

TEACHER PARTICIPATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:
A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

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The proposed qualitative year-long descriptive study explored how high school teachers who participated in a Professional Learning Community had their school leadership aspirations impacted while serving in the New York City Public School System. Currently, the system has a dire need to fill school and district instructional, supervisory, and administrative leadership positions. The Servant Leadership Theory (Greenleaf, 2007) and the Distributive Leadership Theory (Spillane et al., 2001) were used to underpin the study, giving credence to a supportive and collaborative environment. The study was guided by the following research: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? The participants were 12 high school teachers who work in a public high school in a school district in New York City and agreed to answer semi-structured interview questions. Zoom was employed in the transcription and MAXQDA software was the primary tool used in the analysis of the themes born out of the coding of the interviews. The study findings uncovered three main themes: administration perception in PLC influenced teachers' perception of leaders; teachers gained leadership training and skills through professional learning communities; and participation in a professional learning community encouraged teacher leadership aspirations.

Keywords: Professional learning community, teacher leadership aspirations, school leadership, district leadership, NYC Public School System.

Dedication

In loving memory of my mother, oldest sister, and oldest nephew (Grace Thomas, Gemma Bidjou, and Brent Bidjou), may your inspiration of the pursuit of life and education transcend the lives in our family tree.

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Thanking God for giving me the inspiration to pursue this work to be better equipped for service to His people. My supportive wife and wonderful daughters were patient and extremely accommodating throughout this journey. You deserve a significant part of this degree. And for my dissertation committee, many blessings to each of you for seeing so much more in me than I could ever imagine in my wildest dreams. Your patient tutelage gave birth to this project and made the entire experience worthwhile.

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Chapter I: Introduction and Background of the Study

Introduction

Teacher performance and effectiveness are positively correlated with student performance (Harris et al., 2018). Professional learning communities can enhance the performance of students as well as that of teachers. Professional learning communities are collaborations among teachers. Professional learning communities creates a professional community where teachers share tasks and collaboratively work to improve the academic performance and welfare of their students (Wilson, 2016). Wilson (2016) noted that teacher collaboration was possible if all educational professional shared amongst themselves the strategies that would facilitate student success. Tai Mei and Omar (2021) found that, teachers significantly improved student academic outcomes by enhancing their comprehension.

In U.S. high schools, teacher initiated leadership is crucial to schools and students (Admiraal et al., 2019; Killion & Harrison, 2017). Instructional leaders improve their leadership and professional skills by encouraging teachers to focus on subject matter assignments and to work cohesively in small groups and teams (Admiraal et al., 2019; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Teachers who take the initiative to foster the necessary collaboration among their colleagues are vital in the formation of successful professional learning communities (Themaat & Ver Loren, 2019). Thus, professional learning communities are an effective means of improving teacher and student performance; teacher leaders are essential for the creation of effective professional learning communities (Admiraal et al., 2019; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Themaat & Ver Loren, 2019; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Teachers' aspirations to assume leadership positions in professional learning communities are therefore important for the functioning of a professional learning community and, in turn, for student and teacher performance and growth.

Background of the Study

Research has defined a professional learning community as a mechanism that allows teachers to professionally develop themselves while also sharing their expertise with colleagues (Huffman et al., 2016; Zhang & Pang, 2016). The concept of professional learning community is about three decades old and attempts to characterized shared values and a unified vision related to the collaborative working among professional teachers. Wilson (2016) noted that a professional learning community was an environment where professional teachers shared tasks and communally worked to better each other's skills. In the professional learning community, all teachers are responsible for the wellbeing and academic outcome of children. The child is the center of the collaboration, and all teachers assist one another in promoting the learner's optimal performance and achievement since children are the sole reason why teachers collaborate.

The efficacy of professional learning communities in improving the performance of students and teachers is dependent on the commitment of all the teachers involved. DuFour and Eaker (1998) established that the functioning of professional learning communities peaked when all members showed commitment to the activities of the group. Cook and Faulkner (2010) reiterated that working in collaboration allowed professional teachers to share ideas, lessons, assessments and units, which enhanced their performance both individually and collectively. Teachers' edification and responsibility to students and the professional learning community promote student achievement, teacher growth, and a high-performing school (Stoll et al., 2006).

Typically, teacher collaborations within a professional learning community involve the discussion of pedagogical issues, coaching, and mentoring, as well as the sharing of resources, syllabi and best practices that would influence the students positively (Little, 1990; 2003). In concert with Little (1990), Sacks (2017) established that the five steps proposed by the School

Reform Initiative would influence and facilitate the formation and perpetuation of an effective professional learning community. The five steps include hearing what teachers have to say, allowing teachers to think and make contributions, and providing teachers with time to reflect on their ideas as well as those of others. The fourth step is collaborating with other groups to provide a structure for the learning community and allowing the rotation of roles and responsibilities.

The success and strengths of a professional learning community is its leader who support the group and its activities. By sharing leadership responsibilities, participants in a professional learning community share responsibilities and thus implement distributed leadership that allows for a collaborative making of decisions as well as sharing of ideas (Hord & Tobia, 2012). Successful changes in the professional culture of learning communities is influenced by supportive and shared leadership that is at the center of the school administration. Leaders can prioritize student achievement by creating an environment that allows teachers to share ideas and collaboratively work with other academic professionals to improve the students and their professional outcome (King, 2002). Blocks of time during the contractual workday may be dedicated to the collaborative refinement of pedagogy through peer-modeling once a high degree of comfort and familiarity exists within the professional learning community. Leaders play a crucial role in developing a professional learning community where members collaborate in planning, implementing strategies and addressing important issues.

Professional learning communities have improved the academic outcome of students (Lomos et al., 2011). Professional learning communities have also enhanced the academic achievement of students and quality of school leadership. When principals have a positive impact on a professional learning community, there can be gains in student achievement, which may

trickle down into gains in teachers' professional development. Professional learning communities are also influenced directly by school administrations that facilitate communal learning and sharing (Park et al., 2019). Professional learning communities with strong teacher leadership and administrative support enhance the performance of school, students and teachers.

The problem of practice is a gap in the literature regarding how high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community influences their school leadership aspirations. Strong teacher leadership and administrative support is critical in enhancing the abilities of professional learning community in improving student achievement. However, the gap in this study is associated with the impacts of professional learning community participation on the aspirations of teachers to lead leaves practitioners without sufficient guidance on how professional learning communities can be optimized to enhance teacher leadership. This proposed study attempted to address the identified gap with regards to professional learning communities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how public high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community influenced their school leadership aspirations in a New York City public school.

Research Question

A single research question was designed to help guide the study and also address the problem in question:

RQ: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school?

Significance of the Study

Participation in professional learning communities can foster improvements in student and teacher learning and growth (Admiraal et al., 2019; Killion & Harrison, 2017; Themaat & Ver Loren, 2019; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). It is also known that strong teacher leadership, either distributed or concentrated in a single leader, is essential for facilitating the relationships and collaboration among teachers on which an operative professional learning community depends (Hord & Tobia, 2012; King, 2002). However, it is not known how high school teachers' participation in professional learning communities influence their participation on their school leadership aspirations. This proposed study attempted to gain insight into this phenomenon in order to provide guidance to practitioners that may help them optimize professional learning communities' contributions to teachers' aspirations to lead.

Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks were used to underpin this qualitative research. The theoretical frameworks were servant leadership and distributed leadership. The theory of servant leadership was developed by Greenleaf (2007). Greenleaf devised the concept of servant leadership for implementation in a corporate setting. Servant leadership is contrasted with traditional leadership in that a servant leaders' goal is to provide service to the organization and their followers. The servant leader accomplishes the goal of service by promoting growth and success among subordinates, and by involving subordinates in decision-making processes to

ensure that everyone has a voice and is able to contribute to the collective good. The servant leadership model was a useful lens for understanding and interpreting the data in this proposed study because the goal of a professional learning community leader is to serve the instructors they lead and the students in their school, and their success was measured by growth and improved student and teacher performance.

Distributed leadership was the second framework that underpinned this qualitative research. In the academic field, the concept of distributed leadership describes how leadership in complex tasks was invested in multiple individuals rather than a single individual (Spillane et al., 2001). When distributed leadership occurs, leadership is shared by multiple individuals, including teachers. The different individuals who have leadership responsibilities work collaboratively to achieve goals such as student achievement that are too complex and require too much coordination for a single person to undertake all the leadership duties associated with it. Distributed leadership was a useful theoretical framework for organizing and interpreting the data in this proposed study because professional learning communities are often led by an alliance of academic tutors who share leadership duties to coordinate and optimize the needed collaborations among their colleagues (Hord & Tobia, 2012).

Methodology and Research Design Overview

A qualitative methodology was used in this research. Qualitative research methods use open-ended questions to collect data on the experiences and perceptions of participants regarding the problem being investigated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An important advantage of qualitative research is that it enables researchers to allow participants to respond to interview prompts in their own words, in a manner that indicates their perceptions of the influences of the social, organizational, and individual contexts on a phenomenon of interest. For this reason,

qualitative research was the optimal method for exploring a phenomena in its natural occurrence that cannot easily be separated from the contexts in which it occurs. The perceived influences of professional learning community participation on teachers' leadership aspirations are expected to be embedded in unique organizational and personal contexts, so a qualitative approach that will allow participants to discuss those contexts is more appropriate than a quantitative approach that would decontextualize the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Qualitative research is also the most suitable approach for investigating phenomena that previous researchers have not completely described, because the use of open-ended questions to collect data allows insights that were not contemplated in the previous literature to emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The problem of practice addressed in this study was the gap in the literature regarding whether teacher participation in a professional learning community can positively impact teacher leadership aspirations. Given that the phenomenon of interest has not been characterized in the previous literature, a methodological approach conducive to the emergence of unanticipated insights was needed. A quantitative approach would be inappropriate because quantitative research is confirmatory, in that it is used to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses and potential outcomes which must be contemplated in advance (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To achieve the objectives of the research, the researcher used a descriptive research design. Qualitative descriptive research is used by researchers seeking to provide a systematic and elaborate description of a phenomenon using data retrieved from a purposefully selected sample (Sandelowski, 2010). In this study, the purposeful sample consisted of New York City public high school teachers who participated in professional learning communities, and data were gathered as a result of the individual semi-structured interviews conducted using a

researcher-constructed interview protocol. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate because it enables the researcher to identify and to explore existing phenomenon in the way that those who interact with it envision the phenomenon (Percy et al., 2015).

A phenomenological research design was considered but was found to be inappropriate for this research. Phenomenological research designs are used to explore the lived experiences of participants an area not covered by this study (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological design was rejected because the research question in this study explored the perception of teachers regarding the impacts of professional learning community on their aspirations.

The researcher explored the appropriateness of grounded theory research design. Grounded theory research design is used by researchers seeking to develop a theory to test hypothesis from participant responses (Charmaz, 2014). Given that the goal of grounded theory research design is generating a theory, it was unsuitable for this descriptive researcher since the servant leadership and distributed theories were sufficient for this study.

An ethnographic research design was also explored for its appropriateness in the current research. Ethnographic research is appropriate for investigating through researcher immersion in a group of people who have their own distinct culture and collective experience (Hammersley & Arkinson, 2007). New York City public high school teachers do not constitute a distinct group of people with its own culture and history, and the research question in this study did not call for an investigation of a culture, so an ethnographic design was deemed inappropriate.

Definitions of Key Terms

Distributed Leadership - The concept of distributed leadership in education describes how leadership in complex tasks was invested in multiple individuals rather than a single individual

(Spillane et al., 2001). When distributed leadership occurs, leadership is shared by multiple individuals, including teachers.

Professional Learning Community - Antinluoma et al. (2021) envision it as a place where teachers with a common goal convene to learn and share in a safe space. The benefits revolve around student achievement. Professional learning communities in educational settings help to ensure that educators work collaboratively to address challenges they face in their entire community (Prenger et al., 2018).

Servant Leadership - Greenleaf (2007) developed the theory of servant leadership. The leader's goal is to serve the people being led. The servant leader accomplishes the goal of service by promoting growth and success among subordinates and by involving subordinates in decision-making processes to ensure that everyone has a voice and is able to contribute to the collective good.

Assumptions

The assumptions that were made by the researcher include:

1. The researcher assumed that participants selected for this qualitative research were honest and would truthfully and accurately respond to the interview questions. The assumption on the honesty of participants is crucial for the study results to be meaningful, and it cannot be verified during the research process.
2. The researcher also assumed that the expected results would be transferable to other settings if the study. This assumption is necessary for this research to have meaning beyond the context in which it will be set. Descriptions of the inclusion criteria, sample and population were provided to ensure transferability of the current qualitative research.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following limitations to the scope of the study were entailed by the study design and procedures:

1. Data were drawn exclusively from participants' self-report because no other source of information about the influence of professional learning community participation on teachers' leadership aspirations was available. Data from self-reported questionnaires threaten the credibility of the results because the findings cannot be verified through triangulation with data from other sources.
2. Qualitative research is not generalizable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This limitation may threaten the transferability of the results to other settings. However, generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research, and sufficient information about the target population, study settings, and sample were included to ensure the transferability of the results.
3. Qualitative research is not objective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The findings are, instead, grounded on participant perspectives from whose reports they are drawn, and the findings may be subject to the influence of researcher bias. This limitation may threaten the credibility of the findings. To address this challenge, the major findings in this study included the viewpoints of all participants to abate the influence of individual participants' bias when these are not shared by the majority of participants. When presenting the results, the researcher will include direct quotes as verbatim evidence of participant responses. Using direct quotes helped the researcher in independently assessing and comparing the findings to the data from which they were drawn.

The following delimitations were placed on the scope of the research voluntarily: a small sample size that might limit the transferability of the findings. Small sample sizes are common in

qualitative research because of the labor-intensive nature of collecting and analyzing qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

1. The geographic setting in this study was limited to New York City, and the target population was further limited to teachers in NYC public high schools. This delimitation may threaten the transferability of the findings to other geographic settings (e.g., other cities, or rural areas), and to other school levels (middle school or elementary school). Demographic data about the sample were collected and reported in Chapter 4 to enable the reader to assess transferability and appropriateness to other samples and settings.

Organization of Study

The current qualitative research comprises of five chapters. In chapter 1, the researcher introduced the problem to be investigated and provided a brief background of why investigating the problem was important. The review of literature will be in Chapter 2. The researcher will provide a detailed synthesis of empirical and theoretical literature supporting the existence of the problem investigated. In Chapter 3, the researcher described the research methodology, study design, procedures and their rationales. Study findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, recommendations and conclusions.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how public high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community influenced their school leadership aspirations in New York City Public Schools. The problem of practice was a gap in the literature regarding how high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community influenced their school leadership aspirations. This study attempted to gain insight into this phenomenon to provide guidance to practitioners that may help them optimize professional

learning communities' contributions to teachers' aspirations to lead. Distributive leadership and servant leadership were used as the theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Scholars have conceptualized the “professional learning community” concept or practice differently. Chen (2020) conceptualizes a professional learning community as a place or practice where instructors with a shared goal convene to share ideas, learn, and to professionally develop each other. In most cases, professional learning communities are used in learning institutions as one of the strategies to organize educators into professional working groups for advanced learning and training. The context and meaning of a professional learning community differ across the spectrum (Li, 2022). Researchers are yet to agree on a universally acceptable definition of a professional learning community (Mo et al., 2021).

