A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR LITERACY LEADERS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Amy Paulson

March 2022

A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR LITERACY LEADERS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

By

Amy Paulson

Approved March 23, 2022 by

James H. Stronge, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Thomas J. Ward, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Margaret E. Constantino, Ph.D.
Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Dedication

As a third-generation educator, I am extremely proud to be carrying on my family's legacy in education. It was from watching the wonderful example of my mother, Cathy Thomas, that I first knew I wanted to be an educator at an early age. Her passion for the education profession and for life was, and continues to be, an inspiration to all whose lives she touched. This dissertation is dedicated to her in loving memory.

Acknowledgments

The completion of this dissertation marks the realization of a lifelong dream, one that I was able to achieve with the encouragement and support of many. I would like to thank the faculty of the College of William and Mary Executive Ed.D. program. It has been an incredible honor to be a scholar at the College of William and Mary and to have the opportunity to learn from them. I would like to also thank Dr. James Stronge and Dr. Tom Ward for their guidance and support throughout the dissertation process. A special thank you to Dr. Peggie Constantino, my dissertation chair, whose encouragement and support throughout my doctoral journey has truly been invaluable.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my wonderful family: my husband, Elias; my son, Louis; and my daughter, Cathy. I am forever grateful for them and for their endless encouragement, love, and support that made this dream possible. I would also like to thank my father, Ray Thomas, for always believing in me and for exemplifying the values of perseverance, integrity, and resilience throughout my life.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

As with other roles in education, the role of the literacy leader is one that is particularly susceptible to professional isolation. Recognizing the need for additional collaborative opportunities for literacy leaders in the District, this mixed methods action research study sought to implement an intervention in which a group of literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leader in their schools participated in a community of practice (CoP) focused on problems of practice identified by the group. The study examined how the select literacy leaders' participation in a CoP influenced their perceptions of self-efficacy, isolation and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice within their literacy leader roles. Measurement instruments included surveys, semi-structured interviews, CoP meeting transcripts, and a field notes journal kept by the researcher. Following their participation in the CoP, literacy leader participants described their experience as one that promoted confidence, collaboration, affirmation, validation, and influence. Study findings also concluded that the CoP was a source of belonging, collegiality, and trust for participants. The CoP intervention that was implemented in the study was additionally found to promote a learning community and opportunities for situated learning among participants within an authentic context. Recommendations include that collaborative activities that promote self-efficacy be continued in the District and that time during the professional workday be devoted to the implementation of these activities on a regular basis.

A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR LITERACY LEADERS: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Isolation in the Education Profession

Education has frequently been perceived as an isolated profession in which individuals work "behind closed doors" separate from other educators. According to DuFour (2011), the reason for this persistent professional isolation is that the structure and culture of organizations in which educators work have not supported, expected, or required them to collaborate. The Met Life Survey of the American Teacher (2011) reported that teachers and principals believe that more collaboration in schools would significantly affect both student achievement and school improvement. Another study by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) found that although teachers recognized the importance of collaboration, they did not perceive the collaboration practices within their schools as ideal. Only 7% of teachers in the study reported the presence of strong collaboration models in their schools. According to Tichenor and Tichenor (2019), "Teachers believe time and opportunity are the biggest barriers (to greater teacher collaboration) and would like to see more opportunities to collaborate be part of the school day" (p. 60).

Isolation Among Teachers and Other Educators

Isolation among educators is particularly concerning due to its many negative implications, both for educators and students. When teachers express feelings of

isolation, it is assumed that this will negatively affect the individual teacher's behavior and energy levels (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Isolation can also result in feelings of extreme helplessness and burnout (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). Burnout can lead to negative student outcomes (Geving, 2007; Kokkinos & Kargiotidis, 2016). Burnout can also prompt teacher turnover, job absenteeism, and diminished performance (M. H. Fisher, 2011; Maslach et al., 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Professional isolation also occurs in other educational roles. For school leaders, isolation is considered a "given" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 2). My own current role is also one that is susceptible to professional isolation. I am currently an elementary reading specialist, or literacy leader, in a large school district. The school district featured in this study is referred to hereafter as the District. I am the sole literacy leader in my school, as are many other literacy leaders in the 55 elementary schools in the District. Feelings of isolation are common among those in a literacy leader role. According to L'Allier and Elish-Piper (2012),

> A literacy coach may feel like an 'island' because he or she is likely to be the only person in his or her school with coaching responsibilities. Furthermore, opportunities to connect with other literacy coaches in the school district or local area may be limited, resulting in feelings of isolation for some literacy coaches. (p. 56)

Benefits of Teacher Collaboration

Robert John Meehan, a former teacher, esteemed author, and outspoken education advocate, once famously said, "The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other. Without collaboration our growth is limited to our own perspectives" (Meehan, n.d.). Research shows that collaboration among educators, particularly teachers, has many far-reaching benefits and often results in numerous positive outcomes (Ronfeldt, 2015). These positive outcomes

resulting from teacher collaboration are both individual and collective (Killion, 2015). Some of the individual and collective beneficiaries when teachers collaborate with one another include teachers themselves, students, schools, and school districts (Brown, 2011; Lumpkin et al., 2014; Ronfeldt, 2015). The benefits of collaboration also extend to teacher-coach partnerships, professional learning communities, and other groups of educators (D. Fisher et al., 2020; Hasbrouck, 2017).

Teacher Self-Efficacy, Collective Efficacy, and Trust

Literacy leaders work closely with both the teachers and the students in their respective schools in a variety of settings. Thus, the sense of self-efficacy of literacy leaders and their potential impact on the sense of self-efficacy of the teachers and students with whom they work is of particular significance, both within their individual school settings as well as the context of the study. The self-efficacy of teachers is "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Guskey & Passaro, 1993, p. 3). Teachers' self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in outcomes both for themselves and their students (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are particularly enthusiastic and willing to employ complex strategies in their classrooms (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Collective efficacy also plays a critical role in the interactions between literacy leaders, teachers, and students in schools, as well as in the community of practice (CoP) intervention employed in the study. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) define collective efficacy as the "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (p. 190). The positive impact of collective efficacy on student achievement is well-established (Goddard et al.,

2015; Ramos et al., 2014). Collective efficacy also affects student achievement through professional learning. When professional learning enables educators to make connections between their collective actions and student achievement, collective efficacy is thereby fostered (Donohoo & Katz, 2017).

Trust is a critical component both within the school communities that literacy leaders serve and the CoP model itself. Literacy leaders must establish trusting relationships with teachers, students, administrators, and families in order to be successful in their roles. Trust is also critical to the overall success of schools. "Trust is pivotal as American society considers its schools" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 548). In order for the members of a CoP to function as a true community of practitioners, trust must be paramount.

Statement of the Action Research Problem

As a model for professional collaboration, a CoP could possibly alleviate the issue of isolation among educators (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011; Janson & Howard, 2004). Communities of practice are loosely defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who share their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). These communities are informal in nature and are typically driven by the specific needs of the group. In this way, CoPs differ substantially from professional learning communities (PLCs), a collaborative model common in schools today that typically has a set focus. Implementing a CoP with elementary literacy leaders would provide them with a formal opportunity to collaborate with one another according to their individual and collective professional needs and interests.

The potential benefits of collaboration among educators are well-documented and extensive. According to Schleifer et al. (2017), "A growing body of research shows that when

teachers work more collaboratively, student outcomes can improve, teachers can be more satisfied in their jobs and teacher turnover can decrease" (p. 3). An analysis of data compiled from schools in an urban North Carolina school district (one of the largest in the country) over a 10-year period showed that teachers with supportive professional environments (including more peer collaboration and a positive school culture) demonstrated greater increases in student standardized test scores than did teachers in schools with professional environments that were less supportive (Kraft & Papay, 2014). Another study conducted in New York City public middle schools found that high-quality teacher relationships and collaboration contributed to the retention of more teachers annually (Kraft et al., 2016).

Despite the many potential positive outcomes of collaboration, a number of factors can influence the availability of these opportunities for educators. Research shows that the isolation of educators is one such factor and is of particular concern due to its many potential negative impacts. This isolation is more prevalent among certain educator groups, such as literacy leaders, due to the nature of their position (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). The problem investigated in this study was the prevalence and impact of limited opportunities for literacy leaders in the District to collaborate with one another based on their individual and collective professional needs and interests. High-quality collaborative experiences, such as those provided by CoPs, are instrumental in providing educators in all types of roles with valuable and equitable opportunities for collaboration. In this action research study, I endeavored to provide a high-quality collaborative experience for a group of literacy leaders in the District through the implementation of a CoP.

Evidence Supporting the Existence of the Problem

Within the District, elementary literacy leaders serve in several contexts. A large majority of elementary literacy leaders in the District serve as the sole literacy leader, or reading specialist, for the school. Of the 55 elementary schools in the District, there are currently 34 schools that have one person serving as the sole literacy leader for the school (Language Arts Program Coordinator, personal communication, September 14, 2020). The remaining elementary schools in the District have multiple literacy leaders (additional reading specialists and/or Title I and II reading teachers) at each school, depending upon additional funding and/or staff allocations provided for individual schools.

Probable Causes Related to the Problem

Currently, the District provides formal opportunities for elementary literacy leaders to assemble as a group during monthly meetings with the District's Department of Teaching and Learning. These meetings are driven by an agenda pre-determined by the department that typically includes items related to curriculum updates and professional learning for literacy leaders. At these meetings, collaboration and discussions among literacy leaders are centered around the pre-determined agenda items. There are currently limited formal opportunities provided by the District for literacy leaders to collaborate with one another based on their individual and collective professional needs and interests as determined by them. Other probable causes related to the problem include potential time constraints, literacy leaders' limited proximity to one another, and the isolated nature of their position in schools (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). Time constraints in particular are known to be a significant influence on the presence of collaborative opportunities in schools. The Met Life Survey of the American Teacher

(2011) reported that teachers, on average, spend only about 2.7 hours each week in structured collaboration.

Context of the Action Research Problem

The school district featured in this study is a large system comprised of 86 schools. Within the District, there are 55 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, 12 high schools, and four secondary specialty centers. The District employs approximately 15,000 staff members. The District serves a diverse student population of approximately 70,000 students. Of this student population, 46.3% are Caucasian, 23.3% are Black/African American, and 12.8% are Hispanic/Latino. In addition, 10.4% of students are Multiracial, 6.4% are Asian, 0.5% are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% are American Indian/Alaska Native. Annual per pupil expenditure by the District is $13,204.

Information Related to the Organization

Of the approximately 15,000 staff members in the District, 92 are elementary literacy leaders (Language Arts Program Coordinator, personal communication, September 14, 2020). The District's literacy leaders are currently overseen by the Department of Teaching and Learning. The department is led by the Executive Director of Elementary Teaching and Learning, who works closely with the Language Arts Program Coordinator to supervise the implementation of the District's elementary language arts program. Four Language Arts Instructional Specialists assist the Language Arts Program Coordinator and are assigned to specific schools to support the literacy leaders at each school. Literacy leaders can consult with their assigned instructional specialist on an as-needed basis regarding the implementation of the District's language arts program in their respective schools.

Information Related to the Intended Stakeholders

A description of one common literacy leader role within the District, the reading specialist, is as follows:

> The responsibilities of the reading specialist fall into two categories. As a teacher, the reading specialist is responsible for providing literacy instruction to students to promote the development of literacy skills. The reading specialist is also responsible for the implementation of a comprehensive literacy program through the support of teachers in best practices for literacy instruction.

Literacy leaders are considered to be instructional leaders in their schools, and as such, are frequently called upon to consult with school leaders, teachers, and members of the community regarding literacy instruction. The District has also implemented a coaching model for literacy leaders, in which at least half of their time is expected to be spent with teachers in a coaching capacity. Extensive knowledge surrounding current practices in literacy instruction is therefore a requirement of the literacy leader role, and it is thus essential that literacy leaders are highly proactive regarding their own professional learning so as to exemplify instructional and professional excellence within their settings.

In pursuing an explanatory action research Cycle 1, the interests of literacy leader stakeholders were an important consideration in designing the CoP intervention to be studied in Cycle 2. Due to the limited proximity of literacy leaders to one another, as well as their varied individual schedules, the CoP was conducted using an online meeting platform. With permission from the District, CoP meetings were held during the school day to maximize both the convenience and relevance of the CoP for participants.

In supervising the implementation of the District's elementary language arts program, District leaders such as the Executive Director of Elementary Teaching and Learning and the Language Arts Program Coordinator are, thus, directly responsible for literacy achievement in the District. In this capacity, these District leaders plan, implement, and supervise the professional development provided to literacy leaders (which is intended to subsequently be shared by literacy leaders with the teachers in their respective schools) and interact with them regularly for a variety of purposes.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Efficacy

This study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks that both framed the study design and guided the study process. Bandura's seminal self-efficacy research provided a framework for the exploration of participants' perceptions of self-efficacy that occurred in the study. According to Bandura (1986), "Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). Bandura (1977) also identified four factors that influence self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological states. The community of practice intervention employed in this study provided participants with many of these experiences thought by Bandura to be influential in the development of self-efficacy. The perceived self-efficacy of study participants was central to this study.

Situated Learning

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory served as another key theoretical framework for the study. In this theory, learning is viewed as situated activity. Central to the theory is a process Lave and Wenger term *legitimate peripheral participation*. This process is

that by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. “A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Since this study explored the perceptions of those implementing a CoP situated within the professional settings of its members, the situated learning theory was also central to the study.

Action Research Questions

This action research study sought to measure the impact of a CoP on a select group of literacy leaders. The study specifically examined the influence of the CoP on literacy leaders’ perceived levels of self-efficacy, isolation, trust, and professional growth and practice. The following research questions were addressed by the study:

1. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?
2. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?
3. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of professional growth and practice?

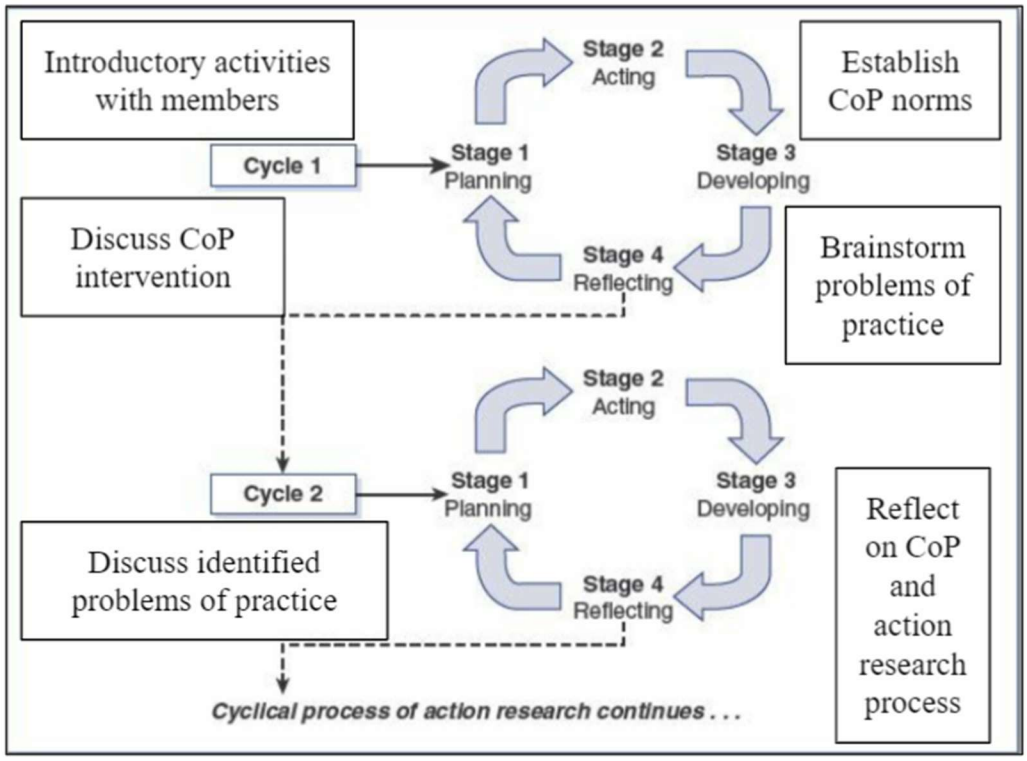
Action Research Model

This action research study utilized Mertler’s (2020) four-stage model of action research with stages dedicated to planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. These stages were cyclical in nature, which was of significance to both the action research process and the intervention implemented in this study. Of action research, Mertler (2020) asserts, “Although action research has a clear beginning, it does not have a clearly defined endpoint” (p. 36). The CoP intervention

employed in this action research study was implemented in two cycles. See Figure 1 for a depiction of Mertler's (2020) four-stage model of action research with the two study cycles included.

Figure 1

Cycles of Action Research Intervention



Note. From *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators* by C. A. Mertler, 2020, SAGE, p. 38. Copyright 2020 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

Brief Description of the Action Research Intervention

Recognizing the need for additional collaborative opportunities for literacy leaders in the District, this study sought to implement an intervention in which a group of literacy leaders participated in a CoP focused on problems of practice identified by the group. The CoP intervention was implemented in a professional development format using a virtual meeting

platform. The two cycles of the CoP intervention were both critical to its implementation. Cycle 1, which was conducted from April-June 2021, established the CoP. In this initial cycle, members participated in introductory activities to become better acquainted with one another. Participants shared their professional backgrounds and experiences as literacy leaders with one another. In addition, members discussed the CoP model and its purpose. Members also established CoP norms and brainstormed problems of practice related to the literacy leader role. These problems of practice became the focus for the CoP as it was implemented in Cycle 2. In Cycle 2, conducted from September-December 2021, members further developed these problems of practice through participatory action research in the CoP. Cycle 2 was ongoing as problems of practice were continually identified and further developed by the CoP. Participants also continually reflected on their CoP participation and the participatory action research process in Cycle 2.

Agendas for CoP meetings were created in an electronic format to allow for their collaborative development by CoP members. The content of these agendas was determined by members prior to CoP meetings and addressed topics selected by the group. Potential topics included those deemed relevant to the literacy leader role by CoP members. Although not collected for data analysis in this study, journals kept by individual participants were an additional source for potential problems of practice, emergent themes for discussion, and reflection on the part of participants. At the conclusion of each CoP meeting, members were asked to reflect about their individual CoP experiences in these journals. In seeking to foster the increased self-efficacy of participants, activities conducted during the CoP intervention aligned with the various elements of Bandura's self-efficacy framework, to include performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states.

