emerged was the evolving roles of the librarians in the PLC. While librarians have written about involvement in PLCs (e.g., Dees et al., 2008; Kirio & Yamamoto, 2012) they did not discuss how a librarian’s role might change over time. The librarians in this study clearly articulated the need to move from assertive mentoring roles to assistive and facilitative ones as members of the team also evolved in terms of knowledge and experience.

**Implications for Practice**

This study highlighted the importance of librarian leadership and flexible and informal working styles in PLCs. Librarians, who are considering involvement in PLCs, must have knowledge of their possible team members to determine their experience and capacity for working in PLCs. Librarians must also assess their own ability to flexibly serve in multiple roles and their skills in adapting and changing their roles based on the particular needs of the PLC.

When developing PLCs, practitioners should consider the human capacity of themselves and others. The participants in the study felt that this dimension of PLCs was the most important in developing and sustaining relationships. Therefore, librarians should keep this factor in mind and focus on developing positive relationships with all members of the academic community. Building these relationships will empower practitioners to develop sustainable professional learning communities within their schools.

PLC members should consider the amount of shared decision-making power they possess. In this study, the Senior Project PLC could make pedagogical and logistical decisions.
Other PLCs need to determine if they can make such decisions and be aware of the support they can expect from the administration. It is important to note that the librarians in this study had a positive working relationship with the administration that enabled them to move their PLC forward with supportive and shared leadership. Librarians who do not have this type of shared leadership capacity should focus their efforts on developing relationships with their administration, as the ability to act on PLC decisions is critical to the sustainability of PLCs. Kuon & Weimar (2012) collected advice from seasoned and retired librarians to help librarians develop this type of capacity. Their advice is summarized below:

- offer timely resources to administrators and teachers
- always having a positive disposition
- create satisfied customers (students, teachers, and the community) who will advocate for the library and librarian
- learn the administrators’ language and speak with them using it
- dress professionally, such as wearing a suit
- present at local and national conferences
- participate in social media, such as Twitter
- participate in school meetings and bring positive “tidbits” about the library
- match library skills with school standards, such as the Common Core State Standards

In the researcher’s experience, the librarians built strong working relationships with their administration by joining various leadership committees and ensuring the leadership is aware of the ways that the librarian and library program are impacting student learning.

The PLC in this study had one formal evaluation of their PLC, the quantification of students passing the Senior Project, which demonstrated their success over the years. However,
the researcher believes that a more systematic focus on results could have helped the PLC to identify other gaps in student learning. When they co-assessed, each PLC member reviewed a quarter of the students’ work based on set criteria before they reconvened. Then they discussed what did work, did not work, and how they could improve instruction. If they approached these evaluation sessions by determining the number of students that had difficulty with the different components of each assessment, they could create more targeted opportunities for remediation.

The researcher is advocating for slightly more results-focused meetings, based on their inquiry to help their PLC move forward.

**Implications for Future Research**

In the course of conducting this study, several items emerged, which have implications for future research. This study focused on a single PLC in a Hawaii public school. The researcher would like to examine librarian-teacher PLCs at other schools to conduct a cross-case analysis to strengthen the findings. Examining other librarian-teacher PLCs might also uncover additional roles, practices, and behaviors that promote strong PLCs.

Since this PLC evolved and included teachers entering and exiting the team, the researcher believes that he could continue the study with this PLC to see if the themes that emerged with new members persisted in subsequent investigations. He also believes that the librarians may be able to identify critical incidents that were the reason for their evolution of roles. This area for research might help practitioners understand different ways of working with new PLC members. It may also illuminate methods of assisting a greater variety of teachers, as the three teachers in the current study had similar implementations of Hord’s attributes in their practice.
The researcher might also continue to work with the librarians in this specific case study as they join and develop other PLCs at their school. Conducting further case studies with them in different PLCs might strengthen the findings if the themes that emerged in this study are consistent with their practices in other PLCs. Studying their participation in other PLCs will also help to understand the librarian’s roles in learning communities when other members may not readily view them as leaders. If this is the case, it could help researchers to understand different practices that aid librarians to develop leadership roles in a variety of situations.

**Conclusion**

Librarians are in a unique position to facilitate the PLC process, as they have experience working with teachers across grade levels and departments in schools (Pennel, 2008). This study illuminated important practices, behaviors, and qualities that librarians possess to ensure the PLC process is successful in schools. The librarians’ leadership and flexibility were important qualities that helped their PLC to be effective. These qualities empowered the team to work productively and contribute ideas that promoted student learning at higher levels.