Li (2022) conceptualizes the professional learning community as a practice where learning institutions commit to achieving a culture characterized by creative solutions to academic and professional issues, shared learning, vision, and collaborative inquiry with distributive and supportive leadership structures. Chen (2020) also highlights that a professional learning community referred to a group of teachers who committed to work together to grow themselves and improve students’ performance academically. Professional learning communities are anchored on the principle that professional development and continuous learning is critical in improved learning outcomes for students (Li, 2022). From Mo et al.’s (2021) perspective, a professional learning community refers to a learning environment where teachers are united by a shared purpose, vision, goals, and collective commitment to engage in action research that would improve their performance continuously. Although several definitions exist for a professional learning community, one consistent aspect across the definitions is the conceptualization of a professional learning community as an environment or practice that promotes shared learning for professional development among teachers.

Existing research indicates that professional learning communities successfully create a congenial environment where tutors mutually cooperate on various aspects to advance their teaching practice and knowledge base (Mo et al., 2021). Elfarargy et al. (2022) maintain that implementing professional learning communities in organizations can help prepare teachers as instructional leaders or leaders who are ready to respond to 21st-century learning challenges.

A professional learning community has several characteristics. Chen (2020) outlines five dimensions of a professional learning community to include shared values and visions, shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. Other scholars such as Li (2022) have identified 12 dimensions of a professional learning community, eight of which directly relate to the four dimensions of professional learning communities. The remaining four relates to the implementation process of professional learning communities in learning institutions.

The 12 characteristics are shared values, collective responsibilities for students' learning, a collaboration aimed at learning, continuous professional learning, individuals and collective reflective, reflective professional inquiry, networks, openness, and partnerships (Li, 2022). Other dimensions are support, resources, respect, inclusive membership, trust, collective professional learning, and structure optimization, (Li, 2022).

The past decade has witnessed significant research on professional learning communities. Studies have identified that professional learning communities professionally develop teachers, improving their instructional leadership and students' performance (Elfarargy et al., 2022). The adoption of professional learning communities in the education sector is conceived as the most important evolution with direct effects on the quality of instruction and teaching practice. Researchers, such as Li (2022), posit that professional learning communities are effective in helping learning institutions to improve students' performance and teacher collaboration. Studies

such as Mo et al. (2021) have also documented evidence indicating the role of professional learning communities in improving teacher leadership skills and students' performance. In the next section, the overview of the problem under investigation is presented and its relationship to teacher leadership.

Systematic Review: An Overview of the Problem

Teaching is an important practice that requires continuous collaboration among teachers (Lee et al., 2022). Collaboration among teachers is critical to professional development, instructional practice, and student performance (Li, 2022). However, the failure of teachers to collaborate and develop to become instructional or teacher leaders threatens the quality of the learning environment and its contribution to students' success (Lee et al., 2022). One challenge that institutions face in professionally developing teachers to become leaders is the tendency to work in isolation (Chen, 2020).

Teacher isolation refers to an emotional state rather than a condition of work. While teaching practice is highly interpersonal, teachers are often isolated from their colleagues (Lee et al., 2022). Some of the challenges of teacher isolation are reduced teacher collaboration, professional growth, creativity, and even innovation in learning institutions when individual teachers concentrate on their roles and ignore the shared role they have to achieve their common objective of improving students' performance (Elfarargy et al., 2022).

Teacher isolation is a widespread problem at the project site and across the United States. Research conducted by Lee et al. (2022) establish that teacher isolation is a major barrier to professional growth among teachers. In most cases, teachers tend to focus on their own life with little interest in other people's activities. Elfarargy et al. (2022) conducted a study on teacher isolation and its impact on collaboration. It found that teacher isolation was prevalent among teachers as most sought to remain private. Elfarargy et al. (2022) also identify that another

reason for teacher isolation is the need for teachers to protect their pedagogical methods, which in most cases could not be developed due to noncollaboration. Additional studies such as Mo et al. (2021) indicate that out of 33 teachers who participated in the study, 40% with over 10 years of practice prefer working independently to avoid participating in a professional learning community.

Researchers such as Elfarargy et al. (2022) have also reported that teachers prefer not to engage in professional learning communities if their contributions are not acknowledged through various professional learning communities' collaborative practices. Other studies have found that most teachers prefer a long time, mostly five years, before participating in professional learning communities (Derk, 2019). Isolation among teachers emanates from cross-curricular collaboration as educators consider collaborative opportunities counter-productive given that instructors from other academic areas may not be conversant with content areas other than their own (Lee et al., 2022). Consequently, such an assumption could lead to a total breakdown of the shared visions, goals, and values essential for a learning organization and professional leadership growth through professional learning communities (Krakehl et al., 2020).

Several systematic reviews have documented the benefits of professional learning communities. For instance, Elfarargy et al. (2022) investigated teachers' perceptions regarding their participation in professional learning communities. The findings indicated that most teachers considered a professional learning community important to their professional growth as leaders and pedagogical knowledge base (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Additional research by Öntaş (2019) reveals that professional learning communities can help teachers enhance their teaching practice by allowing them the opportunity to directly improve their teaching and learning practice through sharing, discussion, and collaboration with other teachers.

In addition, professional learning communities can help to professionally develop teachers because they create strong relationships between team members and shared goals (Nehmeh & Kelly, 2018). Frequent meetings among team members can help them create mutual respect, rapport, and trust for sharing information to improve learning practice (Rolandson & Ross-Hekkel, 2022). Durr et al. (2020) also pinpoint that participating in professional learning communities is important as it helps teachers to reflect on their practices and initiate appropriate practices for improving performance. The studies reviewed indicate that professional learning communities are critical to professionally developing teachers as professionals and instructional leaders, which tackles the learning needs of the 21st-century schools.

Even though the significance of professional learning communities in professionally developing teachers is evident in existing literature, most teachers prefer working in isolation even though the current literature supports the significance of professional learning communities in creating teamwork (Durr et al., 2020). Most teachers avoid professional learning communities, thereby missing opportunities for professional development into teacher leaders (Nehmeh & Kelly, 2018). The existing research has inadequately investigated teachers' perceptions regarding their willingness to participate in leadership after participating in a professional learning community (Durr et al., 2020). There is, therefore, a need to investigate teacher leadership aspirations after participating in a professional learning community to address teacher collaborations that inhibit professional development among teachers to become leaders (Rolandson & Ross-Hekkel, 2022). The research is important as it will address the current research problem where teachers prefer working in isolation, thereby limiting their professional development into leaders.

Documented Impact of the Problem

Previous researchers have called for further research examining the need for teachers to share their expert knowledge and partner professional growth throughout the learning institutions. In particular, Rolandson and Ross-Hekkel (2022) quantitatively investigated the changing role of teachers and found that the teachers' role has evolved from instructional facilitators to leaders. There is also the need to develop teachers into leaders who should take administrative or supervisory roles in learning institutions, particularly in the United States (Chen, 2020). Lack of leadership among teachers has made it difficult to increase students' performance or maintain discipline in the learning institutions (Chen, 2020). Developing effective leaders among teachers can help leaders improve their relationships with other stakeholders to improve teacher retention and overall performance in their schools (Chen, 2020).

The decline in student performance has become an issue of concern attributed to teachers' poor leadership practices. Teachers who do not have leadership skills may fail to motivate and coordinate students and teachers to achieve the redefined goals (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Poor leadership skills among teachers could also worsen job satisfaction leading to high attrition or low retention of teachers (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Given the need to address and fill the leadership roles in public schools, Elfarargy et al. (2022) recommend additional research focusing on how professional learning communities can develop teachers into professional leaders who can manage learning institutions successfully. Mo et al. (2021) also called for additional research on the concept of professional learning communities and the leadership within them from a shared perspective on teacher motivation to become leaders.

There is a need to develop a culture of cooperative learning in institutions to improve learner performance and retain teachers. To be successful, there is a need to develop teachers into leaders who are likely to have the required leadership skills needed for collaboration. There

is also a need to have research-oriented leaders using statistics and suggest appropriate strategies for improving teaching practice and the overall learning process (Mo et al., 2021). Teachers need to have leadership skills to promote strong collaboration and partnership with parents to promote parent involvement, which is key in the learning process. Therefore, the need to fill supervisory leadership in schools, improve students' performance, and retain teachers necessitate implementing a professional learning community to equip instructors with leadership skills to assume such important roles in their institutions and avoid teacher isolation.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The problem that was investigated in this study is a literature gap regarding how high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community influences their school leadership aspirations. Although several studies have been conducted on the influence of professional learning communities, limited studies have focused on the effects of a professional learning community participation on high school teachers' school leadership aspirations (Krakehl et al., 2020). Limited research in this area limits the understanding of how professional learning community programs can be optimized to promote teacher leadership by reducing teacher isolation (Mo et al., 2021). In order to develop interest among teachers to become leaders (instructional, supervisory, or administrative), there is a need to facilitate the free sharing of knowledge and expertise. As opined by Derk (2019), enabling the free flow of knowledge, information, ideas, and expertise among leaders could contribute to professional development that could help teachers improve their pedagogical skills.

Krakehl et al. (2020) investigated the effects of knowledge sharing among teachers and their leadership aspirations and found that through professional learning communities, teachers would be mentored, coached, and trained to become leaders based on peer-to-peer relationships (Krakehl et al., 2020). However, the researcher recommended further research to extend their

findings using a heterogeneous population to facilitate the transferability of their findings (Krakehl et al., 2020). Derk (2019) researched the link between knowledge sharing and pedagogical skills through professional learning communities in the United States and provided initial evidence linking knowledge sharing and expertise to improved leadership and pedagogical skills among teachers (Öntaş, 2019). Given that the researcher used a small sample size that threatened its internal validity, further research was recommended to extend their findings (Öntaş, 2019). Although considerable research exists on professional learning communities, recent literature on how participation in a professional learning community could improve high school teachers' leadership aspirations is still missing.

Historical Review

The term “professional learning community” first emerged in literature in the early 1960s (Lee et al., 2022). The term was used mainly as a substitute to menace isolation in the teaching profession in the United States. The research then evolved and became more explicit in the 1980s through the 1990s (Öntaş, 2019). In the early 1960s, learning institutions faced acute calls from parents and stakeholders to increase the students' performance and prepare them to be career ready. As such, reforms were witnessed in the 1960s (Chen, 2020). In the early 1960s, learning institutions introduced reforms designed to improve schooling outcomes known as Lexicon reforms. By the 1970s, other reforms were needed to increase accountability of funds spent on education (Lee et al., 2022). This led to the introduction of public bills commissioned by the federal government (Lee et al., 2022).

By the early 1980s, the public education reforms majorly focused on the influence of the work environment on workers (Lee et al., 2022). Researchers focused on exploring how the learning environment influenced and motivated teachers to perform (Chen, 2020). The aim was

to create organizational learning whereby teachers can be allowed to collaborate and engage in learning practices designed to improve their skills and knowledge base.

By the 1990s, major reforms were also witnessed in literature, from organizational learning to sociocultural theories (Lee et al., 2022). In early 1993, Astuto et al. published the first literature titled *professional community learners*. This was followed by Senge's (1990) work titled *learning organizations*. Developing from these two previous literatures, Hord (1997) officially conceptualized the term Professional Learning Community. Hord (1997) referred to professional learning communities as a standard organizational framework created to encourage teamwork and continued professional development among tutors to improve school practices. Five key dimensions of a professional learning community were identified by Hord (1997) and they include (a) collective learning and application; (b) supportive conditions; (c) supportive and shared leadership; (d) shared values and vision; and (e) shared personal practice.

The seminal research conducted by Hord (1997) at South West Educational Development Laboratory (SWEDL) between 1995 and 2000 became the basis for research on professional learning communities. Hord's (1997) research included 30 teachers to investigate challenges teachers encountered in their practice to create a vision for a professional learning community. The study aimed to advance collaboration among instructors where information and ideas are freely shared to improve the learning process (Lee et al., 2022). Since then, research on a professional learning community has extended to different fields (Chen, 2020). Most studies have indicated that professional learning communities are effective in developing teachers to be professionals, instructional leaders, and specialists in their areas of specialization through knowledge sharing (Chen, 2020).

In 2012, the concept of professional learning communities was revolutionized by research that sought to understand major practices for effective learning communities (Lee et al., 2022).

The researchers identified success factors for impending professional learning communities, including top teacher support, trust, and organizational capacities to facilitate learning teams and knowledge sharing (Chen, 2020). In early 2020, professional learning community associates discussed history strategies, support, barriers, and benefits of participating in professional learning community practices at the university council for educational administration (Chen, 2020). Therefore, the research reviewed indicates the evolution of professional learning communities over time into a single valuable practice for professional growth and evolution of tutors to leaders.

Thematic Review

Dimensions of Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities infer to a team of specialists who meet often, share knowledge, concerns, and expertise and collaboratively work to improve students' academic performance or teachers' teaching skills (Dogan & Adams, 2018). In the education sector, professional learning communities may as well be denoted as groups of teachers formulated by heads of faculty to help teachers share knowledge to improve working relationships between teachers and facilitate practice-based professional learning for instructors (Admiraal et al., 2019; Dogan & Adams, 2018). The championing of professional learning communities in education is to ensure that instructors can work as a team and collaboratively address the challenges they face when training students and, at the same time, engage in a continuous cycle of skill building that will ensure effective impartation of knowledge to students (Prenger et al., 2018).

The dimensions of professional learning communities are anchored on a set of characteristics that ensure its intended purpose is achieved. While studying the effects of networked professional learning communities, Prenger et al. (2018) examined the impacts of 23 professional learning communities and established that the teachers reported an improvement in

their skills, attitude, content delivery, and satisfaction with the teaching practice. As such, professional learning communities are anchored on shared values and norms that dictate how teachers would approach challenges facing students or challenges they encounter in their professions, consistent focus on the learner, publicizing teaching, and engaging in reflective language while advocating for collaboration between teachers and among students (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Therefore, the key dimensions of a professional learning community include the following:

Shared and Supportive Leadership

As a dimension of a professional learning community, shared and supportive leadership describes the equality between the administration of an institution of learning and other teachers in promoting and enhancing student performance (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Antinluoma et al. (2021) further asserted that in shared and supportive leadership, school heads, rather than solely making decisions, engage with other educational stakeholders, including teachers and heads of faculties. This shared responsibility in decision-making is intended to strengthen teachers, foster a sense of belonging, and give teachers, student leaders, and academic stakeholders a sense of ownership and value (Admiraal et al., 2019). Extending Admiraal et al. (2019) findings, Antinluoma et al. (2021) found that shared and supportive leadership entailed adopting leadership styles such as transformational, visionary, or instructional leadership that will facilitate delegation of duties, seamless sharing of ideas, and collectivity in decision making.

Transformational leadership practices through its key tenets of inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and idealized influence can foster innovation and creativity among school-aged youngsters (Owusu-Agyeman, 2019). Torres et al. (2020) state that while studying shared leadership during the implementation of Denver's management model, with a sample of 53 school administrators, found that shared leadership

fostered seamless and shared decision-making, as well as collaboration at all educational levels. In the education sector, Visone (2020) reports that it was prudent to communicate their expectations about the professional learning community and share responsibilities with and between teachers, besides actively engaging in assigned roles by other teachers.

Shared Values and Vision

The success of professional learning communities is also based on the values and vision that jumpstarted the formation of a professional learning community in a given school. In many learning institutions, the vision describes what the learning institutions strive to become and serves as a motivation to students who have visions of their own. As a construct of a professional learning community, Warwas and Helm's (2018) illustrated that vision encouraged group members to work towards a particular objective, which might be providing scholarships to high-performing and deserving students or ensuring that in their respective subjects, all their students perform exemplary well (Torres et al., 2020). Krijnen et al. (2022) extend Torres et al. (2020), reporting that vision enabled members of professional learning communities to build academic partnerships with the guardians, students, and the academic staff. The essence of the shared vision was to ensure that whatever aspired to be was in sync with every professional learning community member (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Besides shared vision, this dimension incorporates shared values as well. Prenger et al. (2018) described critical values such as a commitment shared by members of the surrounding communities regarding their role in promoting education. In this dimension, all forces, including members of the professional learning community, neighborhood community, teachers, and administration, come together to ensure students' productivity and academic achievement. While there are numerous interpretations of shared vision and value, this dimension entails guiding teachers on effective teaching methods and student engagement.