Definitions of Terms

Community of practice – a group of people who "share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who share their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4)

Isolation- a condition often experienced by educators in several forms

Adaptive isolation – occurs when teachers are unable to meet the demands of adapting to new strategies (Lortie, 1975)

"Egg crate" isolation – physical separation where teachers have little contact with other professionals (Lortie, 1975)

Psychological isolation – a state of mind rather than a workplace condition (Lortie, 1975)

Language arts – reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills; typically taught using an integrated approach in the elementary setting

Literacy leader – one who provides leadership for a school's literacy program, such as a reading specialist, Title I reading teacher, or Title II literacy coach

Problem of practice – an actionable issue associated with a particular field or role

Professional growth – teacher learning and development (Taylor, 2017)

Professional learning community – a collaborative model common in schools today that has historically focused on the improvement of educators' pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as on the improvement of outcomes for students (D. Fisher et al., 2020)

Professional practice - practice "denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 38). *Professional practice* refers to practice within a professional setting.

Sense of self-efficacy – "people's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance"

(Bandura, 1986, p. 391)

Trust – *"*one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open"

(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 556)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A review of the existing literature establishes the factors known to impact the self-efficacy of educators as defined by Bandura. The importance of both self-efficacy and collective efficacy on the overall efficacy of educators is also examined. Since this study sought to implement a collaborative intervention with literacy leaders in a professional learning format, relevant literature regarding situated learning, high quality collaborative practices, and professional learning is explored. Literature surrounding the intervention in this study, a community of practice (CoP), is also highly relevant, as is that which explores the differences between the CoP and other forms of professional learning.

Self-Efficacy

In his analysis of social learning, Bandura (1977) theorized that self-efficacy is based on four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological states. According to Bandura, these four sources are:

> *Performance accomplishments*-These are based on personal mastery experiences. Successful and repeated mastery experiences help to raise an individual's mastery expectations, while early failures tend to lower them. Once an individual has developed strong mastery expectations, these expectations can help to offset the impact of later failures.

Vicarious experience-This involves observing others succeed despite adversity. These observations lead to the development of an individual's belief that they can also experience success in similar situations.

Social persuasion-Supportive affirmations are provided to others in an effort to persuade them that they have the ability to succeed.

Physiological states-These are based on the effects of an individual's emotional and physiological states on self-efficacy. Positive emotions, and the physiological reactions that result from them, can thus help to increase self-efficacy (p. 198).

Performance Accomplishments

Personal mastery experiences, gained through performance accomplishments, are thought to be the most influential source of information about efficacy because they provide the most authentic evidence of a person's ability to succeed in a particular endeavor (Bandura, 1997). A review of self-efficacy literature indicates that the influence of Bandura's four sources of efficacy information on self-efficacy has been widely researched. Personal mastery experiences have been found to play an important role in the self-efficacy of educators (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Wilson et al., 2020). Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) conducted a study with 93 teachers, who completed surveys indicating their self-efficacy beliefs before and after participating in one of four professional development formats with varying levels of efficacy-relevant input. Study results indicated that the professional development format that supported mastery experiences had the strongest effect on the self-efficacy beliefs of participants. In another study with 148 teachers by Wilson et al. (2020), participants completed questionnaires measuring mastery experiences, the school environment, self-efficacy, and reported inclusive teaching practices. Results showed that mastery experiences were important in

predicting the self-efficacy of teachers. Although both studies were based on self-reported data, the necessity of using this method to gather authentic self-efficacy data should be noted. Thus, the findings of both studies about the central role of personal mastery experiences in self-efficacy were important and relevant to this study.

Vicarious Experience

Much like performance accomplishments, the role of vicarious experience in self-efficacy has been researched in a variety of settings. Vicarious experience contributes significantly to the self-efficacy of educators (Clark & Newberry, 2019; Mintzes et al., 2013). In a study of 116 teachers who participated in professional learning communities (PLCs) over a 3-year period, Mintzes et al. (2013) noted that changes in teachers' self-efficacy observed in structured clinical interviews were largely attributable to both mastery and vicarious experiences. In another recent large-scale study of 783 preservice teachers, Clark and Newberry (2019) found vicarious experiences to be one of four contributing factors to teacher self-efficacy beliefs in teacher education programs. Other contributing factors included mastery experiences, verbal persuasion from teacher educators, and verbal persuasion from cooperating teachers. According to Bandura (1977), an individual must be able to identify with those being observed through vicarious experience in order for one's self-efficacy to be influenced. Given their similar roles, it is likely that the educators in the aforementioned studies, as well as those in this study, would identify closely with one another through vicarious experience.

Social Persuasion

In helping others to develop self-efficacy, social persuasion (also known as verbal persuasion) is simple to achieve (Bandura, 1977). As with mastery and vicarious experience, social persuasion has been found to influence educator self-efficacy. The effectiveness of

persuasion is contingent upon the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader (Bandura, 1986). Since Bandura's four sources of efficacy information are often studied together, several of the large-scale studies concluded that, to varying degrees, multiple sources of efficacy information contributed to the self-efficacy of participants. In the study conducted by Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009), three of the four professional development formats presented to teachers used social persuasion in the form of information about a teaching strategy to be implemented. Gains in teacher self-efficacy were attributed to this social persuasion, as well as to both mastery and vicarious experience. Mintzes et al. (2013) concluded that although changes in teachers' self-efficacy observed in interviews were largely attributable to both mastery and vicarious experiences, social persuasion was also a contributing factor. In the study conducted by Clark and Newberry (2019), verbal persuasion from both teacher educators and cooperating teachers were central to the self-efficacy beliefs of the preservice teacher participants. In yet another large-scale study of 119 teachers, Korte and Simonsen (2018) concluded that the social persuasion teacher participants perceived from their students and communities was the most significant predictor of their self-efficacy. Both individually and collectively, these studies undoubtedly illustrate the important role of social persuasion in the self-efficacy beliefs of educators.

Physiological States

According to Bandura (1997), perceptions of one's ability are influenced by an awareness of the body's physical and emotional responses to particular situations. Emotional responses to such situations (e.g., anxiety) can lead to negative judgements of one's ability to perform. These physiological states are the fourth of Bandura's sources of efficacy information. Research on the influence of physiological states on self-efficacy indicates that, although physiological states

contribute to educator self-efficacy less frequently than the other three sources of efficacy information, they have certainly been found to influence self-efficacy. Arslan (2019) concluded that emotional states (along with mastery experience and verbal persuasion) significantly predicted teacher self-efficacy and attitudes toward the teaching profession among 315 prospective teachers. Interestingly, some studies have identified physiological states as the sole influence on teacher self-efficacy among the four sources of efficacy information. One such study of 35 teachers conducted by Ruble et al. (2011) noted significant associations only between physiological states and self-efficacy, and no other efficacy sources. Although the sample size in this study is notably small, the results illustrate the varied influence of physiological states in the self-efficacy of educators.

Self-Efficacy of Educators

Social cognitive theory defines three efficacy belief constructs related to education: student, teacher, and collective (Goddard et al., 2004). The self-efficacy of teachers plays a significant role in a myriad of educational outcomes, including student achievement. "Notably, the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement appears to be indirect, with teacher efficacy influencing numerous teacher behaviors that, in turn, promote student achievement" (Goddard & Goddard, 2001, p. 808).

Benefits of Educator Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is different from other conceptions of self, such as self-worth and self-esteem, because it is specific to a particular task (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Therefore, educator self-efficacy is specific to those tasks that are performed in the educational setting. Another important distinction pertaining to the self-efficacy of educators is that self-efficacy is derived from self-perceptions of competence, rather than actual levels of competence. According

to Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998), “This is an important distinction, because people regularly overestimate or underestimate their actual abilities, and these estimations may have consequences for the courses of action they choose to pursue or the effort they exert in those pursuits” (p. 211). Thus, the self-perceptions of educators regarding their personal competence as educators are critically important to their self-efficacy.

A review of literature indicates that the benefits of educator self-efficacy at both the individual and organizational level are both numerous and broad in scope. Teachers’ sense of efficacy affects their behavior in the classroom, the effort they put into teaching, their personal goals, their level of aspiration, and their teaching practices (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Coladarci (1992) found that personal efficacy was a strong predictor of commitment to teaching by educators. In a study of 192 general and special education teachers, teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy were shown to be less likely to refer a difficult student to special education (Soodak & Podell, 1993). Another study by Soodak and Podell (1994) found that teacher self-efficacy influenced teachers’ thinking about strategies for teaching difficult students. At the school level, Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) found that teacher efficacy was related to the organizational health of schools, while Moore and Esselman (1992) found that higher teacher efficacy led to more classroom-based decision making.

Educator self-efficacy has also been positively linked to student achievement and motivation. In one study of teachers working with disadvantaged students, Timperley and Phillips (2003) found that participating teachers had low self-efficacy and low expectations of students at the start of the study. Following the implementation of a six-month intervention during which teachers learned new and powerful literacy teaching strategies and experienced improved student outcomes because of the intervention, significant gains in the self-efficacy

beliefs of the teachers were noted. In another study of 80 high school teachers and 150 senior high school students, Mojavezi and Tamiz (2012) found that teacher self-efficacy had a positive effect on both student motivation and achievement. In another large-scale study of 2,000 teachers in 75 junior high schools (Caprara et al., 2006), teachers were administered questionnaires that assessed their self-efficacy beliefs and job satisfaction. Students' average final grades at the end of junior high school were also collected for two subsequent years. Teachers' personal efficacy beliefs were shown to influence the academic achievement of these students.

Collective Efficacy of Educators

Of the three efficacy constructs related to education, the perceived collective efficacy of educators is perhaps the most recent and least-researched (Goddard et al., 2004). Collective teacher efficacy is defined as "the collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190). Just as the self-efficacy of individual teachers is closely tied to teacher behavior and student achievement, so too is the collective efficacy of teacher groups. "Because teacher efficacy beliefs shape the normative environment of a school, they have a strong influence over teacher behavior and, consequently, student achievement" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 497).

According to Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004), "Schools are organizations where teachers work together in an interactive social system" (p. 190). This social system structures the relationships of teachers, administrators, and students, and thus affects the instructional activities in schools in a number of ways. According to social cognitive theory, teachers' actions are influenced both by their perceptions of self as well as of the organization. Thus, the environment in which a person lives and works, is developed both individually and collectively (Tschannen-

Moran & Barr, 2004). According to Bandura (1997), collective efficacy is a group characteristic rather than a summation of individual teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. While teachers' efficacy beliefs are based on their perceptions of their individual classroom performance, collective teacher efficacy beliefs are social perceptions that are based on an assessment of the capability of the school faculty as a group (Goddard et al., 2000). Although individual and collective efficacy are separate constructs, they influence one another in reciprocal ways (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). Teachers with low individual self-efficacy may potentially perform differently in a school with high collective efficacy, and vice versa.

Benefits of Collective Efficacy

In the current age of accountability, student achievement is a top priority in the field of education. Collective teacher efficacy is valuable in promoting understanding of ways schools can increase student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). In schools with high collective efficacy beliefs, teachers set challenging benchmarks for students, deliver high-quality instruction, and believe their students can reach high academic goals (Bandura, 1997). Schools with high efficacy beliefs accept responsibility for their students' academic outcomes and view them as their collective responsibility. Teachers in these schools do not accept low student achievement as an unavoidable consequence of low socioeconomic status, lack of student ability, or family background (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Despite the potential influence of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement, a limited number of studies have established a link between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. However, in reviewing these studies, the benefits of collective efficacy are undoubtedly clear. In one large-scale study of 452 teachers in 47 elementary schools, collective teacher efficacy was found to be a key predictor of student achievement in reading and

mathematics (Goddard et al., 2000). In another study of 97 high schools, Hoy et al. (2002) reported a significant positive relationship between collective teacher efficacy of the school and school achievement in Grade 12 mathematics even when socioeconomic status was controlled. Similar to the aforementioned studies, Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) found significant positive relationships between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement on Grade 8 standardized tests in math, writing, and English among 66 middle schools. In another study of 2,170 teachers in 41 schools, Ross et al. (2004) found that prior student achievement in Grade 6 mathematics predicted collective teacher efficacy, and school processes that promoted teacher ownership of school goals, schoolwide decision making, etc. resulted in an even stronger influence on collective teacher efficacy.

Situated Learning

Lave and Wenger (1991) posited that learning has traditionally been viewed as a process by which knowledge is internalized by learners, and is either discovered by the learner, obtained from others, or experienced while interacting with others. This view suggests that learning is largely a "cerebral" process that "establishes a sharp dichotomy between inside and outside" (p. 47). This is in sharp contrast to the social aspects of learning emphasized in situated learning.

The focus of Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning framework is the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it takes place. Within this framework, learning is viewed as a participatory process, in which the whole person engages with the world around them. This notion of learning through participation "focuses attention on ways in which [learning] is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations; this is, of course, consistent with a relational view, of persons, their actions, and the world, typical of a theory of social practice" (p. 50).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning framework postulates that learning occurs within various CoPs in which learners are situated within their daily lives. Initially, learners participate in these communities through *legitimate peripheral participation*. According to Lave and Wenger, this single concept captures their view that learning is "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31). As a process through which learners become part of the CoP, legitimate peripheral participation "provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice" (p. 29). Lave and Wenger asserted that *legitimate peripheral participation* is intended to be a positive and dynamic term and does not in any way mean that newcomers to CoPs are somehow disconnected or disengaged from their peers. Rather, the term "suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" (p. 37).

Over time, learners shift from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation within their CoPs. "Full participation is intended to do justice to the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 37). This study applied these concepts by providing literacy leader participants with an opportunity to participate in a CoP. According to Lave and Wenger, this CoP is one in which they are already situated; this study simply provided the needed formal opportunity for the CoP to take place and for participants to reap the potential benefits of its membership.

Isolation

Lortie (1975) first theorized that three types of isolation are potentially experienced by educators. These three types are:

1. “Egg crate” isolation: physical separation where educators have little contact with other professionals
2. Psychological isolation: a state of mind rather than a workplace condition
3. Adaptive isolation: occurs when educators are unable to meet the demands of adapting to new strategies

Much like the separateness of eggs in an egg crate, egg crate isolation involves the physical separation of educators from one another. In this type of isolation, educators enter the classroom, the door is closed, and the classroom group is largely isolated. Egg crate isolation can be more pronounced in smaller schools, where teachers may be geographically removed from their colleagues and support staff (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). Psychological isolation involves educators’ perceptions of interactions with their colleagues (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). With the third type of isolation, adaptive isolation, educators feel overwhelmed in their efforts to acquire and use new resources (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992).

From a 1980 study of 1,350 elementary and secondary teachers, Goodlad et al. noted that many teachers perceived themselves to be isolated and unfit to affect schoolwide decisions, did not wish to use resource staff, and usually did not receive peer support. Other researchers have attempted to pinpoint potential causes of teacher isolation. The structure of schools, in which teachers have limited opportunities to interact with one another, is thought to be one cause (Flinders, 1988; Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). Cookson (2005) asserted that the “egg crate” structure and regulated schedules of schools make professional collaboration difficult for teachers.

In comparison to other countries, educators in the United States have far more required teaching time in their schools, making isolation more prevalent and the allocation of time for

professional collaboration challenging. A 2020 report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed that primary teachers in the United States had 1,004 hours of net teaching time in 2019, as compared to 677 hours in Finland, 900 hours in France, and 572 hours in Latvia (p. 423). These differences among countries are also apparent in the prioritization of time for professional collaboration among educators. In a comparison of 36 countries, the United States is one of five countries in which regulations for professional collaboration are determined at the school level. In contrast, professional collaboration regulations are mandatory in 28 of these countries, including Australia, Denmark, Korea, and Portugal (OECD, 2020, p. 425).

Trust

A review of literature related to trust indicates that there are many different definitions of trust, ranging from philosophical to economic in nature. According to Hoy and Tarter (2004), "Most people have an intuitive sense of what is meant when we say that we trust someone, yet trust is complex with many layers" (p. 253). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) conducted an analysis of various definitions of trust and created the following multidimensional definition of trust based on their analysis: "Trust is one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

More than ever before, today's schools are charged with providing equitable, engaging, and innovative opportunities for all students. Collective goals and shared decision-making are vital in providing these opportunities for students, and trust is a critical component of this process. As Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) assert, "If schools are to realize the kinds of

positive transformation envisioned by leaders of reform efforts, attention must be paid to issues of trust" (p. 549).

When relationships are rooted within organizations (as they are in schools), the dynamics of trust have a significant impact on the collective efficacy of the organization (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Trust is also an important part of many of the processes involved in the operation of schools. Trust is associated with a positive school climate, productive communication, shared decision-making, and the willingness of staff to go beyond the minimum requirements of their positions (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

A number of large-scale studies have investigated trust in various educational settings. In a study of 98 high schools, Smith et al. (2001) concluded that the better the organizational health of a school, the greater the degree of faculty trust within the school. In another study of 75 middle schools, Hoy and Tarter (2004) proposed and tested an organizational model of justice and trust. Five organizational behaviors were measured in the study: organizational justice, faculty trust in the principal, faculty trust in colleagues, collegial leadership of the principal, and professional teacher behavior. The collegial leadership of the principal was found to be critical in fostering a trusting relationship with the faculty, and professional teacher relationships were also found to be significant in facilitating trust among teachers. In a study of 150 elementary schools, Goddard et al. (2009) noted several findings related to trust. Greater trust was associated with increased school achievement on standardized assessments in reading and math, and trust appeared to mediate a relationship between school disadvantage and academic achievement. Trust is clearly a critical consideration for schools at all levels.

Professional Growth and Practice

The terms *professional growth* and *professional practice* are commonly used in education. Both terms, and the concepts they represent, were significant to this study. Of the term *professional growth,* Taylor (2017) asserts that it is a multidimensional process defined as follows: "Together, teacher learning and development comprise professional growth-a term perhaps synonymous with [continuing professional development], but better reflecting agentive conditions" (p. 90). Drawing upon the work of Fraser et al. (2007) and Kennedy (2014a, 2014b), Taylor (2017) designed a process model for professional growth. Figure 2 shows a depiction of Taylor's professional growth model.

Figure 2

Professional Growth Model

Note. From "Learning About Professional Growth Through Listening to Teachers," by P. Taylor, 2017, *Professional Development in Education, 43*(1), p. 87-105 (https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1030035). Copyright 2017 by the International Professional Development Association.

According to Taylor (2017), teacher accounts of professional growth are especially critical to interpreting and understanding their experiences, both individual and collective. In this study, the participants' accounts of their professional growth played an important role.

Wenger et al. (2002) assert that the term *practice* "denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, problem solving, performance, and accountability" (p. 38). *Professional practice* refers to practice within a professional setting. For the participants in this study, *professional practice* referred to their practice in their professional roles as literacy leaders.

High-Quality Collaborative Practices

According to Killion (2015), "Teacher collaboration is grounded in the social interaction theory of learning and aligns with research on communities of practice, relevance to practice, and collective practice" (p. 63). Research has shown that the potential positive outcomes of collaborative practices among educators are many. However, simply providing additional time for educators to collaborate is not enough; these opportunities must also be strong and of high-quality to be most beneficial (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Strong and high-quality collaboration should incorporate several key elements. Supportive professional development activities that clearly communicate the purpose, goals, and expected outcomes of collaboration are important, and collaboration should also be "deliberative and meaningful" to most benefit educators and students (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019, p. 60).