In this case study, the librarian-teacher PLC adopted an informal structure that allowed for just-in-time learning, which was the team’s preferred method of learning. The librarians served as key members of this PLC utilizing their unique skills and knowledge to promote professional learning among colleagues at their school.
Appendix A: Sample Rubric for the Senior Project Research Paper

B.O.E. Recognition Diploma candidates must be exemplar in 4 of 6 categories to pass.

Senior Project candidates must meet the proficient standard with 100% to pass.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Exemplar</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>Poses a thoughtful, creative and focused statement involving challenging research.</td>
<td>Poses a focused statement involving challenging research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standard #1a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather Information</td>
<td>Researches at least 7 highly credible and reliable sources of varying types.</td>
<td>Researches at least 5 credible and reliable sources of varying types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standard #8</td>
<td>- General encyclopedias are avoided.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Most sources should be cited in the paper.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesize Information</td>
<td>Uses insightful topics or categories to synthesize and organize gathered information.</td>
<td>Utilizes categories to synthesize and organize gathered information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standard #7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>The compelling and intellectually satisfying paper shows a depth of insight/analysis of a significant topic and reflects extensive research that proves the thesis.</td>
<td>Paper shows understanding of topic and reflects adequate research proving the thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standard #9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite Information</td>
<td>Uses paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting to introduce, incorporate, and cite information with accuracy and clarity. Uses, with accuracy and completeness, the MLA style to adhere to fair use and copyright guidelines for citing sources in text and bibliographies.</td>
<td>Use paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting to introduce, incorporate, and cite information with no significant errors and no significant lack of clarity. Use, with no significant errors, the MLA style to adhere to fair use and copyright guidelines for citing sources in text and bibliographies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Standard #8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Common Core Standard #4</td>
<td>Superior writing. Well-phrased sentences with smooth and appropriate transitions. Wordiness is avoided. Proper use of grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation and no contractions.</td>
<td>Proper use of grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation and no contractions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Sample Rubric for the Senior Project Panel Presentation