Supportive Conditions

Supportive embedded structures dictate the meetings, sharing, and learning by the members of the professional learning community (Admiraal et al., 2018). Supportive conditions also entail meeting to make critical and sound decisions, solving any underlying problem with the professional learning community or with students, and encouraging creativity, especially in making critical decisions and addressing problems (Antinluoma et al., 2018). Supportive conditions, particularly for a professional learning community, explored two critical supportive structures without which the success of professional learning community meetings would be impossible. The two supportive structures include collegial relationships and structural conditions. Bates and Morgan (2018) described the collegial relationship as mutual trust and respect, positive attitude, purpose, and a shared vision for the group.

Structural conditions include a physical location for meetings, availability of teachers forming the professional learning community group, prudent time management, and communication structures. Scholars examining the supportive dimension of a professional learning community established that poor time management, ineffective communication, and distance between professional learning community members interfered with the vision of the group and drained the benefits educators might have gained from such engagements. Earlier, Warwas and Helm (2018) stated that professional learning communities are meant to sharpen teachers, expand their skills and improve their mastery of delivering content to students. Therefore, all the supportive structures must be established before professional learning community engagements.

Collective Learning and Application

In professional learning communities, Prenger et al. (2018) asserted that learning is done collaboratively when solving problems faced by the school or one of the professional learning

community members. The understanding of collective learning and application is anchored on the fact that by working together, problems are solved much faster, learning is more fun and more skills are gained, sharpened, and improved simultaneously (Azorín et al., 2019). While describing the supportive conditions for a successful professional learning community, collegial relationships was one of the critical condition teachers were keen about. In collective learning and application, Sekkal et al. (2019) found that collegial relationships promoted and strengthened professional learning communities by encouraging collective solving of issues and engaging in constructive and reflective dialogue, especially in teaching and learning. Collegial relationships facilitated data collection that could be used to strengthen the instructional programs incorporated into the curriculum and pedagogical practices. The collegial relationship between and among peers challenged professional learning community members to apply creativity and engage in high-level discussions with stakeholders and teachers, all of whom agreed that collective learning helped teachers use or develop a teaching illustration relevant to the curriculum being taught to students.

Shared Personal Practice

The formation of professional learning communities fosters collaborative learning and cooperative sharing of knowledge, expertise, and experience to enhance class management, improve content delivery, and sharpen one's skills (Burns et al., 2018). Therefore, this dimension examines the personal practices that make members of the professional learning community unique. Shared personal practices, unlike collaborative learning and application, encouraged colleagues to openly share their attributes, consult on different issues, receive and interrogate constructive criticism, and seek support and clarification (Xiang & Gao, 2018). Under this dimension, Torres et al. (2020) note that by teachers interacting within a formalized structure, it becomes possible to build relationships, advocate for mutual respect, focus on how their

respective schools can be improved and how students' commitment can be enhanced at different educational levels (Admiraal et al., 2019).

Thornton and Cherrington (2018) established that the freedom to share personal attributes with colleagues and allowing them to share their attributes cultivated a culture of mutual respect and enhanced individual commitment to the group's objectives. Consistently, Thornton and Cherrington (2018) posited that this dimension encouraged teachers and educational stakeholders to study, criticize different teaching skills, and engage in high-order thinking to develop programs and curricula that will promote the success of learners. In conclusion, a professional learning community shifts individual teachers' thinking in the sense that engaging with other highly trained and skilled colleagues enable professional learning community members to not only engage in high-order thinking, but also constructively critique each other, point out areas that need improvement, and embellish collegial relationship, especially mutual respect, understanding and trust. To note, a professional learning community operates under five dimensions: supportive and shared leadership, shared personal practice, supportive conditions, shared values and vision, and collective learning and application.

Benefits of a Professional Learning Community

Professional Learning Community and Stronger Relationship between Members

Studying the dimensions of professional learning communities, it was established that collegial and structural relationships between members of a professional learning community formed a bond that helped them share the challenges at work and advise each other on how to overcome them. For instance, Admiraal et al. (2019), while discussing the dimension of shared personal practices, noted that this dimension provided teachers in the professional learning community the opportunity to share their experiences, advice, and challenges with teaching and learning. As per the findings of Admiraal et al. (2019), besides being an opportunity for

continued learning, sharing helped these members form a relationship based on their profession and the challenges that they share. Supporting the conclusions of Admiraal et al. (2019), Thornton and Cherrington (2018) investigated professional learning communities in early childhood education with a sample of eight teachers and found that in early childhood education, professional learning communities created friendship between teachers of different grades and re-affirmed their commitment in training and educating young children. Therefore, some of the benefits of a professional learning community include developing, maintaining, and strengthening the relationship between tutors, administration, and learners.

Professional learning community and Improved Instructor Teaching

Besides developing stronger and lasting friendship and relationships, professional learning communities have facilitated improved teachers' teaching skills. Thornton and Cherrington (2018) found that teachers who engaged and were active professional learning community participants reported increased confidence in their teaching methods. Their subject was research-oriented, and teachers found more opportunities to engage in conversation with peers. In line with these benefits, it is worth noting that a professional learning community enhances how teachers articulate their responses when responding to another professional. It also filters between contents to ensure students are provided with current and high-quality content. Supporting the findings reported by Thornton and Cherrington (2018), Dogan and Adams (2018) established that the numerous opportunities to engage with other sharp and qualified minds during professional learning community meetings improved how teachers prepared and delivered their lessons. In similar research, Terry et al. (2018) conducted qualitative research with seven faculty members and found that the collective nature of a professional learning community presented teachers with an opportunity to acquire extra-pedagogical skills that enhanced instructional skills.

Terry et al. (2018) reported that a professional learning community allowed seasoned and new teachers to grow their pedagogical practices by asking questions and receiving feedback from colleagues. The constructive criticisms and advice from seasoned and experienced teachers exponentially improved the experiences of teachers teaching at various levels. Extending Terry's et al. (2018) study, Keung et al. (2019) investigated the effects of a professional learning community on kindergarten teachers and their perception of a child's whole development and growth. Analyzing data from 2120 teachers working in 153 kindergarten schools, Keung et al. (2019) revealed that teachers' collective focus on children's reflective dialogue and learning enhanced the children's academic outcome. Supportive and shared leadership promoted whole-child development and enhanced the teachers' professional development. Little (2020) quantitatively investigated the association between a middle school teacher and their efficacy in teaching mathematics. Analyzing the collected data, Little (2020) reiterate Keung's et al. (2019) findings that a professional learning community enhanced the teachers' delivery of instructional materials. Overall, the reviewed studies evidenced the positive impacts of professional learning communities on teachers instructing students.

Unlike Keung et al. (2019), Valckx et al. (2019) studied the importance of transformational leadership, professional learning communities, self-efficacy, and teacher autonomy in instructing French, Mathematics, and general sciences. Valckx et al. (2019) analyzed the data collected from 324 teachers from 33 schools and reported that professional learning communities increased self-efficacy of teachers and use of reflective dialogue, enhancing their teaching and content delivery. Consistent findings were reported by Carpenter and Munshower (2019), who showed that teacher collaboration and collective working increased their professional learning community experience, and face-to-face interactions improved teacher practice and content delivery. Comparably, Battersby (2019) investigated the application of

professional learning communities in teaching music. According to Battersby (2019), while the changing culture has shaped the content of music negatively and has made teaching difficult, the adoption and implementation of a professional learning community, especially the use of supportive and shared leadership, collective learning, shared values, and vision, improved the professionalism and effectiveness of music teachers in school districts.

Professional Learning Community and Students' Academic Success

Professional learning communities have been shown to improve the academic outcome of students at different academic levels. For instance, Brown et al. (2018) studied the implementation of professional learning communities in K-12 education and found that besides improving teachers' efficacy, professional learning communities also improved K-12 students' academic outcomes through collaboration with teachers. Moulakdi and Bouchamma (2020) report similar findings when they investigated professional learning communities in elementary schools. In the quasi-experimental research, Moulakdi and Bouchamma (2020) found that the performance of the selected elementary students improved between the pre-and post-test scores due to the collective learning and supportive and shared leadership of professional learning communities. Comparable results were stated by Park et al. (2018), who investigated the role of professional learning communities, principal support, and collective support in improving teacher expectation and student academic achievement. These experimental studies revealed that principal support influenced the teacher's professional development positively, while collective responsibility and principal support improved the student's academic outcome. In the preceding discussion, while literature is scarce regarding the impacts of professional learning communities on students' academic achievement, existing evidence shows a positive outcome and the need for more research on how a professional learning community improves students' academic outcomes.

Professional Learning Community and Teachers' Continuous Learning

Professional learning communities give teachers the opportunity for continuous learning without going back to class or training. When defining a professional learning community, Dogan and Adams (2018) stated that a professional learning community was meant to expand a teacher's working relationship and present an avenue for teacher practice-based professional learning. In congruence with Dogan's and Adams' (2018) findings, Antinluoma et al. (2018) investigated the role of schools as professional learning communities using a qualitative sample of 13 Finnish schools. The findings revealed that the 13 schools fostered and encouraged collegiality, promoting trust and commitment among teachers and students. Further analysis revealed that positive school cultures encouraged continuous collaboration and allowed teachers an open space to improve their skills and collaborate professionally with their colleagues (Antinluoma et al., 2018; Sari et al., 2018). Schools provide teachers an open space to engage, learn and sharpen each other. Despite the benefits, limited support and unsupportive structural conditions hinder collaboration and continuous learning among teachers.

A professional learning community presents teachers with the opportunity to interrogate, constructively criticize, and inform their practice; all these activities amount to continuous learning. While describing the shared personal practices, a dimension of a professional learning community, Admiraal et al. (2019) established that under this dimension, teachers were free to share their struggles, challenges, and approach to teaching and also comment on the experiences of others. With a sample of 14 Dutch schools, Admiraal et al. (2019) established that through shared personal practices, team leaders, supervisors, and principals bonded with other teachers, and each learned from the other. Prenger et al. (2018) investigated the effects of networking professional learning opportunities using 23 networked professional learning communities in a previous study. Concurring with Admiraal et al. (2019) findings, Prenger et al. (2018) reported

that professional learning communities increased their professional knowledge, skills, and job satisfaction.

Consistent findings were reported by Xing and Gao (2018), who compared twitter-based professional learning community and class-based professional learning community using a qualitative sample of 21 teachers. Twitter-based professional learning community increased the size of trained teachers willing to share their personal experiences with the hope that it will help others better themselves while providing quality instructions to their students. Zhang and Yuan (2020) also investigated how the professional learning community influenced teacher job satisfaction using a quantitative sample of 488 teachers in 16 primary schools and a qualitative sample of 10 teachers in a following semi-structured interview. The results of the mixed-methods study revealed that professional learning communities promoted shared responsibilities and collaborative learning that evidenced continuous learning among peers and professionals. Supporting the above findings, Jafar et al. (2022), with a sample of 612 teachers, found that collegiality, transformational leadership, and sharing of personal practice enhanced practice-based professional learning. Across the published studies, a professional learning community is beneficial because it facilitates on-the-job training and learning for teachers in their respective schools.

Negative Effects of Isolation on Teachers' Professional Development

Teacher Isolation Reduce Teacher Commitment

Isolation reduces teachers' commitment to professional development. Nehmeh and Kelly (2018) used quantitative methodology to investigate isolation and its impact on teachers' professional development in the United States. After analysis, Nehmeh and Kelly (2018) reported that teacher isolation contributes to a reduction in commitment to professional development among teachers, thereby decreasing resilience and teaching performance.

Comparable findings to Nehmeh and Kelly (2018) were replicated by Mosely (2018) who explored the challenges of professional development among black teachers in the United States. Extending Nehmeh and Kelly's (2018) results, Mosely (2018) reported that isolation among teachers results in low teacher commitment to their professional development because of low self-belief, stress, or anxiety, thereby leading to reduced commitment (Mosely, 2018). In summary, the articles discussed indicate that isolation reduces teachers' commitment to professional development due to a lack of motivation and anxiety in the workplace.

Teacher isolation contributes to reduced teacher commitment to their professional development. As an illustration from existing literature, Cancio et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative research with 211 special education teachers to examine the isolation and special education teacher stress and its impact on their commitment to professional development. In their findings, Cancio et al. (2018) found that high pressure on student achievement leads to teacher isolation, thereby reducing commitment to professional development among teachers. Corroborative findings of Cancio et al. (2018) were reported by Bressman et al. (2018), in a qualitative research with 20 teachers to investigate support for teachers in their professional development to prevent isolation in the United States. Agreeing with Cancio et al. (2018), Bressman et al. (2018) reported that teachers become isolated because they lacked the necessary support for professional development, leading to a reduced commitment to professional development in their pedagogy. In sum, it is evident that teacher isolation reduces teacher commitment to professional development.

Teacher Isolation Inhibits innovation

Isolation among teachers prevents innovation among teachers in their profession. For example, Darling-Hammond (2019) examined leadership among teachers and creative innovative schools in the United States. The study's findings demonstrated that isolation among teachers

prevents collaboration and the invention of new teaching strategies, thereby inhibiting innovation in schools. Comparable results to Darling-Hammond (2019) were echoed in a quantitative study conducted by Nelson and Bohanon (2019) to explore the best practices in professional development among teachers in the United States. Agreeing with Darling-Hammond's (2019) results, Nelson and Bohanon (2019) established that teachers received limited support in their professional development, which led to isolation, thereby preventing innovation among teachers in schools. Although Nelson and Bohanon (2019) extended earlier results, their sample was less diverse and as such the results could not be generalized to a larger population. In addition, one location was used to conduct the study. In this regard, Nelson and Bohanon (2019) advocated for additional research using different settings and diverse sample sizes. Studies discussed thus far reveal that the isolation among teachers prevents innovation among teachers in their profession.

Challenges in Implementing and Sustaining Professional Learning Communities

Insufficient time for quality professional learning community discussion

Insufficient time for quality professional learning community discussion could hamper the implementation and sustenance of professional learning communities among teachers. For instance, Chen (2020) examined the professional learning communities and professional growth among teachers in the United States. The results were such that lack of time to engage in an in-depth discussion learning and teaching hindered teacher participation in professional learning communities. Chen's (2020) results were echoed in a quantitative study conducted by Huijboom et al. (2021) to study the development of professional learning communities in schools in the United States. The results revealed that some teachers view time spent in professional learning community activities as competing with their other teaching work because it interferes with their normal working schedule in school, thereby resulting in insufficient time for quality professional learning community discussion among teachers in the professional learning communities' group

(Huijboom et al., 2021). Given the results, it is evident that insufficient time for quality professional learning community discussion could hinder the implementation and sustainability of professional learning communities among teachers.

Further research demonstrates insufficient time for quality professional learning communities' discussion as a key challenge facing school teachers. Tahir and Musah (2020) conducted a qualitative study to support this statement by investigating implementing a professional learning community in elementary schools. The results of the study revealed that the implementation of professional learning communities in schools was challenged by the limited time available for teachers to attend a key professional learning community meeting for discussion, limited support from school administration, negative attitudes among teachers, and financial constraints (Tahir & Musah, 2020). In corroborative results to Tahir and Musah (2020), Mei Kin and Abdull Karrem (2021) conducted a quantitative study with 971 school principals to explore the professional learning community implementation in secondary schools. In their results, Mei Kin and Abdull Karrem (2021) reported that limited time among teachers to attend professional learning community group meetings for liberation was a major obstacle to its implementation and sustainability in the United States. Overall, the findings thus far indicate that inadequate time among teachers hampers the implementation of professional learning communities in schools.