According to DuFour (2011), collaborating with colleagues is a professional expectation in education, as is the expectation in professions such as aviation, law, and medicine. He

emphasizes that it is particularly important that this collaboration is high-quality in nature and focuses on "the right work." As DuFour asserted,

> In order to establish schools in which interdependence and collaboration are the new norm, we must create the structures and cultures that embed collaboration in the routine practice of our schools, ensure that the collaborative efforts focus on the right work, and support educators as they build their capacity to work together rather than alone. (p. 61)

PLCs

PLCs are a collaborative model common in schools today. Literacy leaders in the District are responsible for leading PLCs with teachers in their schools on a regular basis. These communities look different in every school and may take many forms, such as book studies, data analysis meetings, professional development sessions, and team planning. PLCs first appeared in the 1960s as a means for counteracting the isolated nature of teaching and learning and have historically focused on the improvement of educators' pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as on the improvement of outcomes for students (D. Fisher et al., 2020). DuFour et al. (2010) identified four essential questions to drive the work of PLCs that illustrate their intended focus on the improvement of student outcomes:

1. What is it we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know if each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4. How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency? (p. 119)

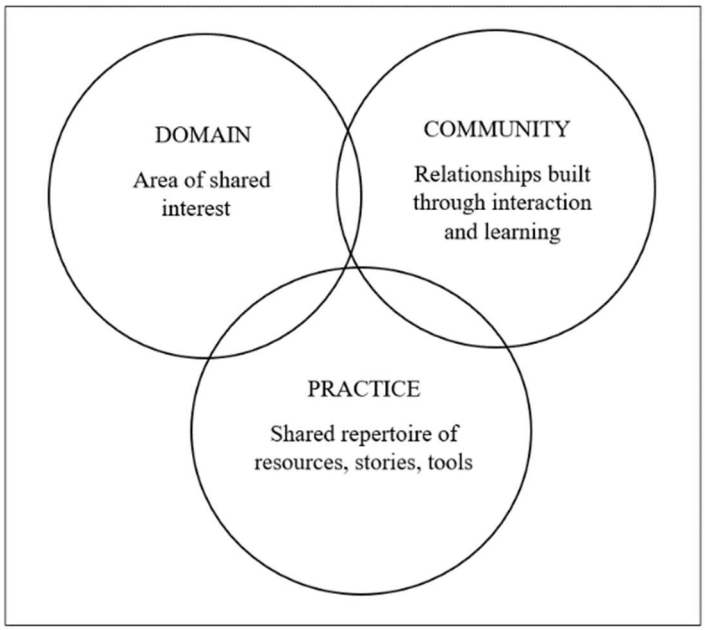
Considered to be a powerful strategy for improving both teaching and learning, PLCs encourage both a collaborative culture and collective responsibility (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

CoPs

According to the CoP model, three crucial elements delineate a CoP from other organized groups of people: *domain*, *community*, and *practice* (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). More than just a group of friends or common connections between people, a CoP is defined by a shared *domain* of interest. Membership in the CoP implies both a commitment to this domain and a mutual expertise that distinguishes the members from others outside of the CoP. As a *community*, members of the CoP must interact and learn together as they engage in activities within their shared domain. A CoP is not simply a community of people with shared interests; CoP members are *practitioners* (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). "They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems-in short a shared practice" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). See Figure 3 for a visual depiction of the CoP model.

Figure 3

Community of Practice Model



Note. From *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* by E. Wenger, R. McDermott, and W. M. Snyder, 2002, Harvard Business School Press. Copyright 2002 by E. Wenger, R. McDermott, and W. M. Snyder.

Principles of CoPs

Wenger et al. (2002) noted that, because CoPs are voluntary, what makes them successful over time is "their ability to generate enough excitement, relevance and value to attract and engage members" (p. 1). Wenger et al. (2002) recommended seven key principles for establishing, maintaining, and supporting CoPs. These principles, along with brief descriptions, are as follows:

1. ***Design for evolution.***

   The organic and dynamic nature of CoPs must be reflected in their design. The key to designing for evolution is to "combine design elements in a way that catalyzes community development" (p. 53).

2. ***Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives.***

   An insider's perspective is fundamental to a good community design. Good community design also incorporates information from outside the community for the purpose of illustrating what the community can potentially achieve.

3. ***Invite different levels of participation.***

   A good community invites different levels of participation. CoPs do not force participation, but rather encourage the involvement of members at all levels of participation.

4. ***Develop both public and private community spaces.***

   Similar to a neighborhood, communities are enriched by interactions that occur in both public and private spaces. Public interactions may take place either face-to-face or in an electronic format. Private interactions involve the one-on-one networking of members.

5. ***Focus on value.***

   Since participation in most communities is voluntary, value is a key component of community life. "Rather than attempting to determine their expected value in advance, communities need to create events, activities, and relationships that help their potential value emerge and enable them to discover new ways to harvest it" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 60).

6. ***Combine familiarity and excitement.***

   Communities that are lively incorporate both familiar and exciting events so that the members of the community can develop relationships that enable them to be well-connected, while also creating the excitement members need to remain fully engaged.

7. ***Create a rhythm for the community.***

Rhythm is an essential component of vibrant CoPs. "At the heart of a community is a web of enduring relationships among members, but the tempo of their interactions is greatly influenced by the rhythm of community events" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 62).

Benefits of CoPs

CoPs have tremendous potential to transform organizations on many levels. Encouraging a culture of growth within organizations is a powerful force for change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Fullan and Quinn assert, "Organizations that support learning, innovation, and action build a culture of growth" (p. 49). The learning, innovation, and action described by Fullan and Quinn as being central to a culture of growth are inherently embedded within CoP organizations themselves, and through their work, thus also become implanted within the individual organizations of which CoP members are a part. The number of organizations that may potentially benefit from the work of CoPs is incalculable. Although the intervention employed in this study was just one CoP, it has the potential to influence not only the numerous schools served by its literacy leader participants, but also any additional organizations with which these schools may interact.

Another hallmark of CoPs, the importance of individual contributions within communities, is echoed by community mapping advocates McKnight and Kretzmann (1996) as a means of innovation. "Identifying the variety and richness of skills, talents, knowledge, and experience of people provides a base upon which to build new approaches and enterprises" (p. 4). Although the concept of community is central to CoPs, the individual strengths of their members are what make them so valuable, both to their members and to others who may potentially benefit from the work of CoPs.

The relationships formed between members of CoPs foster several positive characteristics among them, including collaboration and trust. As previously noted, collaboration and trust are vital tools for educators for numerous reasons. One of these is most certainly that collaboration and trust can help to combat the negative effects of the isolation so prevalent in education. The "built-in" collaborative nature of CoPs, and the trust inspired among their members, make them a natural solution to this longstanding dilemma as well as a critical vehicle for change both within the profession and among the literacy leaders featured in this study.

Examples of Successful CoPs

Examples of successful CoPs are abundant in a variety of professions and settings. At the Hill's Pet Nutrition facility in Richmond, Indiana, a CoP initiated the installation of new technology that resulted in significant reductions in downtime and wasted pet food related to packaging. These changes were initially conceptualized within the CoP by one employee, who relied on the expertise and support of the community of practice to refine his proposal for the new technology that was eventually presented to management and successfully implemented (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Another example comes from Hewlett-Packard, where a CoP comprised of product-delivery consultants from across North America resulted in the standardization of software sales and installation processes, as well as the establishment of a consistent pricing scheme for Hewlett-Packard salespeople. When they initially formed a CoP, these consultants, who had previously been relatively isolated, discovered that they had many problems in common and could learn a tremendous amount from one another (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

CoPs have also been successful in the field of education. In one such example, four university faculty members formed a CoP to provide opportunities for reflection and dialogue

surrounding their individual teaching experiences while conducting a research project. In discussing their findings, Herbers et al. (2011) asserted, "Our inquiry has highlighted the effect of transformative learning on us, the educators. Our interaction in the CoP has allowed us to discover a pedagogical richness that we can freely offer to one another in mutual accountability" (p. 104). In another recent example, 69 science and engineering technology high school teachers, along with industry partners and college faculty, participated in a collaborative CoP focused on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) instruction. Study results indicated that the teachers benefitted greatly from participation in the CoP (Kelley et al., 2020).

Differences Between PLCs and CoPs

Several important distinctions exist between PLCs and CoPs. With their emphasis on the improvement of teaching and learning, PLCs have a distinct, predetermined focus. The focus of CoPs, however, is more loosely defined and is determined by its members. Participation in PLCs is usually mandatory and scheduled. In contrast, "a community of practice's life cycle is determined by the value it provides to its members, not by an institutional schedule" (Wenger, n.d.). Additionally, the boundaries of a CoP are more flexible than an organizational unit like a PLC, and members can participate in different ways and at varying levels (Wenger, n.d.).

Summary

Relevant literature has shown that Bandura's four sources of efficacy information, including interactions with others, play a significant role in the development of self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of educators has many potential implications both for educators themselves and for their students. Just as interactions with others play a pivotal role in the development of self-efficacy, they are equally important to the enhancement of the collective efficacy of educators and in resulting positive outcomes. With its focus on learning and the social situations in which it

takes place, Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory is another critical framework. Empirical research has shown that the potential benefits of collaboration between educators are many; however, these experiences must be strong and of high quality to be most effective. Although PLCs are a common collaborative model in schools today, they have historically focused on the improvement of teaching and learning. Comprised of three interrelated components (community, domain, and practice) that delineate them from other organized groups of people, CoPs offer flexible and interest-based opportunities for high-quality collaboration among their members.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This mixed methods action research study was conducted with a select group of literacy leaders within the context of the District. These literacy leaders were selected from those who are the sole literacy leader in their schools to maximize the potential impact of the community of practice (CoP) intervention. Within this authentic context, the study sought to examine how the select literacy leaders' participation in a CoP changed their perceptions of personal self-efficacy, isolation and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice within their literacy leader roles.

Rationale for Choosing Action Research

Action research "focuses specifically on the unique characteristics of the population with whom a practice is employed or with whom some action must be taken" (Mertler, 2020, p. 6). An action research approach enabled this study to focus on the unique and specialized role of the literacy leader. Through a participatory action research approach, the study garnered authentic data from select literacy leader participants that provided both a comprehensive and genuine glimpse into their role. This approach also allowed for further exploration of collaborative practices among educators. Given their many recognized benefits, it is imperative to continually investigate such practices for a number of reasons. The goal of participatory action research is perhaps the most significant of these. According to Mertler (2020), participatory action research seeks to "improve the quality of the lives of individuals who make up organizations, communities, and families" (p. 19). By employing participatory action research, this study

ultimately aspired to improve the quality of not only the participants' lives, but also those of other stakeholders who may have additionally benefitted from the study.

Description of the Action Research Intervention

Recognizing the need for additional collaborative opportunities for literacy leaders in the District, this study sought to implement an intervention in which a group of literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leader in their school participated in a CoP focused on problems of practice identified by the group. The CoP intervention employed in the study incorporated the self-efficacy and situated learning frameworks of Bandura and Lave and Wenger. The CoP featured participant experiences postulated by Bandura to influence self-efficacy (performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological states). As a CoP, the intervention modeled the situated learning process as theorized by Lave and Wenger.

The CoP intervention was implemented in a professional development format through 1-hour meetings twice per month. To maximize the convenience and relevance of the CoP intervention for participants, all meetings and activities were conducted virtually using an online meeting application and held during the school day. In addition, a website was created and shared exclusively with CoP participants to provide them with additional opportunities to share resources and interact with one another in a digital format. The CoP intervention was implemented in two cycles. Both cycles were critical to its implementation.

Cycle 1, conducted from April-June 2021, established the CoP. In this initial cycle, members participated in introductory activities to become better acquainted with one another. In addition, members discussed the CoP model and its purpose. I provided resources related to the CoP model for members to view and discuss. During this initial cycle, members also established CoP norms for meetings and brainstormed problems of practice to be discussed in Cycle 2. These

problems of practice were solely determined by CoP members and became the focus for the CoP as it was implemented in Cycle 2.

In Cycle 2, conducted from September-December 2021, members further developed these problems of practice through participatory action research in the CoP. Cycle 2 was ongoing as problems of practice were continually identified and further developed by the CoP. Further development of these problems of practice included the discussion and/or implementation of potential solutions. Participants also continually reflected on their CoP participation and the participatory action research process in Cycle 2. Although not collected for data analysis in this study, journals kept by individual participants were an additional source for potential problems of practice, emergent themes for discussion, and reflection on the part of participants. I provided journals to participants.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the study was that of researcher-as-participant. As a study participant, I was one of 10 literacy leader participants selected from the group of 34 literacy leaders in the District serving as the sole literacy leader in their school. In my role as researcher-as-participant, I both facilitated and participated in the participatory action research process throughout the study. As a researcher, I was responsible for the facilitation of the CoP intervention that was implemented, as well as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of study data. “In this role, the researcher is first and foremost part of the group-as opposed to being an ‘outsider’-who also happens to be collecting data on the group” (Mertler, 2020, p. 97).

This action research study bore several ethical considerations. One such consideration was my own potential bias as a literacy leader participant in the study, as this is the group featured in the study. During my four years as a literacy leader in the District, I have experienced

feelings of isolation in my role, as well as a desire for additional opportunities to collaborate with my fellow literacy leader colleagues. For these reasons, I had a personal interest in conducting this study and in employing the CoP intervention being studied. Although my researcher-as-participant position in the study was advantageous in the action research process, a potential conflict also existed between these dual roles. As a researcher, it was imperative for me to uphold the ethical standards of objectivity that are central to the research process, while simultaneously promoting reform as an action research study participant.

To mitigate any potential bias on my part, I employed several methods. Any instruments being used in the study were reviewed by experts and/or pilot tested prior to their use. Member checking was also conducted with the various data sources used throughout the study. Throughout my participation in the study, I also used reflexive journaling to acknowledge and alleviate any personal bias. In addition, during the data analysis portion of the study, I implemented a collaborative peer review of study data to mitigate bias.

Participants

The participants in this action research study were 10 elementary literacy leaders (including myself) in the District. There are currently 92 elementary literacy leaders in the District (Language Arts Program Coordinator, personal communication, September 14, 2020). Using a list provided by the Language Arts Program Coordinator, I selected the potential literacy leader participants from those who are the sole literacy leader in their school. The literacy leaders were randomly selected from the provided list and invited to participate in Cycle 1 on a voluntary basis, thus forming a simple random sample. In addition, literacy leaders were selected from various schools throughout the District to represent a variety of contexts and perspectives within the District. See Appendix A for the informed consent form that was administered to

participants regarding their participation in the study. The selected literacy leaders had between 0-16 years of experience in their literacy leader roles. This same sample was invited to participate in Cycle 2 as part of this study. In addition, a sampling of the remaining literacy leaders in the District who are the sole literacy leader in their school were surveyed as part of the study. Table 1 provides descriptions of the study participants.

Table 1

Study Participants

Member	Years in Role		
	Teacher	Literacy Leader	Sole Literacy Leader
1	18	4	3
2	11	2	2
3	4	6	5
4	10	15	5
5	23	7	6
6	16	16	16
7	19	2 months	2 months
8	15	3	3
9	6	14	14

Data Sources

Data came from multiple sources to capture a wide range of participant perspectives and experiences. Participant perspectives and experiences provided an authentic representation of the lived experiences of the literacy leader and served as a basis for further cycles of action research. These varied data sources, and the diverse data gleaned from them, also contributed to both the reliability and validity of the study itself.

Surveys

A Likert scale survey was administered to study participants at the start and conclusion of the study to measure changes in participants' levels of self-efficacy and levels of trust and

isolation with one another over the course of the study. This same survey was also administered to a sampling of the remaining literacy leaders in the District who are the sole literacy leader in their school. With written permission from the authors, the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) were both used to guide the determination of survey questions. See Appendix B for the written permission of the authors for use of these surveys. The validity of these instruments is well-established. Construct validity was established for the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale through factor analysis. The scale is organized according to two factors: (a) instructional strategies, which has internal consistency of 0.96; and (b) student discipline, with internal consistency of 0.94. The total scale has internal consistency of 0.97 (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Factor analysis was also used to verify the construct validity of the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). To further increase their equity, reliability, and validity, expert review of potential survey questions was also performed prior to the administration of the surveys to participants. Following this expert review, revisions to the survey questions were minimal and involved a slight change with the wording of two questions on the survey aligned with research question one. See Table 2 for an alignment of survey questions with research question one, which concerns the self-efficacy of study participants.

Table 2

Alignment of Survey Questions with Research Question 1

Survey Question	Research Basis
1. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to produce meaningful student learning?	
2. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to produce meaningful teacher learning?	
3. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to get students to believe that they can do well in schoolwork?	
4. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to get teachers to believe that they can do well in their work?	Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004)
5. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to help students master complex content?	
6. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to help teachers master complex content?	
7. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to help students think critically?	
8. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to help teachers think critically?	
9. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to foster student creativity?	
10. How much can literacy leaders in your school do to foster teacher creativity?	

Table 3 shows the alignment of survey questions with Research Question 2. This research question pertains to levels of isolation and trust among study participants.

Table 3

Alignment of Survey Questions with Research Question 2

Survey Question	Research Basis
1. Literacy leaders in this district typically look out for each other. 2. Even in difficult situations, literacy leaders in this district can depend on each other. 3. Literacy leaders in this district trust each other. 4. Literacy leaders in this district are open with each other. 5. Literacy leaders in this district have faith in the integrity of their colleagues. 6. Literacy leaders in this district are suspicious of each other. 7. When literacy leaders in this district tell you something you can believe it. 8. Literacy leaders in this district do their jobs well.	Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003)

Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the CoP participants at the conclusion of the study to gain perspectives following their participation in the CoP. The intent of these interviews was to capture the personal perspectives and experiences of study participants that may not be as apparent in other data sources. Prior to these interviews, detailed interview protocols were developed. Expert review and pilot testing of potential interview questions and protocols was also performed prior to the conducting of semi-structured interviews for the purpose of increasing their equity, reliability, and validity. As a result of this expert review, revisions were made to the interview questions and protocols to provide clarity and solicit more detailed responses from study participants. See Figure 4 for an alignment of semi-structured interview questions with research question one, which concerns the self-efficacy of

study participants. Appendices C and D detail the interview protocols implemented prior to and during the semi-structured interviews.