Student’s Name: ___________________________ Title: ___________________________

Date: ______ Room: _____ Judge Code: ______ Please circle a box for each category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GLO #1: Self-Directed Learner</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Partially Proficient</th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Understands Content and Challenge
- **Student** provides clear and convincing evidence of time commitment and effort, independence and self-direction, and the ability to solve problems that arose during the learning process. Student provides clear evidence of a learning stretch and self-discovery.
- **Student** provides adequate evidence of time commitment and effort, independence and self-direction, and the ability to solve problems that arose during the learning process. Student provides limited evidence of a learning stretch and self-discovery.
- **Student** provides limited evidence of time commitment and effort, independence and self-direction, and/or the ability to solve problems that arose during the learning process. Student provides limited evidence of a learning stretch and self-discovery.
- **Student** provides little to no evidence of time commitment and effort, independence and self-direction, and/or the ability to solve problems that arose during the learning process. Student provides little to no evidence of a learning stretch and self-discovery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GLO #2: Community Contributor</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Partially Proficient</th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Interacts with people outside of the classroom
- **Student** provides clear and convincing evidence that he/she established a professional working relationship with community members.
- **Student** provides adequate evidence that he/she established a professional working relationship with community members.
- **Student** provides limited evidence that he/she established a professional working relationship with community members.
- **Student** provides little to no evidence that he/she established a professional working relationship with community members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GLO #3: Complex Thinker</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Partially Proficient</th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizes information from research and experience (combined with GLO #6)</td>
<td>Student provides clear and convincing evidence he/she understands the Essential Question and can explain how it connects to the research paper and the project. Student clearly explains the learning process and how he/she solved any problems. Effective use of technology evident in the project as a whole.</td>
<td>Student provides adequate evidence he/she understands the Essential Question and can explain how it connects to the research paper and the project. Student explains the learning process and how he/she solved any problems. Adequate use of technology evident in the project as a whole.</td>
<td>Provides limited evidence he/she understands the Essential Question and can explain how it developed. Has some difficulty connecting EQ to the research paper and the project. Struggles to explain the learning process and how he/she solved any problems. Use of technology in the project attempted but insubstantial</td>
<td>Provides little to no evidence he/she understands the Essential Question and can explain how it developed. Has difficulty connecting EQ to the research paper and the project. Cannot explain the learning process and how he/she solved any problems. Use of technology in the project poor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GLO #4: Quality Producer</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Partially Proficient</th>
<th>Not Proficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates a rigorous and relevant project</td>
<td>Student provides clear and convincing evidence that the research and the project match the speaker’s area of interest. The depth and complexity of the project’s scope is especially strong.</td>
<td>Student provides adequate evidence that the research and the project match the speaker’s area of interest. The depth and complexity of the project’s scope is evident.</td>
<td>Student provides limited evidence that the research and the project match the speaker’s area of interest. The depth and complexity of the project’s scope is marginal.</td>
<td>Student provides little to no evidence that the research and the project match the speaker’s area of interest. The depth and complexity of the project’s scope is inadequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLO #5: Effective Communicator</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Partially Proficient</td>
<td>Not Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Presentation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Essential Question, learning stretch, personal relevance, self-discovery, research and independent fieldwork</td>
<td>Attention-getting introduction is followed by a logical, well-organized presentation that clearly and comprehensively connects all the components* of the Senior Project.</td>
<td>An adequate introduction is followed by a generally logical, organized presentation that generally connects all the components* of the Senior Project.</td>
<td>A simplistic introduction is followed by a loosely logical, organized presentation that marginally connects all the components* of the Senior Project. Audience understanding is affected.</td>
<td>A weak or irrelevant introduction is followed by a haphazardly organized presentation that unsuccessfully attempts to connect all the components* of the Senior Project. Audience understanding is affected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Aids</td>
<td>Aids are relevant, error free, well-organized, and neat and clearly guide the audience through the presentation.</td>
<td>Aids are relevant, generally error free, well-organized, and neat and adequately guide the audience through the presentation.</td>
<td>Aids are of limited relevance and contain errors that begin to interfere with meaning. They present a barrier to the audience more than serving as a guide.</td>
<td>Aids are of little to no relevance and contain errors that severely interfere with meaning. They present a barrier to the audience more than serving as a guide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Student is exceptional in the following areas: articulation, use of standard English, posture, eye contact, professional dress, volume, speaking rate, word choice, and poise.</td>
<td>Student is adequate in the following areas: articulation, use of standard English, posture, eye contact, professional dress, volume, speaking rate, word choice, and poise.</td>
<td>Student is marginal in fewer than half of the following areas: articulation, use of standard English, posture, eye contact, professional dress, volume, speaking rate, word choice, and poise.</td>
<td>Student is marginal in more than half of the following areas: articulation, use of standard English, posture, eye contact, professional dress, volume, speaking rate, word choice, and poise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question and Answer</td>
<td>Student responds directly and accurately; answers with exceptional fluency and confidence, and shows enthusiasm.</td>
<td>Student responds adequately; answers with adequate fluency, confidence, and enthusiasm.</td>
<td>Student responds inadequately; answers with limited fluency, confidence, and enthusiasm.</td>
<td>Student responds inadequately; answers with little fluency, confidence, and enthusiasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</table>

Additional comments:
Appendix C: Teacher and librarian interview guide

Introduction: Provide a background for my research and an explanation for professional learning communities.

1. I am doing a thesis on how professional learning communities develop in schools and I am really interested in how it developed at this site.

2. What do you feel is your role in the professional learning community? Why do you feel this way? Can you give any specific examples?

3. PLC Attributes:
   a. When your PLC meets, what are some topics you discuss? Why do you focus on them? (students learning and focus on results)
   b. What do you believe is/are the goal(s) of your learning community? (shared vision)
   c. How does the administration promote collaboration among faculty? How does faculty encourage collaboration among peers? How does your PLC encourage this within the team itself? (Collaborative culture, shared decision making)
   d. What are strategies in your PLC to get people sharing their ideas with each other? What’s an example of an idea that you personally shared? What was the team’s response to it? (collective creativity)
   e. How does the current logistical set up (physical location of members, scheduled collaboration time) help or hinder the learning community? Can you give examples that support your insights? (supportive conditions: physical)
   f. What personal characteristics of the PLC members make it easy to work with them? For example, are the other members of the PLC open to constructive criticism? Can you describe situations, where these characteristics helped your PLC? (supportive conditions: values)
   g. How does your PLC promote opportunities to co-teach, co-plan, or co-assess? Could you share a few examples? How has planning and teaching together helped you to grow as a teacher/librarian? (shared personal practice)
   h. Overall, we looked at the following features of professional learning communities: ensuring that students learn, culture of collaboration, focus on results, supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. Could you please reflect on this list and e-mail regarding any of your practices within your PLC that are not within these categories?

4. Are there any other things that you do (or that others do) that make your learning community work well?

5. Your general comments are welcome.
REFERENCES


Boyd, V. (1992). *School context: Bridge or barrier to change?* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Cohn, M., & McCune, S. (2007). *Building capacity for sustainability: High school staffs and the improvement of learning and teaching*. (Doctoral Dissertation), Retrieved from ProQuest LLC.