Weak Leadership Support

Limited support from school leadership for professional learning community programs among teachers is the main obstacle facing implementation of professional learning communities. In support of this assertion, Dogan and Adams (2018) reviewed 13 peer reviewed studies to examine the impact of professional learning communities on students and teachers in the United States. Dogan and Adams (2018) revealed that limited management support for

teachers' professional learning community participation resulted in a key challenge facing its implementation in institutions of learning. Turner et al. (2018) qualitatively researched the implementation of professional learning communities among teachers and their leaders in schools in the United States with nine teachers attending professional learning community. The results demonstrated that school professional learning communities' development was hindered by the school administration's lack of support (Turner et al., 2018). Overall, the studies reviewed this far reveal that weak support from school leadership for professional learning community programs among instructors is the main obstacle facing implementing professional learning communities.

As shown in the preceding discussion, weak leadership support is a challenge among teachers engaged in professional learning communities (Turner et al., 2018). Although Turner et al. (2018) expanded on the earlier findings, the researcher used one setting and an undiversified sample size to generalize the findings. In this regard, Turner et al. (2018) suggested that additional research should be done in different settings using diversified sample sizes. The articles reviewed thus far demonstrate that weak support from school leadership for professional learning community programs among teachers could be the main obstacle facing the implementation of professional learning communities.

Weak Group Composition

Weak group composition in professional learning communities could be a great challenge facing teachers of those communities. For example, McKeown et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study with 14 teachers to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding effective professional development and its implementation. The results indicated that group composition is dissimilar in content subjects to be discussed in the professional learning community discussions because some teachers are not in their professional learning community groups related to their

teaching subject (McKeown et al., 2019). Comparable outcomes to McKeown et al. (2019) were replicated in a quantitative research by Warwas and Helm (2018) who explored professional learning communities among teachers in the United States. Extending McKeown et al. (2019) findings, Warwas and Helm (2018) established that the size of the professional learning community group composition determines the kind of discussions had among its group members, such that when the professional learning community membership is large, the workload could then be more well-divided and distributed in the professional learning community group discussions. In summary, the reviewed findings demonstrate that weak group composition in professional learning communities could be a great challenge for educators in the professional learning communities.

Benefits of Teachers Participating in Leadership in Schools

Need to foster a collaborative culture

Teacher participating in leadership in schools promotes a collaborative culture in school. For instance, Tallman (2019) quantitatively investigated the benefits of teachers participating in leadership and collaborative culture in schools in the United States. In their findings, Tallman (2019) reported that teachers participating in leadership workshops fostered real collaboration by changing their roles from the instructor to coach promoting team independence and helping students to work as a team to productively achieve set objectives (Tallman, 2019). Similar findings by Tallman (2019) were replicated by Meyer et al. (2022) who examined the association between teachers participating in leadership and teacher collaboration in schools in the United States. Agreeing with Tallman (2019), Meyer et al. (2022) reported that teachers participating in leadership enhances collaboration and teamwork among teachers, as well as between students and teachers, thereby leading to a collaborative culture of the organization. Thus far, the articles

reviewed reveal that teachers participating in leadership promote a collaborative culture in schools.

The findings discussed above have different views regarding the relationship between fostering collaborative culture and teacher leadership in schools. For example, Tallman (2019) established in their research that teachers partaking in leadership enhanced real teamwork by changing their role from the teacher to coach, promoting team autonomy and helping students work as a team to achieve set goals. Based on the above findings, all the researchers concur that teacher leadership in schools fosters a collaborative culture. Whereas, Meyer et al. (2022) indicate that teacher participating in leadership promotes collaboration, leading to enhanced teamwork in schools. Tallman (2019) highlighted that teachers participating in leadership promote teamwork and commitment among teachers, thereby resulting in collaborative culture among teachers and students in school.

Need to use research to improve practice and student learning

Teachers use research to advance their teaching practice and student learning in academic institutions in the U.S. To support this assertion, Sterret et al. (2018) examined the collaborative role of school principals as leaders in schools in the United States. After conducting an analysis, Sterret et al. (2018) established that teacher leaders interviewed teachers with an interest in leadership to identify areas where they needed help in addition to empowering them with leadership knowledge and critical leadership skills. Comparable results to Sterret's et al. (2018) were reported by Shen et al. (2020) in quantitative research investigating the association between teacher leadership and student outcomes in the United States. The findings were such that as leaders, teachers encouraged their colleagues to embrace leadership opportunities available in the teaching profession. Shen et al. (2020) also established that by breaking down some of the school barriers and boundaries that prevented teachers from assuming leadership positions, teacher

leaders had the opportunity of interacting with and knowing their teachers better. Overall, the results discussed thus far reveal that teachers use research to improve practice and student learning in schools in the United States.

Needs For Leaders Promote Professional Learning

Teachers participating in leadership in schools promote professional learning. Shirrell et al. (2019) quantitatively examined teacher professional learning and instructional practices. The findings indicated that teacher-participating leadership enhanced teaching and learning among teachers. The intermediaries of professional learning among teachers fostered a positive learning association between students and their teachers and among students. The professional development also helped instructors to establish routines in their classes that effectively utilized their students' energy and actively engaged them in professional education (Shirrell et al., 2019). Extending Shirrell's et al. (2019) results, Brown et al. (2018) also conducted a quantitative study to examine the decision-making by teachers for school improvement in the United States. Agreeing with Shirrell et al. (2019), Brown et al. (2018) revealed that teacher-participating leadership promotes high professional learning and improved the academic success of students, compared to those trained by teachers not enrolled in any leadership training outside their working environment. Overall, it is evident that teachers participating in leadership in schools promotes professional learning.

Professional Learning Communities Facilitate Improvement in Instruction and Student Learning

Existing research demonstrates that teacher-participating leadership could facilitate instruction and student learning improvement. For instance, Fonsen and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) investigated the teachers' professional development and leadership in the United States. The findings indicated that teacher-participating leadership contributed to facilitating

improvement in instruction and student learning through pedagogical professional learning skills (Fonsen & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019). Findings were replicated in a quantitative study by Schildkamp (2019) to examine the benefits of teachers participating in leadership in the United States. In their findings, the investigators established that teachers in leadership roles reported improved motivation and confidence in their instructional abilities. Teachers in leadership positions were motivated to lead and encourage other educators to improve their self-confidence, knowledge, and attitude (Schildkamp, 2019). In general, the results discussed thus far demonstrate that teacher participating leadership could facilitate improvement in instruction and students learning through increased knowledge, enhanced confidence, and improved attitude towards instructional delivery.

While studies reviewed above agree that teachers participating in leadership facilitate improvement in instruction and students, Fonsen and Ukkonen-Mikkola (2019) reported that participating in leadership improved instruction and students learning through professional pedagogical skills. Simultaneously, Schildkamp (2019) contradicted these findings by reporting that teachers taking on leadership roles can improve teacher motivation and confidence in their abilities and motivation, leading and encouraging other adults to improve self-confidence, increase knowledge, and improve attitude toward teaching among teachers. The differences resulted from different sample sizes adopted by the researchers. Though Schildkamp (2019) extended earlier findings, the research was conducted using undiversified sample sizes and one geographical location. Based on this limitation, the researcher advocated for additional research using different geographical settings to generalize the sample sizes (Schildkamp, 2019). The results analyzed above reveal that teacher-participating leadership could facilitate instruction and student learning improvement.

Professional Learning Communities Improve outreach and Collaboration

Research indicates that teacher-participating leadership enhances collaboration and outreach between and among families and the communities. For example, Naidoo (2019) explored how teachers and school management perceived the leadership functions of school principals. The findings revealed that teachers in leadership positions contributed to organizational effectiveness, family collaboration, the community, and the improvement of outreach programs in the communities and families. Similar findings to Naidoo (2019) were reported by Yulianti et al. (2021) in a quantitative study to investigate the influence of teacher participating leadership on collaboration with families and the community in the United States. Yulianti et al. (2021) reported that leadership was a shared responsibility of teachers and heads, collaboration with families, and the community at large in addition to improving outreach and collaboration with families and the community. Together, studies reviewed thus far demonstrate that teacher participating leadership improves the outreach and collaboration with families and the community.

The positive effects of teacher participation in leadership and decision-making on family and community cooperation has been reported by other researchers. Montoya et al. (2018) qualitatively studied family-school partnership and found that the benefits of teachers participating in leadership in schools promote positive outreach and collaboration with families and the community. Although studies discussed above have a similar opinion regarding the relationship between teacher participating leadership and improving outreach and collaboration with families and the community, other research opined differing conclusions (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Naidoo (2019) revealed that in leadership, teachers fostered family collaboration, the community, and the improvement of outreach programs in the communities and families. Similarly, Alice et al. (2020) and Schildkamp (2019) reported that teachers taking on leadership

roles reported improved teaching motivation and confidence in instructional delivery. Overall, teacher participation in decision-making leadership may enhance community and family collaboration.

Benefits to the Field of Education

A professional learning community is an important aspect in the education landscape. Teachers are required to ensure that they share their knowledge with others for professional development (Chen, 2020). Improving pedagogical knowledge and skills through professional learning community practices could improve not only the competitiveness of teachers, but also student outcomes. Teacher roles have evolved over the years (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Currently, teachers are required to actively participate in leadership practices with the aim of improving the learning environment and responding to the 21st century learning challenges (Chen, 2020).

With the foregoing in mind, teacher development via professional learning communities becomes crucial to knowledge sharing. According to Lee et al. (2022), knowledge sharing among teachers is important as it improves the chances of improving teacher's pedagogical skills (Elfarargy et al., 2022). In addition, professional learning communities are important as they provide an opportunity for teachers to share ideas and challenges with others, and find creative solutions to the identified challenges (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Equally, professional learning communities are important as they provide an opportunity to mentor teachers for leadership roles (Chen, 2020). Through professional learning communities, teachers are able to gain new knowledge about pedagogical practices and leadership requirements (Lee et al., 2022). Teachers can be mentored or trained to become professional leaders who are ready to respond to organizational challenges within their learning environment (Chen, 2020). Therefore, actively participating in a professional learning community will provide hands-on training and create opportunities to increase teacher aspirations for school leadership positions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how public high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community influenced their school leadership aspirations in a New York City public high school. Chapter 3 presents the researcher with the opportunity to expand on the selected research methodology, research design, population and sample. In the chapter, the researcher will also discuss the processes of recruiting participants, collecting data, and analyzing the collected data. Ethical considerations, study limitations, summary of the chapter and transition to chapter 4 of the study will also be included in the chapter. The following research question guided this study:

Research Question

How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school?

Methodology and Research Design

A qualitative methodological direction was employed to address the problem in question. Qualitative research methodology is grounded in the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An important advantage of qualitative research is that it enables researchers to allow participants to respond to interview prompts in their own words, in a manner that indicates their perceptions of the influences of the social, organizational, and individual contexts on a phenomenon of interest. For this reason, qualitative research is effective for investigating a problem in its natural setting. The perceived influences of professional learning community participation on teachers' leadership aspirations are expected to be

embedded in unique organizational and personal contexts, so a qualitative approach that will allow participants to discuss those contexts is more appropriate than a quantitative approach that would decontextualize the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Qualitative research is also the most suitable approach for investigating phenomena that previous researchers have not completely described, because the open-ended nature of data collection allows insights that were not contemplated in the previous literature to emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The problem of practice that was addressed in this study is a gap in the literature regarding how teachers in a New York City public high school perceive their participation in professional learning communities as influencing their leadership aspirations. Given that the phenomenon of interest has not been characterized in the previous literature, a methodological approach conducive to the emergence of unanticipated insights was needed. A quantitative approach would be inappropriate because quantitative research is confirmatory, in that it is used to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses, and potential outcomes must be contemplated in advance (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A qualitative descriptive design was used. Qualitative descriptive research entails the collection and analysis of data from a purposive sample with the experience or knowledge of the problem in question (Sandelowski, 2010). In this study, the purposeful sample consisted of high school teachers from a New York City public high school who participated in professional learning communities. The data from this purposive sample was collected using semi-structured interviews following the interview protocol developed by the researcher. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate because it enables the researcher to describe and explore a phenomenon of interest as envisioned by study participants (Percy et al., 2015).

A phenomenological research design was unfruitful for this qualitative research as it focuses on the internal, subjective component of experience, or ‘what it is like’ to undergo a given lived experience (Moustakas, 1994), whereas the developed research question calls for an exploration of teacher perceptions of the influence of the real-world phenomenon of professional learning community participation on their aspirations. A phenomenological design, with its focus primarily on ‘what it is like’ to participate in a professional learning community, would have the wrong emphasis for addressing the study’s research question.

The researcher also considered the appropriateness of a grounded theory research design. In grounded theory design, the researcher seeks to use the experiences of participants to develop a theory that describes the problem being investigated (Charmaz, 2014). Given that researchers in grounded theory are focused on developing a new theory, the research design is used by researchers investigating a phenomenon where theoretical and conceptual frameworks cannot fully support its existence or support the investigation of that particular problem. Regarding the current research, the researcher anticipated servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2007) and distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2001) theoretical frameworks were sufficient for organizing and interpreting the data, so theory generation was unnecessary, and a grounded theory design was inappropriate.

Lastly, the researcher considered the effectiveness of the ethnographic qualitative research. Ethnographic research design is appropriate for investigating through researcher immersion in a group of people who have their own distinct culture and collective experience (Hammersley & Arkinson, 2007). Teachers from a New York City public high school who participate in professional learning communities do not constitute a distinct group of people with its own culture and history. The research question for this research is not designed to investigate

the culture of the participants, so an ethnographic design was inappropriate. Considering the appropriateness of the different qualitative research design, qualitative descriptive design was deemed appropriate.

Instrumentation

The data used for this qualitative research was collected via one-on-one interviews through Zoom. Semi-structured interviewing encompasses posing scripted, open-ended questions that restrict the interviewee from answering merely ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). This interview procedure allows the researcher enough flexibility to pose probing extension questions when necessary for further detail on a previous response (Newcomer et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviews are recommended sources of data collection for qualitative descriptive studies (Sandelowski, 2010), and the procedure was appropriate in this study since it enabled the researcher to focus on the topics directly associated with the problem being investigated while allowing study participants to respond freely (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

A researcher-developed protocol was developed for the semi-structured interviews and used to collect data for this qualitative research. The researcher-developed protocol emerged from the studies pertinent to professional learning communities and an alignment to the research question. At the beginning of the protocol were four demographic questions, through which participants were asked to state the following: the grade level(s) of their students’ courses taught, years employed as a teacher, and years of participation in a professional learning community. The interview protocol consisted of at least eight open-ended questions used by the researcher to obtain information that would address the research question. The semi-structured interviews lasted for a maximum of one hour.

In the next section, the researcher discusses the sampling technique, participant recruitment, and data collection procedures. The process of data analysis is also described under this section.

Sampling and Recruitment

The population of interest was teachers from a New York City public high school and participated in a professional learning community. The teachers from the public school were recruited via an introductory meeting and using flyers posted at strategic locations within the school. The research used purposive sampling to recruit the teachers for the current qualitative research. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that allows the recruitment of participants with the knowledge and experience with the problem being investigated. Purposive sampling is used by researchers constrained with resources and time to recruit a maximum number of participants for a particular research as will be the case in this proposed study (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Specific to this qualitative descriptive research, a criterion sampling technique was used. Criterion sampling is used by researchers to recruit individuals on whom recruitment efforts were focused and were identified by a series of inclusion criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). To participate in this qualitative research, the participants were required to be (a) a current teacher (b) in a New York City public high school (c) with at least one year of experience in their current teaching position (d) and at least one year of experience participating in a professional learning community.