Figure 4

Alignment of Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Research Question 1

Interview Question

1. How would you describe your current personal self-efficacy? (SE)
2. Have you experienced any changes in your self-efficacy as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (SE)
3. To what specific elements of your CoP participation would you attribute these changes? (SE)
4. Have you experienced any changes in your role in influencing student learning in your school as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (SE)
5. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to your ability to influence student learning in your school? If so, please describe. (SE)
6. Have you experienced any changes in your role in building teacher capacity in your school as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (SE)
7. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to your ability to build teacher capacity in your school? If so, please describe. (SE)
8. Have you experienced any changes in your role in building a positive learning environment within your school community as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (SE)
9. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to your ability to build a positive learning environment in your school? If so, please describe. (SE)
10. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in general? (SE)
    a. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in PLCs/collaboration? (SE)
    b. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in small group instruction? (SE)
    c. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in the science of reading? (SE)
11. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in other CoP members' self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in general? (SE)
    a. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in other CoP members' self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in PLCs/collaboration? (SE)

b. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in other CoP members' self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in small group instruction? (SE)
c. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in other CoP members' self-efficacy related to coaching teachers in the science of reading? (SE)

Note. For coding purposes, the alignment of codes with individual interview questions is shown. SE = Self-efficacy.

Figure 5 shows the alignment of semi-structured interview questions with research question two. This research question concerns levels of isolation and trust among study participants.

Figure 5

Alignment of Semi-structured Interview Questions and Research Question 2

Interview Question

1. How would you describe your current level of connection with your literacy leader colleagues? (I)
2. Have you experienced any changes in your feelings of connection with and/or isolation from your literacy leader colleagues as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (I)
3. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to changes in your feelings of connection with and/or isolation from other literacy leaders? If so, please describe. (I)
4. How would you describe your current trust in your literacy leader colleagues? (T)
5. Have you experienced any changes in this level of trust as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (T)
6. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to changes in your feelings of trust in your literacy leader colleagues? If so, please describe. (T)

Note. For coding purposes, the alignment of codes with individual interview questions is shown. I = Isolation; T = trust.

Figure 6 shows the alignment of semi-structured interview questions with Research Question 3. This research question concerns the professional growth and practice of study participants.

Figure 6

Alignment of Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Research Question 3

Interview Question

1. How would you describe your current professional growth? (PG)
2. Have you experienced any changes in your professional growth as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (PG)
3. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to changes in your professional growth? If so, please describe. (PG)
4. How would you describe your current professional practice? (PP)
5. Have you experienced any changes in your professional practice as a result of your participation in the CoP? If so, please describe. (PP)
6. Do you feel that specific elements of your CoP participation have contributed to your professional practice? If so, please describe. (PP)
7. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your professional growth and practice? (PG, PP)
8. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members? (PG, PP)
9. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your professional growth and practice related to coaching teachers in general? (PG, PP)
    a. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your professional growth and practice related to coaching teachers in PLCs/collaboration? (PG, PP)
    b. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your professional growth and practice related to coaching teachers in small group instruction? (PG, PP)
    c. How did other members of the CoP contribute to changes in your professional growth and practice related to coaching teachers in the science of reading? (PG, PP)
10. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members related to coaching teachers in general? (PG, PP)
    a. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members related to coaching teachers in PLCs/collaboration? (PG, PP)
    b. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members related to coaching teachers in small group instruction? (PG, PP)

c. How do you feel that you contributed to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members related to coaching teachers in the science of reading? (PG, PP)

Note. For coding purposes, the alignment of codes with individual interview questions is shown. PG = Professional growth; PP = professional practice.

CoP Meetings

During Cycle 2, each of the CoP meetings was recorded. Transcripts of these recordings were used in the study. These transcripts provided critical data regarding the content of CoP meetings and the experiences of CoP participants. These data were analyzed and used to answer the research questions proposed by the study.

Field Notes Journal

I kept a field notes journal throughout the CoP intervention. In this field journal, I recorded observational data about the participants, participant interactions, and the level of participant engagement during each of the CoP sessions. I also captured participant statements, comments, and questions during CoP sessions. This field journal captured critical data regarding the personal experiences of participants during the CoP intervention.

Reliability of Data Sources

A variety of methods was used to ensure the reliability of the data sources used in the study. Instruments with well-established reliability were used to guide the development of data sources for the study. Specific interview protocols were developed and followed. Prior to their use, a pilot test of interview questions and protocols was conducted with a panel. Panel participants included a professor of reading education and instructional specialists not participating in the CoP. As the researcher, I continually triangulated the multiple data sources throughout the study to ensure both their accuracy and reliability. This involved the continual

review and comparison of CoP meeting transcripts, my personal field notes journal, and both survey and semi-structured interview responses by me during the study. I also employed member checking throughout the study to ensure the reliability of the various data sources. This process included the review of interview transcripts by individual CoP members for accuracy.

Data Collection

Cycle 1 of the study was conducted from April-June 2021, during which no formal data were collected. During Cycle 1, CoP members participated in activities to become acquainted with one another. Members also discussed the CoP model and brainstormed problems of practice for discussion in Cycle 2. The timeframe for formal data collection in this study was from September-December 2021, during which Cycle 2 of the CoP intervention was implemented.

Surveys

The same Likert scale survey was administered to study participants at both the start and conclusion of Cycle 2. Surveys were also administered to a group of literacy leaders not participating in the study. Participants were asked to complete surveys anonymously. Surveys were administered to participants in an electronic format to maximize both the anonymity and convenience of their completion for participants. Survey responses were collected and recorded by me for data analysis purposes at both the start and conclusion of the study. These responses and the resulting data were kept in a secure location by me so as to protect their confidentiality.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured participant interviews were conducted at the conclusion of Cycle 2. These interview sessions were recorded, and these recordings were transcribed personally by me following the sessions. All recordings were kept secure and were destroyed following their transcription. Once I transcribed the interview sessions, I asked each literacy leader to review

their individual interview transcript for accuracy. I kept all of these transcripts and the resulting data in a secure location throughout the study.

CoP Meetings

During Cycle 2, each of the CoP meetings was recorded. I transcribed these recordings at the conclusion of each CoP meeting. As the researcher, I ensured that these recordings and transcripts were kept secure and confidential, and that all recordings were destroyed after they had been transcribed. Transcription documents were housed securely throughout the duration of the study.

Field Notes Journal

Observational field notes taken by me during the study were also collected. This observational data was also used to answer the research questions pertaining to self-efficacy, levels of isolation and trust, and professional growth and practice identified in the study. As the researcher, I preserved both the confidentiality and security of these data sources throughout the study by keeping them in a secure location.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data from the sources, I used several methods. To analyze the data from CoP meetings, participant interviews, and field notes, I employed the constant comparative method, in which data were collected from multiple sources and analyzed throughout the study (Mertler, 2020). A process of inductive analysis was also employed, in which the researcher progresses from making specific observations to posing general conclusions in the analysis of study data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A coding process was used to guide this inductive analysis. The constant comparative and inductive analysis processes worked in tandem, with the constant comparative process serving to inform the inductive analysis that occurred at the

conclusion of the study. Data from surveys administered during the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Coding and Thematic Analysis

Transcripts from interviews, as well as my researcher field notes, were analyzed using a coding process. As described by Saldaña (2016), both a priori and emergent coding were used. As a researcher, I initially generated an a priori codebook based on the two frameworks that were central to the study, Bandura's self-efficacy framework and Lave and Wenger's situated learning framework. See Appendix E for the a priori codebook used in this process. Using the a priori codebook to guide my analysis, I analyzed CoP meeting and interview transcripts, as well as my field notes journal, for phrases and words related to these pre-determined codes. I determined the significance of these words and phrases in terms of the a priori codes and then placed them into categories representative of the codes. The frequency of these categories was then analyzed and used to determine emergent themes from these data sources. Those categories that included a majority of participant responses (5 or more) determined these emergent themes. I also used an emergent coding process to identify any emerging codes among the data not present in my initial a priori codebook.

Member checking was conducted with transcripts and analytic memos during the coding process to ensure their reliability and validity. See Table 4 for a summary of the study research questions, data sources, and methods of data analysis.

Table 4

Action Research Questions, Data Sources, and Data Analysis

Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?	Surveys Field notes journal Semi-structured individual interviews CoP meetings	Descriptive statistics Inductive qualitative analysis A Priori & Emergent Coding
After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?	Surveys Field notes journal Semi-structured individual interviews CoP meetings	Descriptive statistics Inductive qualitative analysis A Priori & Emergent Coding
After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their professional growth and practice?	Field notes journal Semi-structured individual interviews CoP meetings	Inductive qualitative analysis A Priori & Emergent Coding

Note. Surveys were adapted from the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions

Delimitations

This action research study had several delimitations related to the study setting, participants, and methods. By choosing action research as the study's methodology, I delimited the study to a small group comprised of only literacy leaders within a single school district setting. Another delimitation lies in my choice to conduct this study as one that included qualitative data. Although there is greater potential for researcher bias in the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data, I mitigated this potential bias using methods such as member checking, data triangulation, and pilot testing.

Limitations

One potential limitation of the study was the possibility that other factors may have influenced the self-efficacy, professional growth and practice, relationships, and isolation of literacy leaders other than the limited number of collaborative opportunities with other literacy leaders. An additional limitation lies in the qualitative data collected based on my own perceptions, as well as those of the study participants. Although gracious, the time afforded by the District during the workday for the implementation of the CoP creates another limitation to the study.

In considering these limitations, it is important to note that qualitative studies are not intended for generalizations across contexts but rather have potential for transferability to similar contexts. These studies must instead demonstrate trustworthiness in terms of both study design and methodology, as was the case with this study. It also bears consideration that this study was highly relevant to the literacy leader participants who are stakeholders in the District featured in the study. These limitations were mitigated through both the study design and methodology and therefore did not interfere with the intended purpose of the study.

Assumptions

This action research study made several assumptions related to collaborative practices. It was assumed that the District and its mission, policies, and practices support and value collaboration among employees. As a researcher, I assumed that collaboration among educators would lead to higher levels of self-efficacy, trust, professional growth, and practice, as well as lower levels of isolation. In implementing a CoP intervention in this study, I also presumed that literacy leaders value collaboration and that those selected for participation in the CoP therefore valued the experience. In addition, the study held the assumption that the selected literacy leaders

participated in CoP activities openly and honestly to ensure that the findings of the study were both reliable and valid.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues bore careful consideration in this study. As a researcher, it was of utmost importance for me to protect the confidentiality of participant responses and data. Since participation in this study involved a considerable time commitment on the part of participants, the worthiness of participation in the study by participants was also an essential consideration. Therefore, I investigated the possibility of participants earning professional development credit for their participation in the study and was able to successfully secure this option for study participants.

To conduct this study within the District, approval was first granted by the District's Office of Research and Evaluation. A detailed application outlining the purpose of the study, the methods to be used, and the study's relevancy to the District's strategic plan was required. As a researcher, I completed this process and received approval for this study by the District in February 2021. This approval was granted with several conditions. Before contacting any literacy leaders to inquire about their potential participation in the study, I was asked to initially contact school principals to request their permission. Permission was granted by the District for CoP meetings and activities to take place during the school day if they did not interfere with instruction or any assigned duties of participants. Additional modifications to the study were approved by the District in November 2021. This study was also required to be submitted to William & Mary's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval prior to the data collection portion of the study. The study received this IRB approval in September 2021.

Implications for Policy, Planning, and Leadership

This study had several potential implications for policy, planning, and leadership surrounding collaborative practices. The successful implementation of the CoP intervention in this study could result in several potential policy changes both within and outside the District. Current district policy provides limited opportunities for literacy leaders to collaborate with one another based on their individual and collective professional needs and interests. Since the CoP intervention was successful, a change in this current policy may result. A similar CoP model could potentially be implemented with additional literacy leaders and other educator groups within the District, as well as within other school districts. School and district leaders may support the implementation of similar CoP interventions in various capacities within the District and may possibly participate in such interventions themselves. With its focus on equitable collaborative opportunities, this study has potentially significant implications for equity, a current district initiative. This study also supports the current district strategic planning framework, which includes a component entitled *Mutually Supportive Partnerships*. As a result of this study, the focus of these mutually supportive partnerships could potentially be expanded to include those partnerships acquired through participation in CoPs.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to measure the impact of a community of practice (CoP) on a select group of nine literacy leaders. These literacy leaders were selected from those who are the sole appointed literacy leader in their schools to maximize the potential impact of the CoP intervention. Within this authentic context, the study examined how the select literacy leaders' participation in a CoP influenced their perceptions of self-efficacy, isolation and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice within their literacy leader roles. As outlined in Chapter 3, the methodology of this study was conducted using an action research approach, which enabled the study to focus on the unique and specialized role of the literacy leader. The central research questions that were addressed by the study are:

1. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?

2. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?

3. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of professional growth and practice?

The gathering of authentic data from the select literacy leader participants during the study sought to provide both a comprehensive and genuine glimpse into their role. Data sources

utilized during the study to address the action research questions included surveys, semi-structured interviews, transcripts of CoP meetings, and a field notes journal kept by me, the researcher. The findings of each of the three action research questions and the methods of data analysis are detailed here in Chapter 4.

Data Analysis

During bi-monthly CoP meetings, participating literacy leaders were provided with the opportunity to discuss issues and topics relevant to both their literacy leader role and their individual school contexts. During these meetings, topics determined during Cycle 1 were discussed, as were additional topics deemed by participants to be relevant at that time. Transcripts of meeting recordings were kept by me, the researcher, as was a field notes journal. The same Likert scale survey was administered to study participants at both the start and conclusion of Cycle 2, and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with study participants at the conclusion of Cycle 2. As an additional point of comparison, the same Likert scale survey was administered to a group of literacy leaders who did not participate in the study but are the sole appointed literacy leader in their schools. Although not collected for data analysis purposes, participant reflection journals were utilized by participants to record personal reflections at the conclusion of each meeting. Throughout the study, I employed the constant comparative method, in which data were collected from multiple sources and analyzed throughout the study (Mertler, 2020). These data sources included surveys, semi-structured interviews, transcripts from CoP meetings, and field notes. As the researcher, I continually analyzed these data sources throughout the study and compared their findings to inform my analysis of study data.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

This mixed methods study included the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics that involved the application of simple mathematical methods intended to simplify, summarize, and organize the data (Mertler, 2020). Because the survey contained questions pertaining to both self-efficacy and trust and were both measured by the study, these items were analyzed together. In addition, self-efficacy and trust are closely intertwined within the study frameworks and the CoP intervention itself. The survey sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?

2. After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?

Several dependent and independent t-tests were also conducted, as was a reliability analysis. Data from the two administrations of the survey to literacy leader study participants were compared. In addition, the survey responses of literacy leader study participants at the outset and conclusion of the study were compared with those of literacy leader non-study participants, who completed the survey one time.

Reliability of Survey Scales. With written permission from the authors, the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) were both used to guide the determination of survey questions. Prior to other analyses, reliability analyses were conducted on both scales to ensure the consistency of survey results. Ten survey questions derived from the Collective Teacher

Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) pertaining to self-efficacy demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of .92, indicating a high level of reliability. Eight survey questions obtained from the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003) pertaining to trust demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of .87, also indicating a high level of reliability.

Analysis of Survey Data. To conduct an analysis of survey responses, three groups were compared on their responses to the two surveys. These groups were the following: study participants at the outset of the study, study participants at the conclusion of the study, and literacy leaders not participating in the study who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools. Due to unexpected delays with the District research approval process, this final group was administered the survey at only one point in time. The responses of this third group were compared to the responses of study participants at both the outset and conclusion of the study. The data for the analyses were the composite scores of the two scales. The composites were formed by averaging the simple sum of the individual item responses. Survey responses pertaining to self-efficacy and those pertaining to trust were also analyzed separately for each of these groups.

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics are intended to provide an overview of the survey responses of each of the three groups compared in the study, regarding mean, standard deviation, and other statistical elements. Table 5 depicts the descriptive statistics for Group 1, the survey responses of study participants at the outset of the study.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Group 1: Study Participants at Outset of Study

Measure	Self-Efficacy Survey Responses	Trust Survey Responses
N	9	9
M	2.69	4.46
SD	.45	.79
Skewness	-0.48	-0.27
SE of Skewness	.72	.72
Kurtosis	-1.32	-0.99
SE of Kurtosis	1.40	1.40
Minimum	2.0	3.13
Maximum	3.2	5.38

Note. All 9 samples were reported as valid with none missing.

For Group 1, the survey responses of study participants at the outset of the study, the mean of survey responses pertaining to self-efficacy was 2.69. Survey responses pertaining to trust had a mean of 4.46. This indicates that the mean of survey responses pertaining to trust was higher than those responses pertaining to self-efficacy for Group 1. Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for Group 2, the survey responses of study participants at the conclusion of the study.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Group 2: Study Participants at Conclusion of Study

Measure	Self-Efficacy Survey Responses	Trust Survey Responses
N	9	9
M	2.97	4.64
SD	.68	.62
Skewness	-0.44	-0.29
SE of Skewness	.72	.72
Kurtosis	-0.25	-1.66
SE of Kurtosis	1.40	1.40
Minimum	1.8	3.88
Maximum	4.0	5.38

Note. All 9 samples were reported as valid with none missing.

For Group 2, the survey responses of study participants at the conclusion of the study, the mean of survey responses pertaining to self-efficacy was 2.97. Survey responses pertaining to trust had a mean of 4.64. This indicates that the mean of survey responses pertaining to trust was higher than those pertaining to self-efficacy, a similar finding to Group 1. Table 7 depicts the descriptive statistics for Group 3, the survey responses of literacy leaders not participating in the study who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Group 3: Study Nonparticipants

Measure	Self-Efficacy Survey Responses	Trust Survey Responses
N	14	14
M	3.01	4.05
SD	.58	.81
Skewness	.33	-0.27
SE of Skewness	.59	.59
Kurtosis	-0.64	-1.32
SE of Kurtosis	1.15	1.15
Minimum	2.2	2.75
Maximum	4.0	5.25

Note. All 14 samples were reported as valid with none missing.

For Group 3, the survey responses of literacy leaders not participating in the study who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools, the mean of survey responses pertaining to self-efficacy was 3.01. Survey responses pertaining to trust showed a mean of 4.05. Similar to the descriptive statistics for Groups 1 and 2, this indicates that the mean of survey responses pertaining to trust was higher than those responses pertaining to self-efficacy for Group 3.

Dependent t-Test Analysis. Dependent t-test analyses are used when a single group is being tested under two conditions. To compare the survey responses of study participants at the outset and conclusion of the study, a dependent t-test analysis was conducted. Survey responses pertaining to self-efficacy and those pertaining to trust were analyzed separately for each group.

Table 8 illustrates the results from the dependent t-test analysis conducted to compare the survey responses of study participants at the outset and conclusion of the study.

Table 8

Comparisons of Participant Responses at Outset and Conclusion of Study

Paired Sample	*M*	*SD*	Mean Difference	*t*	*df*	*p*
Self-Efficacy						
Prestudy	2.69	.45	-0.28	-1.42	8	.19
Poststudy	2.97	.68				
Trust						
Prestudy	4.46	.79	-0.18	-1.28	8	.24
Poststudy	4.64	.62				

In analyzing the significance values reported (.19 and .24), it is evident that there were no statistical differences between the two administrations of the survey to study participants with either the questions pertaining to self-efficacy or trust.

Independent Groups t-Test Analyses. Independent groups t-test analyses are conducted to compare the means of two different groups and determine if they are statistically different. Since the nonparticipating literacy leaders could only be measured once, two independent groups t-test analyses were conducted to compare the survey responses of those literacy leaders not participating in the study with those of study participants at both the outset and conclusion of the study. The single measure of the nonparticipating literacy leaders was used as a no-treatment standard for both the pre and post measures of the participating literacy leaders. The first test

compared the responses of literacy leaders not participating in the study with those of study participants at the outset of the study. Survey questions relating to self-efficacy and trust were analyzed separately. Table 9 shows the comparisons of the survey responses of literacy leader participants and nonparticipants at the outset of the study.

Table 9

Comparisons of Literacy Leader Participants and Nonparticipants Prestudy

Sample	*M*	*SD*	M Difference	*t*	*df*	*p*
Self-Efficacy						
Participant Prestudy	2.69	.45	-0.32	-1.41	21	.17
Nonparticipant	3.01	.58				
Trust						
Participant Prestudy	4.46	.79	-0.40	1.18	21	.25
Nonparticipant	4.05	.81				

The significance values reported (.17 and .25) indicate that there are no statistical differences between the one-time survey responses of literacy leaders not participating in the study and the responses of study participants at the outset of the study with either the questions pertaining to self-efficacy or trust.

A second independent groups t-test analysis compared the responses of literacy leaders not participating in the study with those of study participants at the conclusion of the study. Survey questions relating to self-efficacy and trust were analyzed separately. Table 10 shows the

comparisons of the survey responses of literacy leader participants and nonparticipants at the conclusion of the study.

Table 10

Comparisons of Literacy Leader Participants and Nonparticipants Poststudy

Sample	*M*	*SD*	M Difference	*t*	*df*	*p*
Self-Efficacy						
Participant Poststudy	2.97	.68	-0.05	-0.18	21	.86
Nonparticipant	3.01	.58				
Trust						
Participant Poststudy	4.64	.62	.59	1.84	21	.08
Nonparticipant	4.05	.81				

The significance values reported (.86 and .08) indicate that there are no statistical differences between the one-time survey responses of literacy leaders not participating in the study and the responses of study participants at the conclusion of the study with either the questions pertaining to self-efficacy or trust. The significance value of .08 for those survey responses pertaining to trust is potentially a trend but does not reach significance.

Action Research Question #1

After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were analyzed using the a priori and emergent coding processes described by Saldaña (2016). Using an a priori codebook I created to guide my analysis, I analyzed CoP meeting and interview transcripts, as well as my field notes journal, for phrases and words related to these pre-determined codes. I determined the significance of these words and phrases in terms of the a priori codes and then placed them into categories representative of the codes. The frequency of these categories was then analyzed and used to determine emergent themes from these data sources. I also used an emergent coding process to identify any emerging codes among the data not present in my initial a priori codebook. In this manner, I used inductive analysis to progress from making specific observations to posing general conclusions in the analysis of qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This inductive analysis process was also informed by the constant comparative method I employed with a variety of data sources throughout the study.

Semi-Structured Interviews. At the conclusion of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the nine CoP members. These interviews were conducted using an online meeting platform. During the semi-structured interviews, CoP members were asked questions related to self-efficacy, isolation and trust, and professional growth and practice. Questions pertaining to self-efficacy answered Research Question 1. The themes that emerged from semi-structured interview responses related to self-efficacy are affirmation and validation, collaboration, confidence, and influence on CoP members, teacher capacity, and student learning.

Affirmation and Validation. During the semi-structured interviews, CoP members were asked 17 questions pertaining to self-efficacy. These questions asked CoP members about their

perceptions of their own self-efficacy as well as their perceptions of their impact on the self-efficacy of other CoP members. One of the themes that emerged from the responses of CoP members regarding self-efficacy was that of affirmation and validation. When asked about self-efficacy during the semi-structured interviews, all nine members responded that the CoP provided affirmation and validation for them in their literacy leader roles, with seven out of nine CoP members using a form of the word *affirmation* or *validation* in their responses. These responses indicated that, in addition to affirming and validating their own practices as literacy leaders, the CoP also provided them with an opportunity to affirm and validate the practices of other CoP members.

- "I really liked meeting with other literacy leaders. I felt validated in a lot of the things that I was doing. And I felt validated with the questions I asked other literacy leaders."
- "Being alone in a building, I kind of wonder if what I'm doing is okay. When I hear what other people are doing in their buildings, it's affirming to me that at least I'm on the same page as everybody else."
- "I think I helped validate what people were doing by liking their ideas."

In their responses, participants provided examples of how the experience in a CoP provided affirmation and validation for them in their work as literacy leaders, while also allowing them to provide this same affirmation and validation for other CoP members. Several participants discussed the value of the CoP as a forum for sharing ideas and having others validate those ideas. Other participants shared feeling validated in their varied practices surrounding the coaching of teachers, a current area of focus within the literacy leader role. Participants also responded that the CoP was a source of validation for them regarding their

practices concerning the science of reading, a relatively new District literacy initiative. With this initiative, literacy leaders are expected to share science of reading training they have received with teachers in their schools. Their responses indicated that the CoP was a vital source of validation for them regarding this initiative. One participant shared that, as a new literacy leader, she felt she contributed to the self-efficacy of other CoP members because other members felt validated by helping her.

Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes supported this theme. During each of the eight CoP meetings, participants discussed topics of interest and shared ideas and experiences with one another. Participants often made complimentary and affirming remarks to one another when ideas were shared. During CoP meetings, participants also openly expressed interest in implementing ideas shared by other CoP members in their own schools. Participants also shared their experiences with implementing these ideas in their schools in subsequent CoP meetings.

Collaboration With CoP Members. In analyzing semi-structured interview responses using the coding process previously described, a theme emerged regarding collaboration with fellow CoP members. When asked about how others contributed to their own self-efficacy or how they contributed to the self-efficacy of others through the CoP intervention, all nine participants noted that the collaboration and sharing of experiences and ideas with others within the CoP was beneficial, especially in the coaching of teachers in general as well as in the coaching of teachers in collaboration/professional learning communities (PLCs), small group instruction, and the science of reading. CoP members indicated that the sharing of experiences and ideas was both beneficial to them individually and was also a contribution that they were able to offer others in the CoP.

- "I honestly think that's one of the most effective things that can happen, is getting us literacy leaders talking and sharing."
- "The idea sharing aspect was super powerful because good ideas beget more good ideas, especially when they're shared in a collaborative, collective space."
- "It was just great to have a space to say, 'This is what I'm struggling with.' It was really helpful to be able to meet and ask questions and get answers and brainstorm ideas."

In their responses, participants provided examples of how the experience in a CoP provided them with a space to collaborate and share ideas and experiences with others. One participant shared that she felt that her participation in the CoP was similar to having the experience of being on a grade level, an experience she felt she has missed out on as a literacy leader. In discussing the value of having the opportunity to collaborate with others through the CoP, participants shared examples of how the CoP was especially helpful in their work with coaching teachers, particularly in collaboration and PLCs. Several participants responded that they had discussed topics previously shared by fellow CoP members during CoP meetings with teachers in their own schools during collaboration/PLCs. Regarding the coaching of teachers with the science of reading, one CoP member stated, "Having the opportunity to be able to talk things out with each other and share what we know about it and how we are implementing it in our buildings is going to help." Members also provided examples of how they were able to contribute to the self-efficacy of others, particularly regarding the coaching of teachers, by sharing their practices within their own schools. While discussing the collaborative opportunities provided within the CoP, one participant stated, "Had I had your group in those beginning years of being a reading specialist, I think it would have been such a game changer."

Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes supported this theme of collaboration. Collaboration and the sharing of ideas and experiences among CoP members were both prevalent throughout each of the eight CoP meetings. During the eight meetings, CoP members shared ideas and individual experiences with administrators, teachers, and students with one another. During one CoP meeting, one CoP member asked another CoP member if she could observe her conduct a collaboration/PLC with teachers. Both members agreed to arrange this later. On several occasions, CoP members also contacted one another following CoP meetings to further collaborate on topics discussed during meetings.

Confidence. When asked a series of questions pertaining to self-efficacy, five of nine CoP members expressed feeling increased confidence as a result of their participation in the CoP. An analysis of these responses relied on an a priori coding process. As a result, a theme of confidence among CoP members emerged.

- "Having that group made me just feel grounded and more confident."
- "It's always a confidence booster when you have discussions like we've had, with your peers."
- "I felt confident enough to do that. I would not have always felt that confident in the past."

Participants shared examples of how their increased confidence because of their participation in the CoP was helpful to them in their work with teachers. One participant shared that she felt more confident discussing small group instruction with teachers because of her participation in the CoP. Another participant shared that she felt more confident sharing information with teachers in her school because of her CoP participation. One newer literacy leader also shared that the opportunity to collaborate with others within the context of the CoP

was instrumental in building her confidence as a newer literacy leader. Meeting transcripts and field notes indicated that all CoP members were confident in participating in the discussions within the CoP. Participants spoke openly and freely shared ideas and experiences with one another during CoP meetings. Participants were also confident in sharing resources with one another in CoP meetings and through a private website created for the group. During one CoP meeting, one participant offered to share a presentation she had created for a recent meeting with District leadership. Other CoP members who were preparing for similar meetings expressed their appreciation for the resource and stated that it would be extremely helpful to them during their meetings.

Influence. Guided by an a priori coding process, an analysis of semi-structured interview responses indicated an overall theme of the influence of CoP members on others. Those influenced by CoP members included fellow CoP members as well as teachers and students in their respective schools. Each of these groups influenced by CoP members is described below.

Influence on the Self-Efficacy of Other CoP Members. All nine CoP members responded that they felt they contributed to changes in the self-efficacy of other CoP members. These contributions were related to the self-efficacy of other CoP members in the coaching of teachers in general, as well as in the coaching of teachers in collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and in the science of reading, a current District literacy initiative.

- "My knowledge with that helped inform them and helped grow their capacity."
- "I gave them a few more additional ideas to think about."
- "I felt like I had a lot to contribute to others."

In their responses, participants shared many examples of how they were able to influence the self-efficacy of other CoP members, particularly with the coaching of teachers. These

examples included how members were implementing coaching cycles and collaboration/PLCs with teachers in their schools. Several participants shared examples of how they discussed collaborations/PLCs they had conducted with teachers in their schools during CoP meetings that were then implemented by several other CoP members with teachers in their respective schools. Other participants felt that they contributed to the self-efficacy of others through more simple means, such as by simply participating in the conversations during the CoP. As another participant stated, "I contributed a smile and made people laugh." Meeting transcripts and field notes supported this theme. During each of the CoP meetings, participants openly shared ideas, strategies, and resources with one another. During one meeting, a participant stated, "Whatever we can do to help each other." During another meeting, following a discussion about resources for students, one member shared, "This is one of the benefits of this group."

Influence on Teacher Capacity. When asked about their ability to influence teacher capacity within their schools, all nine CoP members affirmed that they were able to influence and build the capacity of teachers in their respective schools as a result of their participation in the CoP.

- "If you're getting fueled from the community group that is fellow lit leaders, then you're able to be a better advocate in your school building among your teachers."
- "I think I'm seeing more involvement than I've ever seen before."
- "It makes me feel like collectively we have more effect on our particular schools because we feel empowered with the knowledge that other people bring to the table."

In responding to questions about their ability to influence teacher capacity within their schools, many CoP members referenced a sense of collective knowledge that they felt was promoted within the CoP. Participants also discussed examples of how they were able to build

teacher capacity in their schools through ideas that had been shared by other CoP members within the CoP. One participant shared that, in addition to implementing ideas gleaned from other CoP members into collaboration/PLCs with teachers at her school, the CoP provided her with an opportunity to "tweak" ideas and talk them over with other CoP members before implementing them with teachers. Several participants also shared that they were able to build teacher capacity in their school through resources that were shared by CoP members on the private website that was created for the group.

Examples from field notes and meeting transcripts supported this theme. Most of the discussions during CoP meetings were focused on building the capacity of teachers through coaching in general, as well as in collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and the science of reading. Participants shared their experiences with coaching teachers and implementing coaching cycles within their respective schools. During one meeting, participants shared the different ways that they were implementing coaching cycles in their schools, from coaching entire grade levels to coaching individual teachers. Many discussions within the CoP also focused on the content of collaboration/PLCs, and participants shared their experiences with facilitating collaboration/PLCs in their schools. As one participant shared, "One of the things I struggle with is collaboration and what to do every week, so I definitely gained more ideas from other people."

Influence on Student Learning. When asked about their ability to influence student learning within their schools, seven of nine CoP members reported that they were able to influence students in this capacity. The responses of CoP members indicated that this influence on student learning was both direct and indirect in nature.

- "It has just made me feel like I have a better handle on my role as a leader."

- "We talked about the data that we're seeing in our buildings. That helped me to get some interventions in place based on what I'm seeing in the data. That was a direct impact from our community of practice."
- "I've been able to see what other reading specialists are doing in their collaborations, which supports the teachers, which supports the kids."

In their responses, participants shared examples of how they were able to influence student learning in their respective schools both directly and indirectly. Several participants shared that they felt they were able to influence student learning indirectly through their work with teachers. After initially discussing information and instructional strategies with fellow CoP members within the context of the CoP, participants relayed this information to teachers during collaboration/PLCs, who then implemented it with their students. Two participants gave an example of this process with the implementation of sound walls, a component of the science of reading currently being implemented in schools throughout the District. Several other participants felt that conversations about the science of reading during CoP meetings helped to develop common language and understanding about this District initiative within the group, which in turn also indirectly benefitted students. One participant felt that she directly influenced student learning when she investigated and then implemented an intervention program for students in her school that was discussed during a CoP meeting and recommended by other CoP members. Examples from field notes and meeting transcripts supported this theme. Student learning was a major focus of discussions during CoP meetings. Participants shared ideas, strategies, and resources for working with students with one another. Many of these discussions focused on the implementation of practices related to the science of reading, which teachers are currently implementing with students in the District.

Table 11 summarizes the emerging themes, frequency, and percentage of respondents for Research Question 1. This research question pertains to self-efficacy.

Table 11

Emerging Themes, Frequency, and Percentage of Respondents for Research Question 1

	Respondents	
Emerging Theme	No.	%
Affirmation & Validation	9 of 9	100
Collaboration	9 of 9	100
Confidence	5 of 9	56
Influence…		
on CoP Members	9 of 9	100
on Teacher Capacity	9 of 9	100
on Student Learning	7 of 9	78

Action Research Question #2

After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?

Semi-Structured Interviews

During the semi-structured interviews, CoP members were asked 6 questions pertaining to isolation and trust. These questions asked CoP members about their perceptions of levels of isolation and trust with their literacy leader colleagues. The themes that emerged from these semi-structured interview responses are collective efficacy and trust.

Collective Efficacy. In their responses, members described feeling a sense of both belonging and collegiality within the CoP. An analysis of responses relied on a priori coding. Considered together, this sense of belonging and collegiality indicated an overall emergent theme of collective efficacy.

Sense of Belonging. When asked about levels of connection with and isolation from literacy leader colleagues, eight of nine participants cited a newfound sense of belonging because of their participation in the CoP. Reponses indicated that this sense of belonging was a source for combatting prior feelings of isolation.

- "It was just helpful to know that I was supported and not alone, because this can be a very isolating job."
- "If I didn't have the community of practice, I feel like I would not be in as good shape because I would feel really isolated."
- "I wasn't isolated anymore. I had people that I could bounce ideas off of."

As the sole literacy leader in their schools, many of the participants discussed feeling isolated prior to their participation in the CoP. Participants shared that the CoP provided them with a sense of belonging that they had not previously had in their roles as the sole literacy leader in their schools. One participant described this newfound sense of belonging as having "energized" her. Another participant reported still feeling this sense of belonging despite the CoP meetings being held virtually. A new literacy leader participant shared that she felt she would not be as successful as a new literacy leader without the CoP and the sense of belonging it brought her. Another newer literacy leader described feeling a sense of belonging with both the newer literacy leaders and the more experienced literacy leaders in the CoP.

Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes supported this sense of belonging by members. Throughout the eight CoP meetings, it was evident that participants felt a sense of belonging with one another. High levels of engagement and participation among CoP members were noted during each of the meetings. Following one meeting, one participant shared, "It is so

nice to have other reading specialists to share ideas with." During another meeting, one participant said, "It sounds like you and I have the same goal."

Collegiality With Literacy Leader Colleagues. In their responses related to their levels of connection with other literacy leaders, six of nine CoP members reported feeling a sense of collegiality with their literacy leader colleagues because of their participation in the CoP.

- "I feel more connected after participating with your group."
- "It gave me more connections with people I normally wouldn't talk to, because we didn't know each other."
- "I definitely feel more connected, because if I didn't have it, I would feel isolated."

Participants provided examples of how the experience in a CoP gave them a space to connect with others doing the same work. Several participants asserted that the CoP provided them with an opportunity to connect with other literacy leaders that they might not have had an opportunity to talk with previously. Another participant shared that it was beneficial to have the opportunity to talk with other literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools and have similar school characteristics. Several other participants shared that the smaller size of the CoP contributed to their sense of collegiality with other literacy leaders. One newer literacy leader described the CoP as a "snapshot of our district's literacy leaders…different people, different backgrounds, different buildings, but also helpful and knowledgeable."

Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes supported this presence of collegiality. High levels of engagement, participation, and collegiality between CoP members were noted during each of the eight CoP meetings. Members called one another by name and were often observed smiling, laughing, and sharing humor with one another. During one discussion during a CoP meeting, one participant stated, "We are a wealth of knowledge." Another participant

shared, “I really find that I get a lot of good advice from all of you, so I definitely look forward to this and it’s very helpful to me.”

Trust. Although trust is certainly central to collective efficacy, trust emerged as an additional theme from the responses of CoP members regarding research question two. In their responses, members described feeling increased trust as a result of their participation in the CoP, as well as a sense of safety and openness within the CoP.

Increased Trust in Literacy Leader Colleagues. When asked a series of questions about trust, seven of nine CoP members reported an increase in their level of trust in their literacy leader colleagues because of their participation in the CoP.

- “I think it has increased my trust because I got familiar with other people who were in the same situation being the one leader in their school.”
- “I definitely feel like my trust has grown, not knowing really any literacy leaders, to now knowing a handful more that were so helpful and so knowledgeable.”
- “My willingness to be able to share more in the group shows that I’ve had some increased level of trust.”

Participants shared examples of how their CoP participation directly influenced and increased their levels of trust in fellow literacy leaders. One participant shared that since the CoP provided her with the opportunity to become familiar with other literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leader in their schools, her level of trust in her literacy leader colleagues increased. Another participant stated that having more people to reach out to for help was a factor in increasing her trust in fellow literacy leaders. One participant shared that her level of trust in her literacy leader colleagues increased because of the nods and visual cues (i.e., smiling and laughing) of other CoP members during meetings. Meeting transcripts and observations

supported this theme. High levels of trust were evident among CoP members during the discussions that were held throughout each of the eight CoP meetings. Members were also trusting of one another in the sharing of resources on a website private to the group throughout the study.