Recruitment was conducted by sending digital recruitment flyers via email to teachers in the selected public high school in New York City. The recruitment flyer indicated: (a) the

purpose and nature of the study, including what participation will entail; (b) the inclusion criteria; and (c) an invitation to contact the researcher directly via personal email at Thomad29@email.franklin.edu to express an interest in participating and to seek clarification about the research or voice concerns pertinent to the research. All potential participants who contacted the researcher via personal email to express an interest in the research were emailed a pre-screening questionnaire. When the potential participants returned the completed pre-screening questionnaire and it was confirmed that they met all inclusion criteria, the researcher emailed an informed consent. To be allowed to participate, participants were to read the contents of the informed consent and sign with “I Consent”. After signing the informed consent, the participants were emailed a demographic questionnaire which they were required to complete and email back to the researcher. The researcher after receiving a signed informed consent from the participants and a signed pre-screening and demographic questionnaire, a mutually agreed time was arranged via email for the Zoom interview.

An initial sample size of 12 participants were recruited. This priori sample size falls within Creswell and Creswell’s (2017) recommendation for a qualitative study to involve 5 to 25 participants. The final sample size was based solely on data saturation, which occurs when no new data is generated following continued data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Two conditions determined data saturation in this study. First, the data from at least 12 participants were analyzed. Second, data saturation is identified if the continued analysis of the two last interviews does not result in any new theme. When these two conditions were met, no more participants were recruited, and no more data were collected.

If the primary recruitment procedure described in this section was insufficient for recruiting a sample size that resulted in data saturation, a snowball sampling strategy was used.

Snowball sampling is a nonrandom, purposeful strategy where study participants are asked to forward recruitment materials to family, friends, and acquaintances who can be eligible participants (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling is acceptable for expanding the recruitment radius of materials to prospective participants who might not have encountered them when they were first distributed (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, if snowball sampling was used, participants would be asked to forward the digital recruitment flyer to individuals of their acquaintance who they believed might be eligible to participate.

Data Collection and Limitation

The researcher scheduled the semi-structured interviews at the time convenient for the participants. Scheduling the interviews based on the participants' convenient time allowed them an ample opportunity to fully respond to the interview questions. The interviews were conducted through the online videoconference application, Zoom. Participants joined the Zoom meeting from any place where they had internet access, but they were asked to join from a quiet, safe location where they had privacy.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher emailed the participants a link they would use to join the scheduled Zoom interview. Each participant who joined the interview was greeted by the researcher and lingering questions or concerns were solicited and entertained prior to the interviews. The terms of informed consent were reviewed briefly and the interview began after the researcher gained the interviewee's permission to activate the recording function on Zoom.

The progression of the interview was informed by the arrangement of the questions as they appeared in the interview protocol. Extensions of previously posed questions were probed whenever more detail or clarity was needed. After all the scripted interview questions had been

asked, the participants were asked if they had additional information regarding the study that they wished to add to their responses. The researcher then thanked each participant and deactivated the recording function in Zoom.

The member-verification procedure was explained to the participant. Within one week of the interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording using Zoom's automated transcription function. The transcripts were verified by the researcher who listened to the recording and reading the transcript simultaneously. While transcribing the interviews, the researcher deleted any information that would identify the study participants. It should be noted that no PII was requested from the participants, but the de-identification of the transcripts helped to ensure that their identities remained confidential if they provided any PII in the course of making their responses. The interview transcripts were emailed to the participants requesting their review, verification of accuracy, or recommendation for corrections within one week. In case any of the participants failed to respond to the researchers' request of reviewing their transcripts, their data were still used (provided they have not withdrawn from the study), but the omission of member verification for that participant's transcript was noted as a study limitation that may threaten the credibility of the data.

Data Analysis

The reviewed interview transcripts were uploaded into the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA. While this software does not completely analyze the data for the researcher, it can be used to increase the dependability of an analysis by tracking researcher decisions during the analysis and maintaining an accurate record of the codes and themes the researcher develops (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The collected data were analyzed following Terry et al. (2017) inductive, thematic analysis. An inductive procedure entails a decomposition

of the data into bite-sized singular blocks of relevant ideas and then grouping blocks of text that have similar meaning into emergent codes and themes that represent patterns of meaning in the participants' responses (Terry et al., 2017). An inductive process is contrasted with a deductive procedure, in which the data are sorted into predefined categories, as the more appropriate procedure for minimizing the effects of researcher preconceptions on the data and allowing for the emergence of unanticipated insights (Terry et al., 2017).

In thematic analysis, the major findings are presented as themes summarizing the information presented by the participants (Terry et al., 2017). A thematic analysis can strengthen the credibility of the results by mitigating the impacts of errors or biases from individual participants when these are not shared by a majority of the participants. Findings that diverge from the majority of the participants is described as discrepant and presented as such in Chapter 4 in relation to the theme from which they diverged. There are six data analysis steps in Terry's et al. (2017) inductive, thematic analysis process: (1) reading and rereading the data in full; (2) coding the data by grouping similar responses and labeling the groups descriptively; (3) theming the data by grouping similar or related codes; (4) checking the themes against the original data to validate them; (5) naming the themes to indicate their significance as answers addressing the research question; and (6) presenting the findings, which were done in this study by writing Chapters 4 and 5.

Data Security Plan

Data Recording Method - Interviews on Zoom were the primary data collection method. Because Zoom is a popular tool and NYC school staff is familiar with the platform, it was the most available option for participants to navigate.

End-to-end encryption - A Zoom business license was secured for generating the transcriptions from all interviews.

Data storage - The data stored on the cloud at the culmination of each interview was accessed using only one computer that was secured and password-protected. The recordings, transcripts, and any other data were saved, protected using a strong unique password as determined by the "password strength test", encrypted in a folder, and only accessible by the PI on that sole computer. LastPass was utilized to assist in the management of the master password and passwords used for encrypted files. The encryption aided in the protection of the Zoom recordings and the Zoom transcription as it was transferred to MAXQDA. This aided in the privacy of the subjects and the information that they shared.

At the end of the required 3-year minimum retention period, all data will be permanently erased from the computer and platforms that were used in the study. The hard drive will be wiped clean and restored to manufacturer's settings. Any breach in security of the data security plan would be reported immediately to Franklin University's IRB and the committee chairperson, Dr. Fernandopulle.

Ethical Considerations

The guidelines that protect human subjects from unethical treatment are listed in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 1979). The first standard is respect for persons. Respect for persons entails respecting the independence of human subjects included in a particular research (DHHS, 1979). The researcher assured participants of their independence by first gaining approval from the university's IRB before participants were recruited. The researcher ensured that the autonomy of research subjects by providing them an informed consent before requesting or collecting any data. The informed consent provided

research subjects with the information on (a) the purpose and nature of the study; (b) the voluntary nature of participation, meaning that there would be no negative consequences to individuals who chose not to participate; and (c) the right of participation and withdrawal from the study anytime during the entire process (by emailing the researcher a message stating, “I withdraw”), or fail to respond to any interview question or questions, without negative consequences.

The second standard for the ethical guideline is beneficence, or the protection of participants’ interests through the minimization of the risks of the research and the maximization of the benefits to them (DHHS, 1979). There were no direct benefits to the participants. There were also no potential risks associated with participation. To minimize the risk that participants’ identities might be disclosed, procedures were implemented to maintain their identities as confidential, meaning that they would be known only to the researcher. First, each participant was assigned a serial pseudonym (P1, P2, etc.) to be used in all study materials in place of their real name. Second, interview transcripts were de-identified during the researcher verification process. Third, data were stored securely. Secure storage of data means that audio-recorded interviews and electronic copies of informed consent were secured in flash drive that was protected by a password. The flash drive was stored in a locked office accessible only to the researcher. The encryption key for each participants’ serial code was secured in the password protected flash drive. The flash drive will be formatted after three years to ensure complete destruction of the data.

The third standard for the ethical treatment of human subjects is Justice, which represents the third ethical guideline for any research process. Justice ensures equitable apportioning of risks and benefits so that one population does not bear the risks of the research while a different

population enjoys the gains (DHHS, 1979). As stated previously, participants would not bear any foreseeable risks, in that the risks of participation would be minimized to those encountered in daily activities. The participants did not directly benefit from participating in the study but insights gained through this research may assist members of the study population by yielding insights that can be used to increase the benefits of professional learning communities for New York City public high school teachers. The minimal nature of the risk, and the benefit of the study to the members of the target population, satisfy the justice criterion (DHHS, 1979).

Summary

A qualitative methodological approach and a descriptive design as described by Sandelowski (2010) were used to address the following research question: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? After IRB approval was secured, a criterion sample (Palinkas et al., 2015) of at least 12 current New York City public high school teachers with at least one year of experience in their current position and at least one year of experience participating in a professional learning community were recruited. Recruitment was conducted by emailing digital recruitment flyers to the teachers at a public high school in a school district in New York City. The final sample size was accomplished when data saturation was evident via a repetition of data, as recommended by Fusch and Ness (2015).

Documentation of informed consent was obtained from participants prior to the actual collection of data. Data were collected through one-on-one virtual interviews. The interviews lasted for approximately one hour. The researcher developed an interview protocol guided by Rubin and Rubin (2011) and recommended by Sandelowski (2010) that was used during the

Zoom interviews. Afterwards, transcription and member checking were uploaded into MAXQDA for analysis. Participation was voluntary, and participant identities were kept confidential. The researcher will present the results of the inductive, thematic analysis process in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how public high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community (PLC) influences their school leadership aspirations in a New York City public school. The current qualitative research was guided by the following research question: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? In Chapter 4 of this study, the researcher describes the participants who were recruited for this research, how data analysis was performed and the information that was obtained after data analysis. The researcher also used the chapter to organize the study findings into themes and concluded the chapter with a summary of the study results.

Participants

The participants were a purposive sample of 12 teachers from a public high school in New York City and attended professional learning communities for their leadership development training. The demographic characteristics of the recruited teachers is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

	Gender	Ethnicity	Years as an educator	Years teaching high school	Years NOT in PLCs	Education level
P1	F	AA	12-20	15+	0	Ed.S.
P2	M	AA	12-20	11-15	0	M
P3	M	AA	20+	15+	-	M
P4	M	AA	20+	15+	0	M
P5	F	W	12-20	15+	0	M
P6	M	AA	20+	1-5	0	M
P7	M	AA	20+	15+	0	M
P8	F	B	20	15+	0	M
P9	F	CB	20	6-10	0	M
P10	M	AA	12-20	6-10	3-5	M
P11	F	AA	12-20	6-10	1-2	B
P12	M	AA	12-20	1-5	0	M

KEY:

ETHNICITY- AA=African American; CB=Caribbean Black; W=White, B=Black

EDUCATION- B=Bachelor's; Ed.S=Education Specialist; M=Master's

Data Analysis

The researcher employed the inductive thematic analysis steps proposed by Terry et al. (2017) to analyze the data collected from the 12 public high school teachers. Terry et al. (2017) proposed six data analysis steps inherent with inductive, thematic analysis of qualitative data: (1) reading and rereading the data in full; (2) coding the data by grouping similar responses and labeling the groups descriptively; (3) grouping similar codes to develop themes; (4) validating the themes by cross-checking with the original data; (5) naming the themes based on how each addresses the research question; and (6) presenting the findings.

Terry et al. (2017) discussed the first of inductive thematic analysis of data the step that allowed the researcher to familiarize with the data by reading and re-reading the data. The process of reading the data allowed the researcher to find meaning in participant responses as well as identify patterns in the responses that might be coded to develop themes for the subsequent analysis steps. While reading the responses from participants, the researcher made handwritten notes noting repeated words, phrases and ideas.

After familiarizing with the data, the researcher began the process of coding the data which Terry et al. (2017) identified as the second step in the analysis process. First, the data were broken down into chunks, or excerpts, that each consisted of words or groups of words conveying a single idea related to the research question guiding the research. Across the 12 transcripts, the researcher identified 125 excerpts. An example of a data excerpt was,

“Being in the professional learning community, it's a good way of assessing yourself. Can I do it [lead]? Do I want to do it?” (P1). This excerpt from a response of P1's indicated that participation in a professional learning community could influence teachers'

leadership aspirations by giving them opportunities to assess their readiness and willingness to lead.

The researcher assigned codes to all identified excerpts. The researcher identified the excerpts with a descriptive phrase summarizing the key information in the excerpt. For instance, P1's excerpt was coded as 'opportunities for self-assessment.' During coding, the researcher used a similar code to identify different data excerpts with similar meanings. For example, P11 stated,

“You can decide then and there [in a professional learning community] if you think you could be admin, or if you're going to stay a teacher. You get to know yourself a little bit more.”

P11's response and P1's response had similar meanings; therefore, they were assigned a similar code. The researcher assigned all 125 data excerpts into 18 codes as shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Initial Codes*

Code, in alphabetical order	<i>n</i> of participants contributing (<i>N</i> =12)	<i>n</i> of response excerpts assigned (<i>N</i> =125)
Administrators are needed at PLC meetings	7	11
Administrators only need to be accessible	3	5
Administrators should obtain input from teachers	7	12
Administrators sometimes attend PLC meetings	4	7
Gaining practical knowledge of leadership	6	6
Leaders do not attend PLC meetings	1	1
Learning how to manage people	6	7
Learning how to teach the teacher	6	11
Opportunities for self-assessment	5	10
Opportunities to assume leadership roles	8	11
Opportunities to prove oneself	3	3
Opportunities to speak on behalf of colleagues	2	2
Participant acquired leadership skills through participation in a PLC	10	11

Participant did not acquire leadership skills in PLC	1	1
Participation in a PLC can influence a teacher's perception of leadership	10	13
Participation in a PLC will not influence perceptions of leadership	2	2
PLC can discourage leadership aspirations	1	1
Teachers can acquire leadership skills through PLC participation	10	11

After coding, searching for themes was the third step in the data analysis process. Terry et al. (2017) discussed the process of searching for themes as grouping of codes with similar information. In the current study, the researcher grouped the following five codes to develop a preliminary theme: Professional learning communities can discourage leadership aspirations, opportunities for self-assessment, opportunities to assume leadership roles, opportunities to prove oneself, and opportunities to speak on behalf of colleagues. The grouped five codes formed a theme because they all indicated ways in which participating in a professional learning community was perceived as influencing teachers' leadership aspirations. A second preliminary theme was formed of six initial codes that all indicated ways in which the participants perceived teachers as gaining leadership training and skills through professional learning community participation. Seven codes indicating the effects of administrators' participation in professional learning communities on teachers' perceptions of leadership were grouped to form a third preliminary theme. Discrepant data were also identified during this step. When two codes that

contradicted each other were grouped, the code with attestation from a majority of participants was identified as the major finding, and the code with attestation from a minority of participants was identified as discrepant data. For example, the codes ‘participant acquired leadership skills through participation in the professional learning community’ and ‘participant did not acquire leadership skills through participation in the professional learning community’ indicated contradictory findings. However, the code indicating that participants acquired leadership skills had attestation from 10 out of 12 participants, and the code indicating that participants did not acquire leadership skills had attestation from only one participant. The code indicating that leadership skills were acquired was therefore identified as the major finding, and the code indicating that leadership skills were not acquired was identified as discrepant data, which is reported in relation to the theme from which it diverged. Table 3 indicates the grouping of the 18 initial codes to form the three preliminary themes.