Safety and Openness of the CoP. When asked about the specific elements of the CoP that contributed to increased levels of connection and trust, seven of nine members of the CoP identified several factors, including feelings of safety within the CoP and the openness of the CoP itself. In discussing the safety and openness of the CoP, several members described feeling safe to express frustrations to the group.

- "It was an open and inclusive environment."
- "It was a safe place and it was judgement free, and there was no such thing as a stupid question."
- "The opportunity to be open with my feelings and where I am in my career."
- "I appreciated the opportunity to vent those frustrations."

Participants shared examples of how the CoP provided them with a safe and open forum to talk with other literacy leaders. Several participants shared that the open, honest conversations within the CoP contributed to an increase in their feelings of trust in other literacy leaders. Other participants shared that their trust in their fellow literacy leaders increased because the CoP was free of judgement by CoP members. Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes verified these assertions. Throughout the implementation of the CoP, members spoke openly and honestly about topics determined by them. These topics included the expression of frustrations and issues they had encountered in their schools. During these discussions, participants offered support and encouragement to one another. As one participant shared, "You should applaud

yourself for anything you have going on in the building. Don't be so tough on yourself. I know I can be, but I have to take it all in and say, You know what? These are the things I have done, and I'm working towards these other things." Table 12 summarizes the emerging themes, frequency, and percentage of respondents for Research Question 2.

Table 12

Emerging Themes, Frequency, and Percentage of Respondents for Research Question 2

	Respondents	
Emerging Theme	No.	%
Collective Efficacy		
Sense of Belonging	8 of 9	89
Collegiality	6 of 9	67
Trust		
Increased Trust	7 of 9	78
Safety & Openness	7 of 9	78

Action Research Question #3

After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of professional growth and practice?

Semi-Structured Interviews

During the semi-structured interviews, CoP members were asked 16 questions pertaining to professional growth and practice. These questions asked CoP members about their perceptions of their own professional growth and practice as well as their perceptions of their impact on the professional growth and practice of other CoP members. The themes that emerged from semi-structured interview responses related to professional growth and practice are community and situated learning.

Community and Situated Learning. Guided by an a priori coding process, an analysis of responses indicated themes of community and situated learning. In their semi-structured interview responses, CoP members identified learning from, as well as collaboration with, their fellow literacy leaders within the CoP as key contributors to changes in their own professional growth and practice. CoP members also indicated that they felt that they were able to influence the professional growth and practice of other CoP members through their participation in the CoP. Considered together, these elements of learning from and collaboration with fellow literacy leaders within the CoP, as well as the ability to influence the professional growth and practice of fellow members, are indicative of the learning community that was present within the situated learning context of the CoP.

Changes in Professional Growth: Learning from Fellow Literacy Leaders. All nine CoP members reported changes in their professional growth as a result of their participation in the CoP. Responses indicated that these changes were attributable to learning from their fellow literacy leaders that took place during their participation in the CoP.

- "I felt like I was listening to the language of professionals and the language of the discipline. Engaging in conversation that was professional made me feel knowledgeable."
- "People have suggested some professional development that they've done with their teachers, and I've taken their suggestions."
- "Being part of the community of practice helped guide where I was going."

Participants provided examples of how the experience in a CoP gave them opportunities to grow professionally. One participant shared that she revisited resources that she hadn't used recently based on the suggestions of other CoP members. Several participants shared that they

had grown professionally through the sharing of other CoP members about the content of their collaboration/PLCs with teachers. Other participants shared that it was beneficial to discuss training currently being provided to literacy leaders concerning the science of reading and how CoP members were sharing this training with teachers. Another participant shared that engaging in conversations with fellow professionals within the CoP made her feel knowledgeable professionally. Examples from field notes and meeting transcripts provided further evidence of this learning between CoP members. Community of practice meetings were entirely focused on topics of a professional nature and provided CoP members with continual opportunities to learn from other members in a professional capacity. This professional learning that took place among CoP members was readily apparent during all eight CoP meetings. Participants also shared professional resources with one another during CoP meetings and through a website private to the group throughout the intervention.

Changes in Professional Growth: Collaboration with Fellow Literacy Leaders. In identifying specific elements of their CoP participation that contributed to changes in their professional growth, all nine participants attributed these changes to the opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of ideas and experiences with fellow literacy leaders provided within the CoP. This collaboration and sharing of experiences and ideas with others within the CoP was also beneficial to members in the coaching of teachers in general as well as in the coaching of teachers in collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and the science of reading.

- "It just made me hungry for more information because there was something that they shared that made me think, 'I'm writing that down. I need to find out more about that.' "

- "Some people spoke about some activities that I didn't think about before, and the professional resources that were recommended."
- "It was just helpful to hear more experienced literacy leaders and what they're doing with their knowledge."

In their responses, participants shared examples of how collaboration with other literacy leaders had increased their professional growth. Several participants shared that the collaborative discussions that were held during the CoP meetings contributed to their professional growth because these discussions sparked ideas or resources that they could seek out and implement in their own schools. Many participants found the collaborative discussions and sharing of ideas and strategies within the CoP to be helpful in coaching teachers in general, and in coaching teachers with collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and the science of reading. Several participants shared that these discussions gave them strategies to use in approaching difficult teachers. Another participant shared that having the opportunity to collaborate and provide input with other CoP members regarding meeting agendas contributed to her professional growth. In describing how the collaborative opportunities provided by the CoP contributed to changes in her professional growth, one participant shared that it helped her with "getting a perspective on things." Evidence of this professional growth was apparent in examples from meeting transcripts and field notes. Throughout the CoP intervention, all nine members collaborated with one another to create agendas for CoP meetings and to participate in collaborative discussions surrounding these topics. Participants also continually collaborated with one another to share resources, both within CoP meetings and through a website private to the group.

Changes in Professional Practice: Learning from Fellow Literacy Leaders. Eight of nine CoP members reported changes in their professional practice as a result of their

participation in the CoP. As with professional growth, responses indicated that these changes were a result of learning from their fellow literacy leaders that took place during their participation in the CoP.

- "It's just making you that much more of a better reading teacher because you're sharing ideas, you're listening to others' ideas. We're emerging ourselves in all that goes on when you're the lone reading specialist in the building, so you can only come out of that with an increase in all the things."
- "I realized that I should focus on something else based on our conversations in our community of practice."
- "It was interesting for me to see what people's needs were, what their thoughts were. If I've never considered something, is that something that I can look into?"

When asked about specific elements of the CoP that contributed to changes in their professional practice as literacy leaders, participants shared examples of how the CoP provided them with a space to learn from other literacy leaders and thus influence their own professional practice. One participant shared that it was valuable to hear how other schools structure collaboration/PLCs. As a result of these discussions, she is planning to investigate a different collaboration/PLC structure for her school next year. Another participant shared that the CoP provided a space for members to receive feedback from other literacy leaders regarding their professional practices. One participant shared that meeting with newer literacy leaders in the CoP made her think more about her own professional practices and how she can be of more help to them. Another participant shared that her participation in the CoP "made me like my job better." Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes echoed this theme. The capability to provide input regarding meeting agendas afforded members the opportunity to select topics they wanted

to learn more about, and the subsequent discussion and learning that took place among CoP members was clear throughout the CoP intervention. Agenda items often sparked additional engaging discussions about other topics of interest related to professional practice within the literacy leader role. During one meeting, one such discussion arose concerning learning walks in different schools.

Influence on the Professional Growth and Practice of Fellow CoP Members. When asked about their contributions to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members, all nine members responded that they felt they had contributed to changes in the professional growth and practice of other CoP members. As with their own professional growth and practice, CoP members attributed these changes to the opportunity to collaborate and share ideas and experiences with fellow literacy leaders in the context of the CoP. This same collaboration and sharing of experiences and ideas with others within the CoP was also consistent among the responses of CoP members about their effect on the professional growth and practice of fellow members concerning the coaching of teachers in general as well as in the coaching of teachers in collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and the science of reading.

- "Through our discussions, I helped reinforce or guide them in their thinking or in a specific practice."
- "It helped them to hear me share things that I was doing, or that my building was having similar concerns with certain aspects."
- "I think I tried to provide ways that we do things here that would maybe help. It seemed like some of them were a little bit more comfortable leaving some of the meetings; they felt a little bit better about it."

Participants shared several examples of how the CoP provided them with an opportunity to influence the professional growth and practice of other CoP members. All nine participants shared that they were able to influence other members' professional growth and practice by sharing their practices within their own schools with other CoP members. Participants felt that this sharing of practices was particularly helpful to other members regarding the coaching of teachers, as well as the coaching of teachers with collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and the science of reading. One participant shared, "I feel like I was helpful in sharing what worked well with my collaborations on the science of reading." A newer literacy leader shared that she felt she helped other CoP members by asking them questions and having them share and support her as a new literacy leader. Another participant with more experience as a literacy leader shared, "I wish I would have had something like this when I first started. It would have been a lot easier." Examples from meeting transcripts and field notes supported this theme. The sharing of practices mentioned by participants in their interview responses was evident throughout the CoP intervention. Many CoP meetings were devoted to sharing practices surrounding the coaching of teachers with collaboration/PLCs, small group instruction, and the science of reading. During one of these meetings, one participant shared how she was discussing small group instruction with teachers in her school during collaboration/PLCs, and several CoP members later shared that they had implemented this same approach with teachers in their schools following the meeting.

Table 13 summarizes the emerging themes, frequency, and percentage of respondents for Research Question 3. Research Question 3 pertains to professional growth and practice.

Table 13

Emerging Themes, Frequency, and Percentage of Respondents for Research Question 3

	Respondents	
Emerging Theme	No.	%
Community & Situated Learning		
Changes in PG: Learning from Fellow LL	9 of 9	100
Changes in PG: Collaboration with Fellow LL	9 of 9	100
Changes in PP: Learning from Fellow LL	8 of 9	89
Influence on PG & PP of Fellow CoP Members	9 of 9	100

Note. PG = professional growth; PP = professional practice; LL = literacy leaders

Summary of Findings

In summary, an analysis of survey questions pertaining to self-efficacy and trust indicated that there was no statistical difference evident between the survey responses of study participants at the outset and conclusion of the study. In addition, there was no statistical difference detected between the survey responses of study participants and those of literacy leaders not participating in the study at either the outset or conclusion of the study. While the survey findings suggest there was no statistical difference between comparison groups, the findings from the qualitative data points to tension between these data sources. The following themes emerged from semi-structured interview responses related to self-efficacy: affirmation and validation, collaboration, confidence, and influence on fellow CoP members, teacher capacity, and student learning. Transcripts from CoP meetings indicated that collaboration and the sharing of ideas and

experiences among CoP members was consistent throughout each of the eight meetings. Field notes taken by me during each of the eight meetings were indicative of the themes that emerged related to self-efficacy. High levels of collaboration and engagement among CoP members were noted, as were frequent affirming remarks between members. Participants also regularly expressed interest in implementing ideas shared by CoP members in their schools, and subsequently shared their experiences in implementing these ideas. Confidence was observed among members throughout the CoP intervention, both in their participation in CoP discussions and in their sharing resources with other members. The themes of member influence on teacher capacity, student learning, and other CoP members were also apparent in field notes taken throughout the intervention due to the nature of topics discussed.

The themes of collective efficacy and trust emerged from semi-structured interview questions pertaining to isolation and trust. With regard to collective efficacy, responses indicated that CoP members felt a sense of belonging and collegiality as a result of their CoP participation. Responses also indicated increased levels of trust and a sense of safety and openness within the CoP. Meeting transcripts from the eight CoP meetings validated these themes, as did field notes taken by me throughout each of the eight meetings. High levels of belonging, collegiality, trust, and safety and openness among CoP members were evident in the content of both meeting transcripts and field notes during the study.

The themes of community and situated learning emerged from semi-structured interview responses pertaining to professional growth and practice. In describing changes in their professional growth as a result of their CoP participation, members identified learning from, and collaboration with, fellow literacy leaders as key contributors. As with their professional growth, CoP members identified learning from fellow literacy leaders within the CoP as a significant

influence on their professional practice. Members also felt that they were able to influence the professional growth and practice of their fellow CoP members. Meeting transcripts and field notes additionally reflected the themes of community and situated learning. Transcripts indicated that professional learning was a consistent focus of CoP meetings, and high levels of collaboration were also noted during meetings. Collaboration, engagement, and professional learning among CoP members were also continually apparent in field notes taken throughout the CoP intervention.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted using an action research approach, which enabled the study to focus on the unique and specialized role of the literacy leader. Study data were gleaned from surveys, semi-structured interviews, community of practice (CoP) meeting transcripts, and a field notes journal kept by the researcher. In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the study findings as they pertain to each research question as well as the alignment of these findings with relevant literature. I will also discuss recommendations related to these study findings and implications for future policy, practice, and research.

Summary Findings for Study

Action Research Question #1

After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?

Survey and semi-structured interview responses, CoP meeting transcripts, and researcher observations all informed the self-efficacy levels of CoP participants. An analysis of survey responses pertaining to questions about self-efficacy determined that there was no statistical difference between the survey responses of CoP participants at either the outset or conclusion of the study. In addition, no statistical difference was noted in comparing the responses of CoP participants at both the outset and conclusion of the study with the one-time responses of a group of literacy leaders not participating in the study who are the sole literacy leader in their schools. It is important to note that the sample sizes of the surveyed groups were notably small, with just

nine in the group of literacy leader study participants and 14 in the group of literacy leaders not participating in the study. Future cycles of this CoP, as well as other potential CoPs, could thus benefit from larger groups. Differences in instrumentation may also explain these differences. Survey questions were answered using pre-determined Likert scale responses, while interview protocols allowed for the sharing of experiences by participants in an open-ended format during semi-structured interviews.

Contrary to the survey findings, when CoP participants were asked semi-structured interview questions pertaining to self-efficacy, themes of affirmation and validation, collaboration, confidence, and influence emerged. In describing how their CoP participation contributed to changes in their levels of self-efficacy, the content of participant responses reflected this theme. Responses included references to affirmation, validation, collaboration, confidence, and influence on fellow CoP members, teacher capacity, and student learning. All nine members responded that the CoP was a source of affirmation and validation for them and noted that the opportunity to collaborate and share ideas and experiences with other literacy leaders within the CoP was beneficial to them. Five of nine members also credited their CoP participation with increasing their confidence in their literacy leader roles.

In analyzing social learning, Bandura (1977) postulated that self-efficacy is based on four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological states. The CoP intervention that was implemented in the study provided participants with opportunities for these four sources of self-efficacy influence. Vicarious experience, or observing others succeed in activities thought to be threatening without adverse consequences, can generate expectations in observers that they can also succeed with persistence and intensity of their efforts (Bandura, 1977). Through their CoP participation,

members were also recipients of supportive affirmations provided by others to persuade them that they can succeed. Bandura (1977) refers to this experience as social persuasion wherein CoP participants were offered these words of encouragement and support to overcome self-doubt. These supportive affirmations were apparent in CoP meeting transcripts and researcher field notes. In a group setting, persuasion can encourage members to be innovative and overcome challenges (Goddard et al., 2004). Physiological states, another source of self-efficacy information, were apparent in the positive emotional responses of participants observed throughout each of the eight CoP meetings. In sharing their experiences with teachers, administrators and students throughout the CoP, members also shared performance accomplishments, based on personal mastery experiences, with one another. Members additionally described increased confidence as a result of their participation in the CoP, also likely to directly influence their own personal mastery experiences.

When CoP participants were asked about their own contributions to changes in the self-efficacy of other CoP members, all nine participants responded that they felt they contributed to changes in the self-efficacy of other members. These contributions were related to the self-efficacy of other CoP members in the coaching of teachers in general, as well as in the coaching of teachers in collaboration/professional learning communities (PLCs), small group instruction, and in the science of reading, a current District literacy initiative. These results illustrate the importance of vicarious experience as a source of self-efficacy. Through vicarious experience, observers such as those in the CoP are convinced that if others are able to do something, they should be able to improve their own performance in some way (Bandura, 1977). All nine CoP members also affirmed that they were able to influence and build the capacity of teachers in their respective schools as a result of their participation in the CoP. In discussing this ability to

influence teacher capacity, many CoP members referenced a sense of collective knowledge that they felt was promoted within the CoP. Participants also discussed examples of how they were able to build teacher capacity in their schools through ideas that had been shared by other CoP members within the CoP.

When asked about their ability to influence student learning within their schools, seven of nine CoP members reported that they were able to influence students in this capacity. The responses of CoP members indicated that this influence on student learning was both direct and indirect in nature. This belief of CoP members in their ability to influence student learning in their schools reflects the definition of educator self-efficacy, or "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Guskey & Passaro, 1993, p. 3). Members attributed their ability to influence student learning to the discussions and sharing of ideas that took place within the CoP. As a researcher-as-participant in this study, these findings about self-efficacy affirmed my observations within the CoP throughout the study.

Professional development that provides opportunities for interaction among educators has been shown to have powerful effects on educator self-efficacy (Mintzes et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). In their semi-structured interview responses, members continually touted the benefits of the opportunity to interact and collaborate with other literacy leaders within the CoP, and how this opportunity influenced their actions as literacy leaders.

A sense of self-efficacy is critically important to the success of educators, for its effects are truly comprehensive in scope. Self-efficacy is known to affect the behavior of educators, the effort they put forth, their personal goals, their level of aspiration, and their educational practices (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Different from the student-centered professional learning

communities (PLCs) currently being implemented in many schools, CoPs are instead participant driven. With their "built in" opportunities for interactions between educators that promote the four sources of self-efficacy, CoPs are an ideal vehicle for professional development and have been successful in numerous educational settings (Herbers et al., 2011; Kelley et al., 2020).

Action Research Question #2

After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?

Survey and semi-structured interview responses, CoP meeting transcripts, and researcher observations all informed the levels of isolation and trust of CoP participants with one another. An analysis of survey responses pertaining to questions about levels of isolation and trust determined that there was no statistical difference between the survey responses of CoP participants at either the outset or conclusion of the study. In addition, no statistical difference was noted in comparing the responses of CoP participants at both the outset and conclusion of the study with the one-time responses of a group of literacy leaders not participating in the study who are the sole literacy leader in their schools. As previously mentioned, the sample sizes of the surveyed groups were notably small, with just nine in the group of literacy leader study participants and 14 in the group of literacy leaders not participating in the study. As noted previously, while the survey findings suggest there was no statistical difference between comparison groups, the findings from the qualitative data point to tension between the data sources.