Table 3*Grouping of Initial Codes into Preliminary Themes*

	<i>n</i> of	<i>n</i> of response
Preliminary theme	participants	excerpts
Code grouped to form theme	contributing	assigned
	(<i>N</i> =12)	(<i>N</i> =125)
Influence of administrator involvement	12	51
Administrators are needed at PLC meetings		
Administrators only need to be accessible		
Administrators should obtain input from teachers		
Administrators sometimes attend PLC meetings		
Discrepant data - Leaders do not attend PLC meetings		
Discrepant data - Participation in a PLC will not influence perceptions of leadership		
Participation in a PLC can influence a teacher's perception of leadership		
PLC influence on leadership training and skills	12	47
Discrepant data - Participant did not acquire leadership skills in PLC		
Gaining practical knowledge of leadership		
Learning how to manage people		
Learning how to teach the teachers		

Participant acquired leadership skills through participation in a PLC

Teachers can acquire leadership skills through PLC participation

PLC influence on leadership aspirations 12 27

Discrepant data - PLC can discourage leadership aspirations

Opportunities for self-assessment

Opportunities to assume leadership roles

Opportunities to prove oneself

Opportunities to speak on behalf of colleagues

Review of the themes was identified as “step four” of the data analysis steps (Terry et al., 2017). The researcher cross checked the themes against the original data to validate them as reflecting actual responses from the participants. The researcher also cross-checked the themes with each other to ensure no overlap and that each theme was distinct and unique.

Step five of the analysis was the naming of the themes. Terry et al. (2017) defined this step in terms of the researcher assigning names that would be used in presenting the study findings to preliminary themes developed in the previous data analysis steps. The researcher reviewed the information assigned to each code and how it addressed the research question guiding this qualitative descriptive research. When the meaning of the data under each theme was assessed, the preliminary theme was named, which showed that the information in the theme addressed the study’s research question as shown in Table 4.

Table 4*Naming of Themes*

Preliminary theme label	Finalized theme name
Influence of administrator involvement	→ Theme 1: Administrators' participation in PLCs influenced teachers' perceptions of leadership
PLC influence on leadership training and skills	→ Theme 2: Teachers gained leadership training and skills through immersion in a PLC
PLC influence on leadership aspirations	→ Theme 3: Participation in a PLC encouraged teachers' leadership aspirations

Reporting of the findings was the sixth data analysis step. The researcher reported the results of the data analysis in the subsequent sections of this chapter. The detailed discussion of the themes were presented under the outcome of analysis section.

Outcome of Analysis Findings

The qualitative research question that guided the collection and analysis of the data was: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? The indicative, thematic analysis of the data yielded three themes: (a) administrators' participation in professional learning communities influenced teachers'

perceptions of leadership, (b) teachers gained leadership training and skills through immersion in a professional learning community, and (c) participation in a professional learning community encouraged teachers' leadership aspirations. Detailed presentation of the themes is presented in the sections below:

Theme 1: Administrators' Participation in Professional Learning Communities Influenced Teachers' Perceptions of Leadership

Most participants indicated that administrators attended professional learning community meetings sometimes, but not always, and that administrators typically visited professional learning community meetings briefly and did not remain for the entire session. Most participants further indicated that administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was needed so that school leaders could receive input from teachers and provide coordination and leadership, although a small number of participants provided discrepant data indicating that administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was not needed, as long as the administrators were accessible to teachers when needed. A majority of the participants expressed the perception that participation in a professional learning community can influence teachers' perceptions of leadership, but the nature of this influence was perceived as depending on the nature of the administrators' involvement or lack of involvement.

Almost all participants indicated that administrators attended professional learning community meetings sometimes, but not always. For example, P1 said of administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings, "They do attend; they definitely do attend most of them, except when they are otherwise engaged in something else." P4 said of their principal, "It's not a routine thing that she's going to sit in every [PLC] meeting, but if we request for her to be there, she definitely would be." Similarly, P5 said, "Administration does attend

meetings. So maybe they might not be at every meeting . . . if they come, they come; if not, it's open, it's not like you can't come. It's open.” P9 stated of their school’s administrators, “Sometimes I remember our administrators would be there, and sometimes they would not.” Only one participant, P8, provided discrepant data indicating that administrators never attended professional learning community meetings at their school. Asked whether administrators ever attended PLC meetings, P8 answered, “No.”

Most participants believed that it was important for administrators to attend at least some professional learning community meetings for at least part of the meeting. P1 indicated that teachers needed administrators to be present at professional learning community meetings at least some of the time to make decisions that teachers did not have the authority to make: “I think that sometimes we [teachers] have things we cannot conclude on. So, they [administrators] clarify certain things. Sometimes they help to clarify some of the issues we have at the meeting.” P1 added another response in noting that administrators’ occasional attendance at professional learning community meetings was valuable for the sake of appearances and teacher morale, saying of administrator attendance, “It shows that you [the administrator] are concerned. It shows you are interested.” P3 indicated that school leaders should attend professional learning community meetings to provide guidance to teachers and an overall vision for the school, or to tell teachers, “What are the expectations, what do they want for their school? So, they [administrators] should attend them [PLC meetings].” P7 provided corroboration of P3’s perception in noting that administrators’ occasional attendance at professional learning community meetings was needed to guide teachers’ decision-making in accordance with an overall vision for the school, because, “Whatever we [teachers] are doing has to fit within the vision of the school. It's not something that is being done independently of the school, because

that wouldn't work.” P8 expressed a similar perception to P3’s and P7’s, saying that their administrators’ absence from professional learning community meetings left teachers without needed guidance: “I feel like I need more explicit directions from the principal, in terms of the big picture of what we're doing. Tell us, ‘These are the school’s goals.’”

The most frequently cited reason why participants perceived administrators’ occasional presence at professional learning community meetings as important was so that school leaders could receive input from teachers. P10 regarded administrators’ attendance as important because, “The administration or administrators need to understand the collective thinking of its staff. So, it [attendance at professional learning community meetings] gives them insight on what the staff is thinking.” P10 added that if they were an administrator, they would attend professional learning community meetings to solicit input from teachers: “I’d want to survey the staff, the educators, the teachers themselves, and find out what are some topics that they feel they need some assistance or help in.” P4 also expressed the perception that administrators’ occasional presence at professional learning community meetings was important so that school leaders could acquaint themselves with teachers’ needs, offering the following analogy in explanation:

If you supervise the police department, you want to know exactly what they need in order to do their jobs. Or if you are a commander with soldiers, you want to know exactly what's working, what's not working, as opposed to saying, “You guys are going to use this strategy” . . . If you’re a principal, you can hear [at professional learning community meetings] some of those [teachers’] concerns [about prescribed instructional strategies] before adopting a curriculum, so when you go to these curriculum meetings that teachers are not privy to, you can raise these points and say, “Well, this curriculum doesn't mesh

well with the standardized test that the kids have to take,” or, you know, “My teachers are concerned about that.”

P8 also suggested that administrators should attend professional learning community meetings to ask teachers for feedback: “They [administrators] should ask for suggestions more consistently and feedback. I think that's a best practice that has not been fully explored: the power of asking people's opinions about things, asking them to share their needs.”

Almost all of the participants expressed the perception that participation in a professional learning community could influence how leadership was perceived by teachers in a manner that depended on the nature of the administrators' involvement. P4 said participation and its effect on teacher perceptions of leadership, “It depends on the agenda of the community, and whether they [teachers] subscribe to it.” P4 clarified that if an administrator sets a goal for the professional learning community that teachers endorsed, teachers' perceptions of leadership would be positively influenced, such as if an administrator asked the professional learning community to engage in, “Thinking about the kids only, and that's really because the professional community that they're part of, that's their agenda.” P5 expressed the perception that administrators' attendance at professional learning communities could influence teachers' perceptions of leadership positively or negatively, “100%, depending on how the leadership acts during that professional learning community, whether or not they're enthusiastic, or they just can't be bothered, or they're just staring at you from afar. It depends on how they're acting.” P6 agreed that the influence on teachers' perceptions of leadership depended on how the administrator behaved during professional learning community meetings, saying, “I think the leadership can really either motivate or turn off [teachers].” To have a positive influence on teachers' perceptions of leadership, P6 added, “I think leaders need to just listen and always try to find

ways to help the teachers.” P10 believed that if administrators provided adequate guidance about an overall vision for the school and what should be discussed during professional learning community meetings to promote that vision, then teachers’ perceptions of leadership would be positively influenced because, “It can show whether or not this is a leader, an administration, who is taking time and thinking deeply about the professional learning community, or one that is simply facilitating them because that is the new trend.” P11 believed that if an administrator created the professional learning community, teachers’ perceptions of leadership would be positively influenced because, “An administration that doesn't care would never even think to get this thing [the professional learning community] going.”

Two participants provided discrepant data indicating that participation in a professional learning community would not influence teachers’ perceptions of leadership. Asked whether professional learning community participation would influence teachers' perceptions of leadership, P1 stated, “I don't think so. The professional learning [community] sometimes doesn't have anything to do with the leader.” P2 answered the same question by stating, “No, because if you're not in educational leadership, professional learning community doesn't come up,” explaining that at school, “If you're a teacher who's just a regular teacher, you don't have to go to these small [professional learning community] groups.”

Theme 2: Teachers Gained Leadership Training and Skills Through Immersion in a Professional Learning Community

Almost all participants indicated that they acquired leadership skills and training through participation in a professional learning community. Almost all participants also indicated that teachers in general could gain leadership skills through professional learning community participation. Leadership skills and training that the participants reported they gained through

professional learning community immersion included gaining a practical, as opposed to a theoretical, knowledge of leadership, learning how to manage people, and learning how to present information or teach other teachers.

Eleven participants stated that they acquired leadership skills through their participation in a professional learning community. P3 said that professional learning community immersion helped them to gain leadership skills because, “You build on your ‘people skills’.” P12 indicated that they learned collaboration skills: “It's helped me empathize with some of the struggles that teachers may have, and helps me try to collaborate with them.” P5 reported that they learned communication skills because, “You see how the other staff members communicate their perspectives and their strategies.” P6 said that professional learning community immersion helped teachers to gain leadership skills because by presenting information to colleagues in professional learning community meetings, “You'll know how to instruct the teacher.” P7 indicated that they learned how to plan, run, and keep records of meetings, because, “[professional learning community meetings are] really organized. It's not just haphazard. So, you do have to plan, and we have to have an agenda and give feedback. We have to keep records.” P10 was the only participant who provided discrepant data indicating that they did not acquire leadership skills through professional learning community participation, explaining that professional learning communities, “Came about after I'd already acquired leadership qualities and abilities.”

Consistent with their responses about the leadership skills they had gained, the participants affirmed that teachers in general could acquire leadership skills through immersion in a professional learning community. P1 indicated that teachers could learn to lead by watching how administrators led professional learning community meetings: “If you're looking at your

leader, how he's handling things, it can influence you. You can learn to be a leader by watching your leader." P11 agreed with P1 that teachers could gain leadership skills by watching how administrators led professional learning community meetings because, "When we see something that we like, we imitate it. So in these communities, you're going to see those alphas emerge, the ones who are taking the lead." P2 said that taking on administrative and clerical duties for the professional learning community could help teachers acquire leadership skills, saying that through, "The task of being the facilitator and kind of the notetaking person, guiding questions, you can develop that [leadership skills]." P7 indicated that teachers who led professional learning community meetings would learn leadership skills: "There are a lot of opportunities to develop in the learning community, and particularly in terms of skills: How do you conduct a learning community? What do you start with? Where do you go from there?" Asked whether teachers in general could gain leadership skills through professional learning community participation, P8 affirmed, "I will definitely say so, because you have to make decisions." P9 said that teachers could gain leadership skills through the professional learning community because, "Presentation, working with peers, all of that is part of being in administration." P12 believed that professional learning community participation could help teachers acquire the leadership skills of collaboration and professionalism: "We're collaborating amongst each other. So, it's not the teacher and isolation . . . and I do think at the end of the day, whether they know it or not, they are learning to be better professionals."

Asked specifically what leadership training teachers could receive through immersion in a professional learning community, six participants indicated that teachers could gain practical, as opposed to theoretical, knowledge of leadership. P1 said that through, "Seeing how it [leadership] is done in real time," teachers could gain, "kind of what you call practical, not just

the book knowledge of it [leadership], but seeing it working with the people.” P10 indicated that teachers could gain practical knowledge of leadership through professional learning community immersion because, “Experience is the best teacher for anything.” P11 indicated that teachers could gain practical knowledge of leadership in the professional learning community by performing leadership roles in, “Those things where you get to take the role of leader, give it to a person who may never have had it before.” P4 suggested that practical knowledge gained through professional learning community participation was a more effective pathway to gaining leadership skills than formal instruction in leadership: “The best leaders . . . became leaders because they felt that they had to, and they maybe join a professional community, as opposed to going to some leadership school.”

Six participants indicated that a leadership skill in which professional learning community immersion trained teachers was how to manage people. P1 said of the primary leadership skill that teachers gained through professional learning community immersion, “It's basically how to manage your colleagues. That's the thing you learn a lot about. That's the basic thing: how to manage people.” P5 agreed, saying that through immersion in professional learning communities, teachers could learn, “How to handle people, and that's a big part of being an administrator, how to handle the adults, because primarily they're the ones you deal with. Not the kids.” P6 indicated that teachers could learn management skills through immersion in a professional learning community, including, “Dealing with multiple personalities, [and] how are you under pressure when something happens right away [suddenly]? Are you able to delegate responsibilities? Are you able to criticize, critique, in a positive way? Are you able to give positive feedback?”

Six participants indicated that teachers could learn the leadership skill of how to present information, or how to teach the teacher, through participation in professional learning communities. P2 recalled a fellow teacher who rose to the level of assistant principal (AP) after giving regular presentation to other teachers in professional learning community meetings:

One guy who was a regular teacher, he was doing our professional development before he became an AP [assistant principal]. He was just a model teacher or something like that. But every Wednesday, we had half-a-day. He led almost every single teacher professional development . . . If you are put forward to run a [professional learning community] meeting, give a professional development, the opportunity to lead, if given, can really train you to be an AP [assistant principal].

P5 suggested that in professional learning communities, teachers could learn to present information to adults instead of to the children they were accustomed to teaching, and that this skill was distinct from teaching children and valuable because, “It just comes out differently when you're dealing with a bunch of adults than with the kids, no matter what. It's a different dynamic when you're dealing with adults.” P6 also indicated that through professional learning community participation, teachers could learn how to teach other teachers: “You'll know how to instruct the teacher. I think that there's nothing better than experience.” P9 agreed, saying, “The presenting, if you can do that with your community, could probably assist you if you have that vision to become an administrator in the future.”

Theme 3: Participation in a Professional Learning Community Encouraged Teachers' Leadership Aspirations

All of the participants indicated that immersion in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' leadership aspirations. Only one participant provided partly discrepant data indicating that if an administrator played an obstructive role in the learning community, professional learning community participation might discourage teachers' leadership aspirations. Ways in which immersion in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' leadership aspirations included giving them opportunities to assume leadership roles, the participants said, as well as giving teachers opportunities to self-assess their own willingness and readiness to lead. Professional learning community participation could also give teachers opportunities to prove that they had the capacity to lead, some participants said.

Eight participants expressed the perception that immersion in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' leadership aspirations by giving them opportunities to assume leadership roles. P11 suggested that assuming a leadership role in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' aspirations: "Immerse yourself in being a leader, and you're going to want to be a leader." P12 agreed that immersion in leadership experiences in a professional learning community could foster teachers' leadership aspirations because,

Sometimes you're leading the meeting one week. Another time, you may be taking the notes. You could be leading the breakout room. You could learn to create agendas next time. You're learning different roles that more than likely you're going to have to take on in leadership. If leadership is your aspiration, you're going to have to take on different roles and know different aspects. And I believe that is what happens at the professional learning [community].

P4 reported that they had seen teachers emerge as leaders through assuming leadership roles during professional learning community meetings:

I've seen it happen to other teachers, less senior teachers, new teachers that came in, and they heard ideas, and their personality is just such that people like how you [the new teacher] speak, you're very clear and you articulate, and you have a lot of energy, and they [the new teachers] become leaders. They're the ones that decide, "Okay, I'll spearhead this particular activity. I'll make sure I'll do this assignment and represent the group."

Five participants indicated that immersion in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' leadership ambitions by giving them the opportunity to assess their willingness and readiness to lead. P1 said, "Being in the professional learning community, yes, can actually, it's a good way of assessing yourself. Can I do it [lead]? Do I want to do it?" P11 said that opportunities for self-assessment in professional learning communities were valuable to teachers because not everyone was amenable to bearing the disadvantages of a leadership role:

There are some negative experiences to being a leader because you have to take the responsibility. You have to be willing to shoulder all of that. But in a professional learning community, you can get your feet wet. Try it out. See where you fit in that. Because there's some parts of it that you probably would like, and some parts of you probably would not like . . . you can decide then and there [in the professional learning community] if you think you could be admin, or if you're going to stay a teacher . . .

When you hear the feedback in that room of what people think about admin, that will lead you [to ask], "Do I want to be that person, or do I want to just teach the children?"

And then, at the same time, you could say, "Well, I think I could do a better job." You get to know yourself a little bit more.

P5 said that teachers benefitted from opportunities that the professional learning community gave them to self-assess their leadership capacity because they might have no other way to judge their readiness to lead, given that, “It's a completely different job being an administrator versus being a teacher. I mean it's all educational, but there's different responsibilities.” Attempting to attain an administrative position was a major commitment for a teacher, P5 added, because, “It's another masters, so you got to go back to school . . . it's like starting from the beginning in a different title, because you have to resign as a teacher and go into a different bracket.”

Participating in a professional learning community allowed teachers to assess whether they should make that career change, P5 said, because,

If a teacher sees that [what assuming a leadership role in a professional learning community is like] and feels they could handle it, they could cope and deal with it, and maybe because they see it firsthand, then maybe they'll consider doing it because they could see it first.

Related to opportunities for self-assessment was the opportunity that professional learning community participation gave teachers platforms to demonstrate their leadership capacity, three participants indicated. P1 said that the professional learning communities gave teachers the opportunity to prove that they had the potential to lead: “The professional learning community might be a smaller scale. So if the teacher sees it, or I can handle this on this scale, it might encourage them, probably, to go on to do it on a bigger scale.” P2 agreed, stating that leading in a professional learning community gave teachers the opportunity to prove that they could lead other teachers: “If you are trying to talk to all these people [teachers] who are pretty smart, pretty intellectual, and you want to be the lead guy, you got to prove that you can guide them.” Through leading in a professional learning community, P2 added, “If you are a go-getter

and really are pushing to be in-charge, you can lead a group, or show your intellect and or your knowledge.” P4 suggested that professional learning community participation was an effective way for younger teachers to demonstrate their leadership potential: “I think younger teachers, they feel they need to prove themselves and show their value. They are more susceptible or more likely to take a leadership role [in a professional learning community].”

Analysis Summation

This study was guided by the following research question: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? Following the analysis of data, the following themes emerged: Theme 1 was: administrators' participation in professional learning communities influenced teachers' perceptions of leadership. Most participants indicated that administrators attended professional learning community meetings sometimes, but not always, and that administrators typically visited professional learning community meetings briefly and did not remain for the entire session. Most participants further indicated that administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was needed so that school leaders could receive input from teachers and provide coordination and leadership, although a small number of participants provided discrepant data indicating that administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was not needed, as long as the administrators were accessible to teachers when needed. A majority of the participants expressed the perception that participation in a professional learning community can influence instructors' perceptions of leadership, but the nature of this influence was perceived as depending on the nature of the administrators' involvement or lack of involvement.

Theme 2 was: teachers gained leadership training and skills through immersion in a professional learning community. Almost all teachers indicated that they acquired leadership skills and training through participation in a professional learning community. Almost all participants also revealed that teachers in general could gain leadership skills through professional learning community participation. Leadership skills and training that the participants reported they gained through professional learning community immersion included gaining a practical as opposed to a theoretical knowledge of leadership, learning how to manage people, and learning how to present information or teach other teachers.

Theme 3 was: participation in a professional learning community encouraged teachers' leadership aspirations. All the 12 participants recruited for this qualitative study stated that participating in professional learning community encouraged teachers' leadership aspirations. Only one participant provided partly discrepant data indicating that if an administrator played an obstructive role in the learning community, professional learning community participation might discourage teachers' leadership aspirations. Ways in which immersion in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' leadership aspirations included giving them opportunities to assume leadership roles, the participants said, as well as giving teachers opportunities to self-assess their own willingness and readiness to lead. Professional learning community participation could also give teachers opportunities to prove that they had the capacity to lead, some participants said. In Chapter 5, the researcher will discuss and provide an interpretation of the results presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Results, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The current research was prompted by the limited understanding of how participation in professional learning communities by high school teachers influenced their school leadership aspirations. Strong teacher leadership and administrative support are significant in improving student academic performance in professional learning communities. However, little is known about the impacts of the professional learning community's participation on teachers' aspirations to lead. The limited understanding of the role of professional learning in leadership leaves practitioners without sufficient guidance on how it can be optimized to enhance teacher leadership. The researcher, therefore, attempted to address this problem by researching how the participation of public high school teachers in a professional learning community influenced their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public high school.

The research method for this study was a qualitative methodology. Open-ended questions were used to collect data on the teachers' experiences and perceptions of professional learning communities and leadership opportunities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposive sampling technique was used for participant recruitment while virtual semi-structure interviews were used by the researcher to collect data from each participant. The data were analyzed following the step provided for in the inductive thematic analysis of qualitative data (Terry et al., 2017).

The guiding research question was: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? The results revealed that administrators partially attended meetings, and their perceptions influenced teachers' perceptions. Although some participants indicated administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was unnecessary, most participants expressed the perception that participation in a professional learning community can influence teachers' perceptions of leadership, but the nature

of this influence was perceived as depending on the nature of the administrators' involvement or lack of involvement.

The inductive thematic analysis of the data further showed that by participating in a professional learning community, teachers could acquire leadership skills. Leadership skills and training that the participants reported they gained through professional learning community immersion included gaining practical as opposed to theoretical knowledge of leadership, learning how to manage people, and learning how to present information or teach other teachers. Engaging in professional learning encouraged teachers' leadership aspirations. The professional learning community encouraged the leadership aspirations of teachers by giving them opportunities to assume leadership roles and self-assessing their willingness and readiness to lead. Some participants said that professional learning community participation could also give teachers opportunities to prove that they could lead. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss and interpret the results presented in chapter 4, discuss the limitations of the results, provide recommendation for future, discuss the implication of the findings and provide a conclusion that summarizes the study' findings.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

The researcher discussed and interpreted the findings based on the research question and the themes generated during the inductive thematic analysis of data. The overarching research question was: How do public high school teachers who participate in a professional learning community describe the influence of their participation on their school leadership aspirations at a New York City public school? The results are discussed based on the themes below.

Theme 1: Administrators' Relationships to Professional Learning Communities Influenced Teachers' Perceptions of Leadership

Although the majority of participants established that administrators attended professional learning community meetings, these administrators did not attend meetings regularly or did not attend the meetings for the entire session. The findings indicated that administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was needed so school leaders could receive teacher input and provide coordination and leadership. However, some participants reported that administrators' attendance at professional learning community meetings was unnecessary as long as the administrators were accessible to teachers when needed. Although the participation of administrators in professional learning community meetings could influence teachers' perception of leadership, such influence depended on the nature of the administrators' involvement or lack of involvement. The findings imply that participating in professional learning community programs impacts teachers' perception of leadership, which can be done through attending professional learning community meetings.

The results concur with previous literature regarding professional learning community and teachers' perceptions of leadership. Naidoo (2019) revealed that when teachers who attend professional learning communities are positively inclined toward leadership, they can contribute more directly to organizational effectiveness and improve outreach programs in the communities and families. Consistent with current study findings, past research indicated that teachers participating in leadership or professional learning communities led to improved teacher perceptions of leadership and collaboration with families and the community (Yulianti et al., 2021).

Although the result concurred with past researchers, other studies indicated inconsistent results regarding teacher participation in leadership or professional learning community programs. Montoya et al. (2018) indicated the benefits of participating in leadership in schools enhanced teachers' collaboration with administrators, community and families, in addition to

influencing their positive perception of leadership. In contrast to current findings, Schildkamp (2019) reported that by accepting some leadership responsibilities, teachers were motivated and their confidence improved in teaching as well as leading (Alice et al., 2020).

Similar to current findings, past research opined that teachers participating in leadership or professional learning communities promoted real collaboration between academic stakeholders by shifting and elevating their roles to coaches from academic instructors. Such shifting can be done by promoting team autonomy and helping students to work collaboratively to achieve set objectives, thereby enhancing teachers' perception of leadership (Tallman, 2019). Similar to Tallman (2019), Meyer et al. (2022) found that participating in professional learning communities improved how teachers perceived leadership supporting teamwork between teachers and enhancing collaboration between students and teachers. While Meyer et al. (2022) concur with current research findings, the findings were limited to how professional learning communities influenced how teachers perceived leadership. However, the study did not indicate how administrators' association with professional learning communities may affect teachers' ability to take up leadership responsibilities.

Whereas attending professional learning communities improved teachers' perception of leadership, previous literature highlights that limited support from school administration discouraged teachers from taking up leadership roles (Tahir & Musah, 2020). However, Mei Kin and Abdul Kareem (2021) report that limited time among teachers to attend professional learning community group meetings for liberation was a major obstacle to teachers' acceptance of leadership. The findings have added to previous literature by establishing that administrators' relationship with professional learning communities may influence teachers' perception of leadership.

Theme 2: Teachers Gained Leadership Training and Skills Through Immersion in a Professional Learning Community

Participation in a professional learning community enabled teachers to acquire training and skills in leadership. Participants indicated that they acquired leadership skills and training through participation in a professional learning community. Teachers, in general, could gain leadership skills by participating in professional learning communities. The leadership skills and training the participants reported having gained through professional learning community immersion included gaining practical as opposed to theoretical knowledge of leadership, learning how to manage people, and learning how to present information or teach other teachers. The findings imply that professional learning community programs help teachers train and gain skills in leadership by learning how to manage people and present information or train other teachers.

The findings above have also been reported in other studies. Consistent with current study results, previous literature revealed that a professional learning community is beneficial because it facilitates on-the-job training and learning for teachers in their respective schools (Jafar et al., 2022). Through professional learning communities, teachers can gain new knowledge about pedagogical practices and leadership requirements (Lee et al., 2022). The findings also agree with Chen (2020) that attending a professional learning community enhanced teachers' skills through training. Past studies have established that teachers can be mentored or trained to become professional leaders ready to respond to organizational challenges within their learning environment (Chen, 2020). Therefore, actively participating in a professional learning community will provide hands-on training and create opportunities to increase teacher aspirations for school leadership positions.

Consistent with current research findings, other studies have identified that professional learning communities professionally develop teachers, improving their instructional leadership

and students' performance (Elfarargy et al., 2022). Adopting professional learning communities in the academic profession is an important evolution with direct effects on the quality of instruction and teaching practice (Li, 2022). Inconsistent with the findings, Li (2022) posit that professional learning communities are effective in helping learning institutions to improve students' performance and teacher collaboration. The collaboration between current study findings and previous literature provides insight into how tutors can enhance their instructional skills through a professional learning community. The findings have added to prior studies such as Mo et al. (2021), who documented evidence showing that teachers' leadership skills were enhanced by their engagement in professional learning communities. The findings provide the need to develop teachers into leaders with the leadership skills needed for collaboration and teachers' instructional and leadership capabilities.

Research findings are also consistent with previous literature indicating the need for teachers to have leadership skills to promote strong collaboration, partnership, and parent involvement, which is key in the learning process (Schildkamp, 2019). Therefore, the need to fill a supervisory leadership role in schools, improve students' performance, and retain teachers necessitates implementing a professional learning community to equip teachers with leadership skills. Such skills help teachers to assume important roles in their institutions and avoid teacher isolation (Fonsen & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019). However, Schildkamp (2019) established that leadership responsibilities motivated teachers as it improved their attitude and self-confidence about leading and providing directions. The results of this study have extended previous findings and theory by evidencing that teachers gain training and skills through professional learning community immersion, including gaining practical as opposed to theoretical knowledge of leadership, learning how to manage people, and learning how to present information or teach other teachers.

Theme 3: Participation in a Professional Learning Community Encouraged Teachers'

Leadership Aspirations

Teachers' leadership aspirations were encouraged through participation in a professional learning community. The analysis of the collected data revealed that by participating in professional leadership communities, teachers were encouraged to take up leadership positions. However, one participant reported that if an administrator obstructed the establishment of a learning community, professional learning community participation might discourage teachers' leadership aspirations. Participation in professional learning communities could encourage teachers' aspirations by giving them opportunities to assume leadership roles, as well as giving teachers opportunities to self-assess their willingness and readiness to lead. Professional learning community participation could also give teachers opportunities to prove that they could lead. Study findings imply that participating in a professional leadership community may help teachers gain motivation and encouragement to assume leadership roles.

After attending professional learning communities, teachers were inspired to engage in leadership roles. The findings above have been confirmed by other researchers indicating that professional learning communities can help to professionally develop teachers because they create strong relationships between team members and shared goals (Nehmeh & Kelly, 2018). Thornton and Cherrington (2018) found that teachers engaged in active professional learning communities and reported increased confidence in their teaching methods. With current study findings, a professional learning community encourages teachers' leadership aspirations. The results support previous literature findings, which revealed that participating in professional learning communities was important as it provided teachers with a collaborative and nurturing safe space to review their instructional practices, as well as initiate practices that would improve their performance (Durr et al., 2020). Frequent meetings among team members can help teachers

create mutual respect, rapport, and trust for sharing information to improve learning practices and their leadership aspirations (Rowlandson & Ross-Hekkel, 2022). Though a professional learning community is important in cultivating the leadership aspiration of teachers, most teachers prefer working in isolation, even though the current literature supports the collaborative impacts of professional learning communities among high school teachers (Durr et al., 2020).

However, previous literature has demonstrated that most teachers avoid professional learning communities, thereby missing opportunities for professional development into teacher leaders (Nehmeh & Kelly, 2018). After participating in a professional learning community, teacher leadership aspirations fostered collaborations that enhanced professional leadership development among teachers (Rolandson & Ross-Hekkel, 2022). The study findings are important because they have addressed the current research problem where teachers prefer working in isolation, thereby limiting their professional development into leaders by establishing the need for professional learning communities to enhance teachers' leadership aspirations. Consistent with current study findings, Krakehl et al. (2020) established that teachers would be mentored, coached, and skilled to become leaders based on peer-to-peer relationships through professional learning communities. Besides developing stronger and lasting friendships and relationships, professional learning communities have helped teachers improve and enhance their teaching skills, resulting in improved leadership aspirations. The results also concur with Thornton and Cherrington (2018), who found that teachers who engaged and were active professional learning community participants reported increased confidence in their teaching methods and leadership abilities.