When CoP participants were asked semi-structured interview questions pertaining to isolation and trust, a theme of collective efficacy emerged. The collective efficacy promoted in group settings such as the CoP is known to affect the performance of the group. A strong sense

of group capability establishes a powerful push for group performance (Goddard et al., 2004). In addition, collective efficacy is known to strongly influence both the behavior of educators and student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000).

In their responses, members described feeling a sense of belonging and collegiality with fellow CoP members because of their participation in the CoP. As literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leader in their schools, this sense of belonging and collegiality seemed particularly meaningful to participants. Isolation is indeed a critical issue for literacy leaders. The isolative nature of the literacy leader position can cause literacy leaders to feel like "an island" (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012, p. 56). Furthermore, literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools are particularly susceptible to the "egg crate" isolation described by Lortie (1975), in which educators have little contact with other professionals (such as other literacy leaders) due to physical separation. Isolation has been shown to trigger burnout among educators (Gaikwad & Brantley, 1992). Like teachers, literacy leaders are also prone to the negative outcomes that can stem from burnout, such as turnover, job absenteeism, and diminished performance (M.H. Fisher, 2011; Maslach et al., 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). With their focus on interpersonal relationships among participants, CoPs are an ideal solution for combatting the problem of isolation among educators.

While trust has been found to have a significant impact on the collective efficacy of organizations such as the CoP employed in the study (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), trust emerged as an additional theme from the semi-structured interview responses of CoP members. Participants described feeling a sense of safety and openness within the CoP, as well as increased trust in fellow CoP members. In their semi-structured interview responses, CoP members cited the open, honest conversations within the CoP as contributing to an increase in their feelings of

trust in other literacy leaders. Participants also shared that their trust in their fellow literacy leaders increased because the CoP was free of judgment by CoP members. Topics discussed within the CoP included the expression of frustrations and issues participants had encountered in their schools. "Such openness signals a kind of reciprocal trust, a confidence that neither the information nor the individual will be exploited, and recipients can feel the same confidence in return" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 558). Although the survey results did not indicate any statistical differences with questions pertaining to trust among the groups to whom the survey was administered, the theme of trust that emerged from participants' semi-structured interview responses is an indicator of the element of trust that was present within the CoP.

In providing a place of safety and openness for participants, the CoP model itself promotes trust. "An effective community of practice offers a place of exploration where it is safe to speak the truth and ask hard questions. Trust is key to this process" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 37). Within a CoP, this trust is not automatic, but rather happens gradually as a result of the interactions that occur within the CoP. As Wenger et al. (2002) assert, "The trust community members need is not simply the result of a decision to trust each other personally. It emerges from understanding each other" (p. 85). Trust played a central role in the CoP intervention that was implemented in the study as well as in the resulting outcomes of the study. Throughout the CoP intervention, I witnessed countless examples of the themes of collective efficacy and trust that emerged from the study. On many occasions throughout the study, CoP members referred to the collective knowledge of the group and demonstrated trust in one another through the sharing of experiences in an open and honest manner.

Action Research Question #3

After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of professional growth and practice?

When asked questions about changes in their levels of professional growth and practice as a result of their participation in the CoP, overarching themes of community and situated learning emerged. In their responses, participants cited learning from fellow literacy leaders and collaboration as influences on their own professional growth and practice. Participants also felt that they had influenced the professional growth and practice of fellow CoP members within the CoP.

According to Wenger et al. (2002), a community is "a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment" (p. 34). The CoP intervention employed in this study provided members with the opportunity to function as a community as defined by Wenger et al. In their responses, CoP members continually referred to these same community elements: interactions, relationships, and learning from other CoP members. The mutual commitment and sense of belonging experienced by CoP members was also apparent in interview responses, meeting transcripts, and in researcher field notes throughout the study. The CoP also allowed members to function as a community within their domain, or area of shared interest, as literacy leaders. The domain serves to bring people together, guide their learning, and define the identity of the community (Wenger et al., 2002). As a community, CoP members had the opportunity to explore their practice as literacy leaders. The practice of a community involves the exploration of both the existing body of knowledge and the latest advances in the field (Wenger et al., 2002). Throughout the CoP

intervention, members discussed existing knowledge surrounding literacy, as well as current advances in the field such as the science of reading.

Another theme that emerged from the interview responses of CoP members was that of situated learning. According to situated learning theory, learning occurs through participation in the learning curriculum of a community, rather than through the replication of the experiences of others or by gaining knowledge through instruction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). CoP members affirmed that this situated learning took place throughout their participation in the CoP. Research surrounding effective professional learning indicates that the CoP intervention employed in the study incorporated many of the elements thought to be essential for effective professional learning, and the responses of participants reflected these same elements. These include professional learning experiences that are participant-driven and feature experiential and active learning. In addition, those experiences that incorporate feedback, including group review and self-reflection are thought to be effective. Finally, collaborative practices that support the development of professional learning communities, trust, and discourse are considered to be ideal professional learning experiences (Labone & Long, 2016). As a researcher-as-participant in this study, these findings regarding professional growth and practice provided validation for my own professional practice regarding the implementation of professional learning through CoPs.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In this section, I will provide recommendations for policy and practice relevant to the findings of the study. Central to these recommendations are the themes that emerged from the study findings. These themes are integrated within the recommendations related to the study. Table 14 is a summary of the study findings and related recommendations and literature.

Table 14

Study Recommendations Based on Findings

Findings	Related Recommendations	Related Literature
Self-efficacy was promoted among literacy leaders.	Continue collaborative activities that promote self-efficacy in the District.	Bandura, 1977; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012; Mintzes et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009
Collective efficacy and trust were promoted among literacy leaders.	Time during the professional workday should be devoted to collaborative activities that promote collective efficacy and trust.	Goddard et al., 2000, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000
Community was promoted among literacy leaders.	Consider replacing monthly literacy leader meetings with virtual collaborative opportunities.	DuFour, 2011; Taylor, 2017; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger & Snyder, 2000
Situated learning, an ideal model for professional learning, was promoted among literacy leaders.	Award PD credit for participation in situated learning activities.	Killion, 2015; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000

Note. PD = professional development

Recommendation #1

The CoP intervention that was employed in this study provided participants with experiences that incorporated the four sources theorized by Bandura (1977) to influence self-efficacy. Research has also concluded that professional development that provides opportunities for interaction among educators has been shown to have powerful effects on educator self-efficacy (Mintzes et al., 2013; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Study findings illustrate that the self-efficacy of CoP members was positively impacted in numerous ways. Therefore, it

is recommended that collaborative activities that promote self-efficacy be continued in the District.

This study sought to measure the effects of a CoP on a select group of nine literacy leaders and their perceptions of self-efficacy, isolation, and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice within their literacy leader roles. The findings of the study indicate that the CoP that was implemented with these nine literacy leaders not only positively impacted participants' levels of self-efficacy, but also their levels of isolation and trust with one another, as well as their professional growth and practice. The CoP intervention employed in the study was intentionally implemented with a group of literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools, since this role is one that is particularly prone to professional isolation. Developing a support system of other professionals is recommended for literacy leaders due to the isolative nature of their position (L'Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). In discussing the impact of their CoP participation, participants continually referred to the sense of belonging, collaboration, and collegiality promoted within the CoP and the resulting positive effect on their feelings of isolation in their roles. It seems probable that additional collaborative opportunities would have similar benefits for other educators in roles prone to professional isolation, such as administrators or other instructional specialists who have a solitary role in their schools.

From the study, themes such as affirmation and validation, collaboration, collective efficacy, trust, community, and situated learning emerged. Research shows that all these elements, both individually and collectively, positively influence educators and those that they serve. Therefore, it is likely that participation in similar collaborative activities would benefit educators in all roles in the District. Such collaborative opportunities could be held at the school level and could be formed based on specific instructional domains (e.g., teachers of reading or

math). These opportunities could also be a vehicle for brainstorming solutions to school-specific issues.

The implementation of more informal collaborative opportunities similar to CoPs in the District would require a significant shift in the implementation of professional learning. Currently, the District implements PLCs in its schools. Individual schools determine the structure of and time allotted for these PLCs. PLCs have historically focused on the improvement of educators' pedagogical and content knowledge, as well as on the improvement of outcomes for students (Fisher et al., 2020). Collaborative opportunities such as CoPs are more informal in nature and are driven by the specific needs of the group. If additional collaborative opportunities were implemented with the educators in the District, educators and students would surely continue to be a central focus, as was evident throughout the CoP that was implemented in this study. The implementation of additional opportunities for collaboration would provide the District's educators with authentic professional learning focused on their specific needs as determined by them. If these became standard and regular practice in the District, they could become an additional platform for the promotion of self-efficacy, collective efficacy, trust, community, and situated learning among the District's educators. Regarding professional learning typically directed by the District (e.g., new regulations, processes, etc.), District representatives could attend collaborative activities at various schools to introduce these regulations and processes. According to Wenger et al. (2002), "In most domains, there are some individuals regarded as 'thought leaders,' people in the organization who are defining cutting-edge issues in the domain or are well seasoned and well-respected practitioners" (p. 78).

The implementation of additional collaborative activities would encourage educators in the District to view themselves as true practitioners in their field. According to Fullan and Quinn

(2016), “Organizations that support learning, innovation, and action build a culture of growth” (p. 49). This learning, innovation, and action Fullan and Quinn described are hallmarks of collaboration among educators. Although the implementation of additional collaborative opportunities would require a different approach to professional learning by the District, the culture of growth that would be promoted through this approach, as well as its long-term value, would far outweigh any initial challenges. Although this study was conducted with just ten educators, the findings are a clear indicator of the value of collaborative activities as a vehicle for professional learning.

Recommendation #2

According to Goddard et al. (2004), the four sources of self-efficacy information identified by Bandura (1977) are not only critical to the development of self-efficacy, but also to collective efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) also theorized that the environment in which a person lives and works is developed both individually and collectively. Study findings indicated that the intervention that was implemented in the study promoted both self-efficacy and collective efficacy among its members. Trust was also promoted within the CoP and was a key finding of the study. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), “People make trust judgments in part on the basis of the assumption of shared values” (p. 560). If additional collaborative activities became standard and regular practice in the District, it is important that a sense of collective efficacy and shared values be conveyed to stakeholders with regard to their implementation. In addition, one of Wenger et al.’s (2002) seven principles for cultivating CoPs is to *focus on value*. Therefore, it is recommended that time during the professional workday be designated for the implementation of collaborative activities that promote collective efficacy and trust. This would prioritize time for these activities and emphasize their value within the District.

The implementation of collaborative opportunities that promote collective efficacy within the District could potentially result in larger organizational efficacy gains. “If collective efficacy gains enhance organizational performance, reciprocal causality suggests that resulting performance improvements may, in turn, strengthen collective organizational efficacy” (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 483).

The CoP intervention employed in the study was implemented in a professional development format through one-hour meetings twice per month. To maximize the convenience and relevance of the CoP intervention for participants, all meetings and activities were conducted virtually using an online meeting application and held during the school day with permission from the District. In this way, the CoP was truly a model of situated learning within the professional settings of participants. During the course of the study, attendance at CoP meetings varied due to the obligations of the literacy leader participants within their respective schools. It became apparent during the study that the role of the literacy leader who is the sole literacy leader in their school varies among the schools in the District. For example, several literacy leaders who were participating in the study were frequently called upon to serve as substitute teachers in their schools because of substitute teacher shortages stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Although recordings of CoP meetings were made available to participants unable to attend CoP meetings live, the personal interactions between members were an important aspect of the CoP model employed in the study. If time during the professional workday was designated for the implementation of collaborative activities that promote collective efficacy and trust, this would allow participants to attend meetings on a regular basis. The frequency of meetings, as well as specific dates for them, could be predetermined by the District and included within the school year calendar.

Recommendation #3

Wenger et al. (2002) asserted, "The community element is critical to an effective knowledge structure" (p. 34). The learning communities promoted within collaborative activities like CoPs make them a structure well-suited for the conveyance of knowledge among educators. Although the term *community* may seem synonymous with commonality, the long-term interactions within collaborative activities like CoPs actually encourage differentiation among members (Wenger et al., 2002). This focus on differentiation among members would honor the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and contexts of literacy leaders in the District. In order to foster collaborative cultures in education, it is essential to embed collaboration into routine practices, ensure that this collaboration is purposeful, and support educators in these collaborative efforts (DuFour, 2011). It is therefore recommended that the monthly in-person meetings previously held by the Department of Teaching and Learning with literacy leaders potentially be replaced by virtual collaborative opportunities. Due to the limited proximity of literacy leaders to one another, as well as their varied individual schedules, the CoP was conducted using an online meeting platform. This virtual format maximized the accessibility, convenience, and relevance of CoP meetings for participants. The virtual meeting format eliminated the need for travel on the part of participants or the securing of a location for CoP meetings. Since participants were able to attend CoP meetings from their respective schools, they were also able to readily access relevant materials and resources during CoP meetings.

During the study, the District made the decision to suspend all professional learning held during the school day to allow for literacy leaders and other instructional specialists to serve as substitute teachers as needed in their schools as a result of substitute teacher shortages related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this decision did not affect the CoP meetings held during the

study, the monthly meetings previously held during the school day by the Department of Teaching and Learning with literacy leaders for the purposes of professional learning were suspended. This professional learning was subsequently delivered to literacy leaders in an asynchronous format through prepared presentations and video recordings. For the literacy leaders participating in the study, the CoP thus became their lone opportunity for formal interaction with other literacy leaders in the District. Many participants expressed that the CoP was even more valuable to them for this reason. According to Taylor (2017), teacher accounts of professional growth are especially critical to interpreting and understanding their experiences, both individual and collective.

As evidenced by the successful implementation of the CoP in this study, collaborative activities are an ideal model for professional learning. Collaborative activities such as CoPs have also been successful in numerous settings and professions (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Since collaborative activities such as CoPs inherently include the elements known to constitute effective professional learning, they eliminate the "sit and get" approach to professional learning. The literacy leaders in the District, particularly those who are the sole literacy leaders in their schools, could greatly benefit from the delivery of professional learning through collaborative activities.

Recommendation #4

The situated learning framework central to the study focuses on the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it takes place (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Killion (2015) also theorized that teacher collaboration is based on the social interaction theory of learning. Since literacy leaders in the District are already situated as a social group, collaborative activities such as CoPs are a natural fit for their professional learning. The CoP that was successfully

implemented in the study was situated within one such group of literacy leaders. If situated learning activities became standard and regular practice in the District, it is recommended that educators who participate in these activities be awarded professional development credit as an option for recertification purposes. Since participation in situated learning activities involves a considerable time commitment on the part of participants, the worthiness of participation in these activities by participants is an important consideration within these contexts. It is also important that professional development activities are meaningful to educators (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). As described earlier, shared values are essential to trust (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Awarding participants professional development credit for their participation in situated learning activities would convey a sense of fairness to participants in the valuing of their time.

During the study, I investigated the possibility of participants earning professional development credit for their participation in the study and was able to successfully secure this option for study participants. The awarding of professional development credit to participants in situated learning activities for recertification purposes could potentially include specific conditions or deliverables determined by the District for consistency purposes. Since topics discussed within situated learning activities are continually evolving, deliverables could provide opportunities for follow-up discussions and/or the development of relevant products or solutions for issues determined within these activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

This action research study included stages dedicated to planning, acting, developing, and reflecting as described in Mertler's (2020) four-stage model of action research. The developing stage of action research, in which an action plan is created for the future, is a critical component of the action research process (Mertler, 2020). Since both the action research process and the

study that was conducted are cyclical in nature, this action plan includes steps for a subsequent cycle. As discussed previously in my recommendations, if collaborative opportunities became standard and regular practice in the District, I recommend that time during the professional workday be designated for the implementation of these activities. This policy would ensure that the literacy leaders in this study were able to attend these activities regularly on designated days. An additional recommendation stipulated that virtual collaborative opportunities possibly replace the previous monthly meetings previously held by the Department of Teaching and Learning with literacy leaders. If this recommendation were implemented, these virtual collaborative opportunities would become the model for the delivery of this professional learning in a subsequent cycle. Throughout the study, many of the discussions in the CoP focused on the science of reading and the implementation of this relatively new District initiative in the schools of the literacy leader participants. Collaborative opportunities similar to CoPs would continue to be an ideal forum for conversations surrounding this topic in future cycles. In addition to these recommendations for a subsequent cycle with the current study participants, I would also propose that future research include the implementation of similar collaborative opportunities with additional groups of educators.

Limitations

As discussed previously, while the survey findings suggest there was no statistical difference between comparison groups, the findings from the qualitative data point to tension between the data sources. There were notable differences in the quantitative and qualitative instruments utilized in the study. Quantitative data was gathered from survey questions that were developed using the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and the Comprehensive Teacher Trust Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). Participants responded to

these survey questions using pre-determined Likert scales. As the researcher, I developed semi-structured interview questions myself that were likely more closely aligned with the CoP intervention and the experiences of participants in the study. These semi-structured interview questions provided participants with opportunities to discuss their experiences within the CoP in an open-ended format. To eliminate this tension between data sources, I suggest that a fully qualitative study be conducted in the future. In addition to a fully qualitative approach, the triangulation of data sources within this study would also serve to potentially mitigate any potential tension between data sources.

Summary

This mixed methods action research study sought to measure the impact of a CoP on a select group of nine literacy leaders and their perceptions of self-efficacy, isolation, and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice within their literacy leader roles. This group of literacy leaders was specifically selected for participation in the study and the CoP intervention due to their role as the sole literacy leader in their schools. In analyzing data gleaned from surveys, semi-structured interviews, CoP meeting transcripts, and researcher field notes, themes of affirmation and validation, collaboration, confidence, influence, collective efficacy, trust, community, and situated learning emerged. Recommendations relevant to these findings include the continuation of collaborative activities in the District, with time during the professional workday designated for the implementation of these activities. An additional recommendation is that participants be awarded professional development credit for their participation in situated learning activities. It is also recommended that virtual collaborative opportunities potentially replace previous monthly literacy leader meetings.

Study findings indicated that the CoP intervention implemented in this study positively impacted study participants in a number of ways. As a researcher-as-participant in this study, the CoP intervention and the study itself also impacted me tremendously. When I first learned about CoPs as a vehicle for collaborative practice, I was immediately intrigued and proceeded to research the model further. The CoP model seemed to be an ideal solution for the pervasive isolation experienced by literacy leaders like myself who are the sole literacy leader in their schools. Although I knew a great deal about CoPs prior to conducting the study as a result of my research, nothing could have quite prepared me for the experience of developing, facilitating, and witnessing a CoP in action myself. These experiences were incredibly powerful to me as both a researcher and educator and are a true testament to the effectiveness of authentic opportunities for professional growth, collaboration, and communication. On many occasions during the study, I sat in awe of what was taking place before me: genuine, participant-driven collaboration, collegiality, professional learning, and so much more. I am forever changed by the experience of conducting this study, and I hope to continue my work in providing collaborative opportunities for educators. According to Mertler (2020), the ultimate goal of participatory action research is to "improve the quality of the lives of individuals who make up organizations, communities, and families" (p. 19). As a scholar-practitioner, it is my greatest hope that this study and the CoP it inspired improved the quality of not only the lives of its participants, but also those of all whose lives it may touch in some way, both now and in the future.