Professional learning community participation could also give teachers opportunities to prove that they could lead others and deliver the results of their leadership roles. The results are consistent with previous research indicating that it is worth noting that a professional learning

community enhances how teachers articulate their responses when responding to another professional. It also filters between contents to ensure students receive current and high-quality content (Dogan & Adams, 2018). Dogan and Adams (2018) also concur with the present results by establishing that numerous opportunities can be had while engaging with other sharp and qualified minds during professional learning community meetings, improving how teachers prepare and deliver their lessons. Similar to current results, Terry et al. (2018) found that a professional learning community fostered collaboration among teachers and provided them with an opportunity to acquire extra-pedagogical skills that would enhance their teaching, learning, and leadership skills. The results of this qualitative research add to previous findings in that participation in a professional learning community could encourage teachers' aspirations by allowing them to assume leadership roles and self-assess their willingness and readiness to lead.

Limitations

The significant limitations associated with the current study were associated with qualitative research methods and associated procedures. Data were drawn exclusively from participants' self-report because no other source of information about the impacts of professional learning community participation on teachers' leadership aspirations was available. The unavailability of other sources of information on the impacts of professional learning communities on the leadership aspiration of teachers threatened the credibility of the study results as the findings cannot be verified through triangulation with data from other sources.

Qualitative research is not generalizable; therefore, the study results may not be transferable to other study settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In conjunction with Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Creswell and Creswell (2017) reported that qualitative studies were subjective, in that the results were anchored on the experiences and perception of participants, which may be subject to researcher bias. This limitation may threaten the credibility of the study results. The

risks of bias due to the subjective nature of qualitative research was addressed by incorporating and discussing the experiences of all participants independently to show areas of convergence and divergence from each of the participants' responses and research interpretation of the study results.

In addition to the methodological limitations of the study, the current qualitative research was limited by the use of a small sample by the researcher. Despite a small sample threatening the transferability of study results, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) established that the voluminous nature of qualitative data justified the use of a small sample by qualitative researchers to ensure accurate and in-depth analysis of the data. The geographic setting for this qualitative research was limited to New York City, and the target population was further limited to teachers in a NYC public high school. The geographical limitation may threaten the transferability of the results to other cities or rural areas and other school levels (middle school or elementary school).

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher employed qualitative research, which is not generalizable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This limitation threatened the transferability of the results to other settings. As a recommendation, researchers should consider using a mixed method or quantitative methodology to permit the generalizability of findings. The transferability of the current results was also influenced negatively by the researcher's use of a small number of teachers as a sample. As a result, further research may consider using a sample larger than the one used in this study to facilitate transferability of the results. The study was delimited to New York City with the target population further limited to teachers in a NYC public high school. The geographical delimitation of the current research influenced the transferability of the findings to other schools as well as areas outside of New York City. Therefore, future researchers should consider expanding the geographical scope of their qualitative studies to ensure transferability.

The results of this study have made significant contributions to the academic field by evidencing that professional learning community attendance by administrators can affect teachers' perceptions towards leadership, a significant addition to literature regarding professional development for teachers. Previous researchers have called for further research examining the need for collaboration and teamwork among teachers to facilitate professional development throughout learning institutions. This qualitative research has supported recommendations for teacher collaboration by showing that professional learning communities foster teamwork between school administrators and teachers to improve their schools' academic performance (Rolandson & Ross-Hekkel, 2022). Moreover, professional learning communities have been critical in the evolution of teachers' roles from instructional facilitators to leaders. The findings have advanced the knowledge in academia by establishing the significance of a professional learning community in promoting teacher leadership aspirations through training and gaining skills. Therefore, schools are recommended to implement professional learning community programs to improve teacher leadership and instructional excellence.

Implications for Practice

It is known that teachers' participation in a professional learning community can foster improvements in student and teacher learning and growth (Admiraal et al., 2019; Killion & Harrison, 2017). Teachers may use the research findings to attend professional learning community programs to perfect their teaching practice and promote their leadership abilities. It is also known that strong teacher leadership, either distributed or concentrated in a single leader, is essential for facilitating the relationships and collaboration among teachers on which an effective professional learning community depends (Hord & Tobia, 2012; King, 2002). As a result, schools may apply these findings in developing and implementing professional learning community programs to foster teacher training and development, thereby promoting their

leadership roles. In New York City, high school leaders can use these results to foster and attend a professional learning community after learning how it can influence teachers' leadership aspirations and school performance abilities.

Knowing how participation in a professional learning community influences New York City high school teachers' leadership aspirations in one school, may prompt administrators to create professional learning community programs to be attended by both school leadership and teachers to spur teacher leadership aspirations, training, and increased skills. The research has provided insight and guidance to practitioners that may help them optimize professional learning communities' contributions to teachers' aspirations to lead schools. Teachers' aspirations to assume leadership positions in professional learning communities are significant for the functioning of a professional learning community and, in turn, for student and teacher performance and growth, thereby improving the leadership pipeline. Community colleges may, therefore, use this study's findings to improve and sustain their leadership pipeline. The leadership pipeline can be sustained through ensuring continuous professional development of teachers, working with elected boards and unions to ensure availability of funds to finance career development programs for aspiring teacher leaders (Artis & Bartel, 2021). Sustaining the leadership pipeline ensures continuous career development through mentorship programs as well as building a team with essential leadership skills and practices for the community colleges (Artis & Bartel, 2021).

The research findings are important to the general public and society because public high schools may experience increased performance due to highly trained teachers. Through professional learning communities the benefit to the public and to society is learners with the promise of a skilled workforce. Through the research findings, society and the general public

may understand the importance of professional development through collaboration and teamwork to promote leadership and performance. The general public and society, including organizations other than schools, may use these findings to implement professional learning community programs to improve skills among personnel in various fields.

Conclusion

The problem addressed was the limited understanding of how participating in a professional learning community influenced teachers' school leadership aspirations. The researcher explored how participating in professional learning communities by teachers in a public high school in New York City influenced their leadership aspirations. The results of the qualitative study enhanced the researcher's understanding of how schools may use professional learning communities to encourage teachers to take leadership roles. The researcher also established that teachers, through professional learning communities, gained important leadership skills. Leadership skills and training gained through professional learning community immersion included gaining practical as opposed to theoretical knowledge of leadership, learning how to manage people, and learning how to present information or teach other teachers. Teachers are not only able to provide theoretical knowledge, but they can also provide practical leadership skills gained through professional learning community programs. Such skills may include managing people, presenting information, and teaching other teachers. Research has provided insight into the significance of professional training and development among professional learning community participants, the general public, and society. More research is recommended to help ascertain the importance of training among teachers with leadership aspirations.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

NOW RECRUITING

Public High School Teachers

To explore the impact of a PLC on teacher school leadership aspirations

STUDY

Teacher Participation and Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

CRITERIA

- High School Teacher
- One year participation in a PLC
- One year in current public high school

EXPECTATIONS

- Complete 3 online surveys
- Participate in an interview on Zoom
- Can be done at your convenience on a computer in December-January 2023

BENEFITS

- Increase PD opportunities
- Increase student performance CE
- Mentoring opportunities for school leadership

INTERESTED?

Contact Dion Thomas at
 Thomad29@Email.franklin.edu

Appendix B

Pre-Screening Questionnaire

Directions: Please complete and return this form via email to Thomad29@email.franklin.edu. By answering all questions, you will be considered for participation in the research study titled: Teacher Participation and Professional Learning Communities: A Qualitative Descriptive Study.

1. Are you a currently employed as a high school teacher?
Circle only one choice: A. Yes B. No

2. Do you currently work in the New York City public high schools?
Circle only one choice: A. Yes B. No

3. By October 2022, will you have at least one year teaching experience in your current position?
Circle only one choice: A. Yes B. No

4. Have you participated in a professional learning community for at least one year?
Circle only one choice: A. Yes B. No

Thank you for the time taken to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix C



Consent to Participate in a Research Study
 Dion Thomas, Principal Investigator
 Project Title: Teacher Participation and Professional Learning
 Communities: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

Hello, my name is Dion Thomas and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student in the EDD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM at Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio. As part of the requirements for earning my doctorate, I am doing a research project.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of my project is to determine the impact of high school teachers' participation in a professional learning community on their school leadership aspirations. I am inviting you to participate in my project because, although it may not have any personal gain, you will aid in uncovering experiences that can enhance professional development, instruction, student achievement, and the pool of potential school leaders.

What am I being asked to do?

1. In order to participate in the study, you will be required to complete a pre-screening questionnaire to ensure that you are eligible to participate. If eligible, you will complete and return an informed consent form and then a demographic questionnaire. All three forms will be emailed to you and each would take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete before returning by email.
2. **Taking part in this study is your choice.**

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits you would normally have.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

The interview will consist of fifteen (15) questions. It will take a maximum of one hour. The

interview questions will include questions like, “What knowledge, skills, or abilities did you bring to your professional learning community?” and “How did your attendance in the professional learning community impact you?”

Only you and I will be present during the Zoom interview. With your permission, I will audio record the interview so that I can focus on our conversation and later transcribe the interview for data analysis. You will be one of about 12 to 15 people I will interview for this study.

With your permission, I will also video record the interview so that we can see each other and have a comfortable conversation.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. If you become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the research study altogether.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may shed light on the importance of the professional learning communities as a vehicle for promoting professional development, advancing student achievement, and expanding the pool of teacher aspirants who desire to assume school leadership roles to meet 21st Century schoolwide challenges.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

I will keep all study data. First, each participant will be assigned a serial pseudonym (P1, P2, etc.) to be used in all study materials in place of their real name. Second, interview transcripts will be de-identified during the researcher verification process. Third, data will be stored securely. Secure storage of data will mean that the audio recordings of the interviews, and the digital copies of the informed consent forms, will be stored only on a password-protected flash drive that only the researcher can access, in a locked office also accessible only to the researcher. The key indicating which serial pseudonym was assigned to each participant will also be stored only on this flash drive. At the end of the required retention period, the flash drive will be reformatted and physically destroyed. Only my Franklin University dissertation chair and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The Franklin University IRB has the right to review research records for this study.

After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for your time and effort in participating in this research project.

Future Research Studies:

Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study, collected for this study, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please email me at Thomad29@email.franklin.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Wanda Fernendopulle, at wanda.fernandopulle@franklin.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Franklin University IRB Office at 614-947-6037 or irb@franklin.edu.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date the following signature page and return it to: Thomad29@email.franklin.edu.

Keep a copy of the informed consent for your records and reference.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I agree to join the research project entitled, "TEACHER PARTICIPATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE STUDY"

Please initial "Yes" or "No" to each of the following:

_____ Yes _____ No I consent to be audio recorded for the interview portion of this research.

_____ Yes _____ No I consent to being video recorded for the interview portion of this research.

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Signature of the Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

Directions: Please answer all of the following questions by circling the choice that best completes your response. Your accuracy in completing and returning this form via Microsoft Outlook Email to the researcher will be appreciated.

1. With which gender do you identify? A. Male B. Female C. Other D. No Response

2. Which category best describes your ethnicity? A. African American B. Asian
C. White D. Hispanic E. Middle Eastern F. Other

3. About how many years have you worked in any school setting?
A. 1 -5 years B. 6 – 12 years C. 12 - 20 years D. Excess of 20 years

4. How many years have you taught in high schools?
A. 1 – 5 years B. 6 – 10 years C. 11 – 15 years D. More than 15 years

5. How much time has elapsed since you participated in a professional learning community?
A. Less than 1 year B. 1 to 2 years C. 3 to 5 years D. More than 5 years

6. Which of your academic degrees provided you some leadership preparation?
A. Bachelor's B. Master's C. Specialist D. Doctorate

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Greetings Interviewee! My name is Dion Thomas and I am a student at Franklin University. I am conducting a qualitative descriptive study that will be exploring how teacher participation in a professional learning community impacts a high school teacher's leadership aspirations. The purpose of the study will be to pinpoint how participation in a professional learning community impacts the teacher's feelings about aspiring to high school leadership in the New York City Public Schools System. This interview will require that you complete a demographic survey and respond orally to interview questions posed by the researcher for a maximum duration of one hour.

ZOOM INTERVIEW RECORDING:

Interviews with participants will be audio-recorded only, which will be initiated only after interviewee's questions or concerns have been addressed without further inquiry. The camera capability on your device can now be deactivated. Any identifiable information pertaining to participants or the information that they share will be coded and maintained in a secured area with access only by the researcher. No information will be shared with any other researcher or entity. It is imperative to note that anyone who voluntarily chooses to participate in this study may not gain personally and can choose to abandon participation at any point during the course of the research study without any penalty.

THE INTERVIEW

Interview Questions

1. About how many years have you worked in high schools?
2. What does school leadership mean to you?
3. Relate a most memorable experience involving school leadership.
4. Describe your experience in your professional learning community?
5. What knowledge or skills did you bring to your professional learning community?
6. How did your attendance in the professional learning community impact you?
7. Have you ever performed administrative or clerical tasks for your professional learning community?
8. How important is attendance by a school leader/administrator attending the professional learning community? Why?
9. If you were a school leader, would you participate in a professional learning community with teachers? Why?
10. In your opinion, can a school leader influence a teacher's perception of school leadership? Please elaborate on your answer.
11. In your opinion, do you think that participation in a professional learning community can influence a teacher's perception of school leadership? Please elaborate on your answer.
12. After participation in your professional learning community, do you feel that you have now acquired some leadership skills? Justify your answer.
13. Can a teacher acquire school leadership skills through participation in a professional learning community? Explain.

14. Do you feel that high school leadership training can be gained through immersion in leadership experiences?
15. Do you feel that participation in a professional learning community has the potential to positively impact a teacher's leadership aspirations? Please explain.

Thank you for participating in this interview!

Appendix F

Letter of Support



LETTER OF SUPPORT

October 5, 2022

Dion Thomas, Student
Franklin University
Columbus, Ohio

Dear Dion:

As per our discussion last week, it is a pleasure to provide this Letter of Support to conduct your study.

After explaining your project, we agree that the interviews will be held offsite and will not impact teachers' contractual hours of employment or infringe on their workload. In addition, no physical school documentation will be shared by the interviewees.

Best wishes as you conduct this entire project at our school.

Joseph Rand, Ed.D.
Borough Principal

Principal's Signature

Date

DR. JOSEPH RAND
BROOKLYN/SI WEST
Borough Principal

Address: 960 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, NY 11213 – Telephone: (718) 778-5891

Prospect ALC
Supervisor

Appendix G

Franklin University IRB Exempt Letter

Date: December 16, 2022
PI: Dion Thomas
Department: i4, Doctoral Studies
Re: Initial - IRB-2022-69



FRANKLIN
UNIVERSITY

Teacher Participation and Professional Learning Communities: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

The Franklin Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Teacher Participation and Professional Learning Communities: A Qualitative Descriptive Study*.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Findings: The PI is conducting surveys and interviews with public high school teachers in New York City to learn how their participation in a professional learning community influences the teachers' school leadership aspirations.

The IRB determination of exemption means:

- You must conduct the research as proposed in the Exempt application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if stated in your application or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB prior to implementation to determine if the study still meets federal exemption criteria.
- You are responsible for notifying the IRB Office with any problems or complaints about the research.

Students, please note the following:

- You must use only the approved consent and assent forms (as applicable).
- Prior to graduation, you will need to complete a Closure submission for the IRB Office to close the study.

Any modifications to the approved study or study closures must be submitted for review through Cayuse IRB. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

You may contact the IRB Office at 614-947-6037 or irb@franklin.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

Franklin Institutional Review Board