APPENDIX A

Participant Informed Consent Form

I,_____ , agree to participate in a research study regarding my experiences with a community of practice for literacy leaders. The purpose of this study is to measure the impact of participation in a community of practice on the self-efficacy, levels of trust and isolation, and professional growth and practice of the literacy leader participants.

As a participant, I understand that my participation in the study is purposeful and voluntary. All literacy leader participants will have the opportunity to participate in regular community of practice meetings and one interview to be held at the conclusion of the community of practice intervention.

I understand that the interviewer has been trained in the research of human subjects, my responses will be confidential, and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I understand that community of practice meeting and interview data will be collected using an audio recording device and then transcribed for analysis. Information from the audio recordings and transcriptions will be safeguarded so my identity will never be disclosed. Data will also be gathered from surveys and a field notes journal kept by the researcher. Information from these surveys and field notes journal will be safeguarded so my identity will never be disclosed. My true identity will not be associated with the research findings.

I understand that there is no known risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time. I agree that should I choose to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the study that I will notify the researcher listed below, in writing. A decision not to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher, the College of William and Mary generally or the School of Education, specifically.

If I have any questions or problems that may arise as a result of my participation in the study, I understand that I should contact Amy Paulson, the researcher at (757-343-5727/ acpaulson@wm.edu), Dr. Peggie Constantino (757-221-2323/meconstantino@wm.edu) or Dr. Tom Ward, chair of EDIRC, at 757-221-2358 or EDIRC-L@wm.edu.

My signature below signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to participate in this research study.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Date

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE W&M PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2021-09-23 AND EXPIRES ON 2022-09-23.

APPENDIX B

APPROVAL LETTER FOR USE OF SURVEYS

William & Mary
School of Education

MEGAN TSCHANNEN-MORAN, PHD

PROFESSOR OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Amy Paulson,

You have my permission to use the Collective Teacher Beliefs Scale in your research. The best citation to use is:

> Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering Student Learning: The Relationship of Collective Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools,* 3(3), 189-209.

You also have my permission to use the Faculty Trust Scale, also called the Omnibus T-Scale, which I developed with Dr. Wayne K. Hoy, in your research. Below are the citations for both.

> Hoy, W. K. & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The conceptualization and measurement of faculty trust in schools: The omnibus T-Scale. In W.K. Hoy & C.G. Miskel, Studies in Leading and Organizing Schools (pp. 181-208). Information Age Publishing: Greenwich: CT.

You can find a copy of this measure and scoring directions on my web site at https://mxtsch.pages.wm.edu

I will also attach directions you can follow to access my password protected web site, where you can find the supporting references for these measures as well as other articles I have written on this and related topics.

All the best,
Megan Tschannen-Moran
William & Mary School of Education

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Community of Practice (CoP) Semi-Structured Interview

Introduction: *As a literacy leader, you have a unique role in your school and in the District. This action research study focuses on examining how the selected literacy leaders' participation in a CoP changes their perceptions of personal self-efficacy, isolation and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice within their literacy leader roles.*

Introductory Protocol: *For note-taking purposes, and so as to ensure the accuracy of these notes, I will record our conversation today. As the researcher, only I will have access to the recording, which will eventually be destroyed after it is transcribed. As indicated on the consent form that you signed at the outset of the study, all conversations and data will be kept confidential. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may stop at any time you wish. In addition, no harm is intended to be inflicted upon you. Thank you for your participation in this interview and in the action research study.*

During the interview, I will ask you some questions, but please feel free to speak honestly and openly as you respond. The interview is intended to last about one hour. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Probes:

- *Tell me more about _____.*
- *Could you explain _____?*
- *What do you mean by _____?*

Information to be Noted by Researcher:

- Name of Interviewer
- Name of Interviewee
- Audio File Name
- Date
- Time
- Location
- List of Pre-determined Interview Questions

APPENDIX D
PILOT TEST EMAIL REGARDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To ensure the reliability and validity of the semi-structured interview questions, a pilot test of the questions will be conducted with a panel. Potential panel participants include a professor of reading education and literacy leaders not participating in the CoP. In soliciting the feedback of the panel, the below email will be sent prior to the conclusion of the study, at which time the semi-structured interviews will be held with study participants.

Dear _____,

I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation at William & Mary. For my dissertation, I am conducting an action research study with a group of literacy leaders who are the sole literacy leader in their schools. During the study, I am implementing a community of practice (CoP) with these literacy leaders and examining the impact of the CoP on their self-efficacy, isolation and trust with one another, and professional growth and practice. The following research questions are being addressed in the study:

1. *After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of self-efficacy?*
2. *After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of isolation and trust with one another?*
3. *After participating in a community of practice, how do school literacy leaders describe changes in their levels of professional growth and practice?*

To answer these three questions, I have created some semi-structured interview questions that will be asked of the study participants at the conclusion of the study. To determine the reliability and validity of these questions, I need to solicit the feedback of others regarding the quality of

the questions, any suggested revisions to the questions, as well as any that may potentially be deleted. In addition, I also need to solicit feedback regarding the interview protocols or procedures to be utilized during the interviews. If you could kindly review the attached interview questions and protocols (not included in Appendix D) and provide me with any feedback or suggestions, I would greatly appreciate it. Your responses will remain confidential. Thank you in advance for your time and assistance in this endeavor.

APPENDIX E

A PRIORI CODEBOOK FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Domain	Description	Examples
Self-efficacy	Personal judgements of one's own capabilities	• Confidence • Effectiveness • Influence • Success • Failure
Situated Learning	Participatory learning that takes place within a learner's individual context	• Learning among literacy leaders • Learning in literacy leaders' schools
Isolation	Detachment from colleagues, especially those in a similar role	• Loneliness • Helplessness • Limited collaboration • Sense of belonging
Trust	An individual's willingness to be vulnerable to others based on confidence in others	• Vulnerability • Confidence in others
Professional Growth	Educator learning and development (literacy leaders)	• Literacy leader learning • Literacy leader development
Professional Practice	Practice within a professional setting (literacy leaders)	• Students • Teachers • Administrators • Community

REFERENCES

Ackerman, R. H., & Maslin-Ostrowski, P. (2002, April 21-25). *Seeking a cure for leadership in our lifetime* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, United States.

Arslan, Ali (2019). The mediating role of prospective teachers' teaching self-efficacy between self-efficacy sources and attitude towards teaching profession. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, *5*(1), 87-96. https://doi.org/10.12973/ijem.5.1.101

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.84.2.191

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014). *Teachers know best: Teachers' views on professional development*.

Brown, D. W. (2011). Right on course. *Learning & Leading with Technology, 39*(1), 26-29.

Caprara, G. V., Barbranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 473-490. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2006.09.001

Clark, S., & Newberry, M. (2019). Are we building preservice teacher self-efficacy? A large-scale study examining teacher education experiences. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 47*(1), 32-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2018.1497772

Coladarci, T. (1992). Teachers' sense of efficacy and commitment to teaching. *Journal of Experimental Education, 60*(4), 323-337. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1992.9943869

Cookson, P. W., Jr. (2005). The challenge of isolation. Professional development: your first year. *Teaching PreK-8, 36*(2), 14-16.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE.

Cuddapah, J. L., & Clayton, C. D. (2011). Using Wenger's communities of practice to explore a new teacher cohort. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *62*(1), 62-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487110377507

Donohoo, J., & Katz, S. (2017). When teachers believe, students achieve: Collaborative inquiry builds teacher efficacy for better student outcomes. *Learning Professional, 38*(6), 20-21. https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/when-teachers-believe-students-achieve.pdf

DuFour, R. (2011). Work together: But only if you want to. *Phi Delta Kappan, 92*(5), 57-61. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171109200513

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010*). Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., & Mattos, M. (2013). How do principals really improve schools? *Educational Leadership, 70*(7), 34-40. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/how-do-principals-really-improve-schools

Fisher, M. H. (2011). Factors influencing stress, burnout, and retention of secondary teachers. *Current Issues in Education, 14*(1), 1-36. https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/658

Fisher, D., Frey, N., Almarode, J., Flories, K., & Nagel D. (2020). *Plc+: Better decisions and greater impact by design.* Corwin.

Flinders, D. J. (1988). Teacher isolation and the new reform. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, (4)*1, 17-29. https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/journals/jcs/jcs_1988fall_flinders.pdf

Fraser, C., Kennedy, A., Reid, L., & Mckinney, S. (2007). Teachers' continuing professional development: Contested concepts, understandings, and models. *Journal of In-Service Education, 33*(2), 153-169. https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580701292913

Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2016). *Coherence: The right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems.* Corwin.

Gaikwad, S. M., & Brantley, P. S. (1992). Teacher isolation: Loneliness in the classroom. *Journal of Adventist Education, 54*(4),14-15, 39-40. http://circle.adventist.org/files/CD2008/CD1/jae/en/jae199254041404.pdf

Geving, A. M. (2007). Identifying the types of student and teacher behaviours associated with teacher stress. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies, 23*(5), 624-640. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.02.006

Goddard, R. D., & Goddard, Y. L. (2001). A multilevel analysis of the relationship between teacher and collective efficacy in urban schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*(7), 807-818. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00032-4

Goddard, R., Goddard, Y., Kim, E., & Miller, R. (2015). A theoretical and empirical analysis of the roles of instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective beliefs in support of student learning. *American Journal of Education,121*(4), 501-530. https://dx.doi.org/10.1086/681925

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Woolfolk-Hoy, A. (2000). Collective teacher efficacy: Its meaning, measure, and impact on student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*(2), 479-507. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037002479

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Woolfolk-Hoy, A. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher, 33*(3), 3-13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x033003003

Goddard, R. D., Salloum, S. J., & Berebitsky, D. (2009). Trust as a mediator of the relationships between poverty, racial composition, and academic achievement: Evidence from Michigan's public elementary schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*(2), 292-311. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x08330503

Goodlad, J. I., and Others, & California Univ., L.A.G.S. of E. (1980). A study of schooling: Series of introductory descriptions. Reprinted from the Phi Delta Kappan. A study of schooling in the United States. Technical Report Series, No 1. *Phi Delta Kappan, 61*(3-6).

Guskey, T. R., & Passaro, P. (1993, April 11-16). *Teacher efficacy: A study of construct dimensions* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, United States.

Hasbrouck, J. (2017). Student-focused coaching. *Theory Into Practice, 56*(1), 21-28. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1252219

Herbers, M. S., Antelo, A., Ettling, D., & Buck, M. A. (2011). Improving teaching through a community of practice. *Journal of Transformative Education, (9)*2, 89-108. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344611430688

Hoy, W. K., Sweetland, S. R., & Smith, P. A. (2002). Toward an organizational model of achievement in high schools: The significance of collective efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 38*(1), 77-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x02381004

Hoy, W. K., & Tarter, C. J. (2004). Organizational justice in schools: No justice without trust. *International Journal of Educational Management, 18*(4), 250-259. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540410538831

Hoy, W. K., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (1999). Five faces of trust: An empirical confirmation in urban elementary schools. *Journal of School Leadership, 9,* 184-208. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268469900900301

Hoy, W. K. & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The conceptualization and measurement of faculty trust in schools: The omnibus T-scale. In W.K. Hoy & C.G. Miskel (Eds.), *Studies in Leading and Organizing Schools* (pp. 181-208). Information Age.

Hoy, W. K., & Woolfolk, A. E. (1993). Teachers' sense of efficacy and the organizational health of schools. *Elementary School Journal, 93*(4), 355-372. https://doi.org/10.1086/461729

Janson, A., & Howard, L. (2004). The odyssey of Ph.D. students becoming a community of practice. *Business Communication Quarterly, 67*(2), 168-181. https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569904265421

Kelley, T. R., Knowles, J. G., Holland, J. D., & Han, J. (2020). Increasing high school teachers' self-efficacy for integrated STEM instruction through a collaborative community of

practice. *International Journal of STEM Education, 7*. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-020-00211-w

Kennedy, A. (2014a). Models of continuing professional development: A framework for analysis. *Professional Development in Education, 40*(3), 336–351. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.929293

Kennedy, A. (2014b). Understanding continuing professional development: The need for theory to impact on policy and practice. *Professional Development in Education*, *40*(5), 688–697. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.955122

Killion, J. (2015). High-quality collaboration benefits teachers and students: Lessons from research. *Journal of Staff Development*, *36*(5), 62-64. https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/high-quality-collaboration-benefits-teachers-and-students.pdf

Kokkinos, C. M., & Kargiotidis, A. (2016). Rating students' problem behaviour: The role of teachers' individual characteristics. *Educational Psychology, 36*(8), 1516-1532. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2014.993929

Korte, D. S., & Simonsen, J. C. (2018). Influence of social support on teacher self-efficacy in novice agricultural education teachers. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 59*(3), 100-123. https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2018.03100

Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2014). Can professional environments in schools promote teacher development? Explaining heterogeneity in returns to teaching experience. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *36*(4), 488, 494. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373713519496

Kraft, M. A., Marinell, W. H., & Yee, D. S (2016). School organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(5), 1411–99. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216667478

Labone, E., & Long, J. (2016). Features of effective professional learning: A case study of the implementation of a system based professional learning model. *Professional Development in Education, 42(1),* 54-77, https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.948689

L'Allier, S. K., & Elish-Piper, L. (2012). Literacy coaches in elementary schools. In R. M. Bean & A. S. Dagen (Eds.), *Best practices of literacy leaders* (pp. 43-62). Guilford Press.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. University of Chicago Press.

Lumpkin, A., Claxton, H., & Wilson, A. (2014). Key characteristics of teacher leaders in schools. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research, 4*(2), 59-67. https://dx.doi.org/10.5929/2014.4.2.8

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*, 27-35. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397

McKnight, J. L., & Kretzmann, J. P. (1996). *Mapping community capacity*. Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. https://naaee.org/sites/default/files/mapping-community-capacity.pdf

Meehan, R. J. (n.d.). http://robertjohnmeehan.com/

Mertler, C. A. (2020). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators*. SAGE.

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. (2011). *The Met Life survey of the American teacher: Preparing students for college and careers*. In *MetLife, Inc*. MetLife, Inc.

Mintzes, J. J., Marcum, B., Messerschmidt-Yates, C., & Mark, A. (2013). Enhancing self-efficacy in elementary science teaching with professional learning communities. *Journal of Science Teacher Education, 24*(7), 1201-1218. https://doi.org/10.1007/S10972-012-9320-1

Mojavezi, Ahmad & Tamiz, Marzieh. (2012). The impact of teacher self-efficacy on the students' motivation and achievement. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies.* https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.3.483-491

Moore, W., & Esselman, M. (1992, April). Teacher efficacy, power, school climate and achievement: A desegregating district's experience. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2020). Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators. *OECD Publishing*.

Ostovar-Nameghi, S. A., & Sheikhahmadi, M. (2016). From teacher isolation to teacher collaboration: Theoretical perspectives and empirical findings. *English Language Teaching, 9*(5), 197-205. https://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n5p197

Ramos, M., Silva, S., Pontes, F., Fernandez, A., & Nina, K. (2014). Collective teacher efficacy beliefs: A critical review of the literature. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 4*(7), 179-188. https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_7_1_May_2014/23.pdf

Ronfeldt, M. (2015). Field placement schools and instructional effectiveness. *Journal of Teacher Education, 66*(4), 304-320. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487115592463

Ross, J. A., Hogaboam-Gray, A., & Gray, P. (2004). Prior student achievement, collaborative school processes, and collective teacher efficacy. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 3*(3), 163-188. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700760490503689

Ruble, L. A., Usher, E. L., & McGrew, J. H. (2011). Preliminary investigation of the sources of self-efficacy among teachers of students with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 26*(2), 67-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357610397345

Saldaña, Johnny. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.

Schleifer, D., Rinehart, C., & Yanisch, T. (2017). Teacher collaboration in perspective: A guide to research. *Public Agenda*.

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Dimensions of teacher burnout: Relations with potential stressors at school. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal, 20*(4), 775-790. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9391-0

Smith, P. A., Hoy, W. K., & Sweetland, S. R. (2001). Organizational health of high schools and dimensions of faculty trust. *Journal of School Leadership, 11*(2), 135-151. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460101100204

Soodak, L. C., & Podell, D. M. (1993). Teacher efficacy and student problem as factors in special education referral. *Journal of Special Education, 27*(1), 66-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/002246699302700105

Soodak, L. C., & Podell, D. M. (1994). Teachers' thinking about difficult-to-teach students. *Journal of Educational Research, 88*(1), 44-51. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1994.9944833

Taylor, P. (2017). Learning about professional growth through listening to teachers. *Professional Development in Education, 43*(1), 87-105. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1030035

Tichenor, M., & Tichenor, J. (2019). Collaboration in the elementary school: What do teachers think? *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 8*(2), 54-61. https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v8n2p54

Timperley, H. S., & Phillips, G. (2003). Changing and sustaining teachers' expectations through professional development in literacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *19*(6), 627-641. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x(03)00058-1

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr, M. (2004). Fostering student learning: The relationship of collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 3*(3), 189-209. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15700760490503706

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). A conceptual and empirical analysis of trust in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 36,* 334-352. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578239810211518

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research, 70*(4), 547-593. https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1170781

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A., & Hoy, W. (1998). Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(2), 202-248. https://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1170754

Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: Four professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and implementation of a new

teaching strategy. *Elementary School Journal, 110*(2), 228-245. https://doi.org/10.1086/605771

Wenger, E. (n.d.). *Communities of practice: Learning as a social system.* The Systems Thinker. https://thesystemsthinker.com/communities-of-practice-learning-as-a-social-system/

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Harvard Business School Press.

Wenger, E. C., & Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review, 78*(1), 139-145. https://hbr.org/2000/01/communities-of-practice-the-organizational-frontier

Wenger-Trayner, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015, April 15). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/

Wilson, C., Marks Woolfson, L., & Durkin, K. (2020). School environment and mastery experience as predictors of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs towards inclusive teaching. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(2), 218-234. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1455901

Woolfolk Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(4), 343-356. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.01.007

VITA

Amy Christine Paulson

Education:	2019-2022	The College of William and Mary Williamsburg, Virginia Doctor of Education *Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership*
	2015-2018	University of Virginia Charlottesville, Virginia Master of Education *Curriculum and Instruction: Reading Education*
	1995-1997	University of Virginia Charlottesville, Virginia Master of Education *Curriculum and Instruction*
	1990-1994	Longwood University Farmville, VA Bachelor of Arts *English*
Experience:	2018-present	Reading Specialist Public Schools
	2017-2018	Title I Reading Teacher Public Schools
	2010-2017	Grade 3 Teacher Public Schools
	1994-2006	Grade 2 & 3 Teacher Public Schools