

Pre-Service Teacher Leaders Directing Professional Learning Communities to Enhance their Peers' Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions

Relevance and Significance of the Topic:

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) enhance teachers' understanding of pedagogical practice. Dee (2010) defined a professional learning community as a "collegial group who are united in their commitment to an outcome" (p. 10). When PLCs work together, the underlying goal of "improving student learning and utilizing best practice is reached" (p. 10). Professional book discussions often focus the PLC; thereby enhancing teachers' instructional practice and professional experiences. an SU PK4 junior level student, described feeling overwhelmed and concerned about dealing with classroom situations. "Most of my concern came from a lack of knowledge and a lack of known resources."

Course time is limited and often does not meet students' needs and may not answer students' questions. Therefore, during the Fall 2011 semester, Dr. Baynum created a program titled Workshop Wednesday (WW) to answer pre-service teachers questions pertaining to designing classroom management routines, utilizing children's literature, supporting readers' comprehension, and other topics. Junior level PK4 majors (N~30) in the Teacher Education Department voluntarily met for ten weeks throughout the fall semester to engage in discussions. As topics and conversations progressed, PK4 students began to take on leadership roles; thereby redesigning the WW approach. In the spring 2012 semester, nine junior level students participated in the redesigned workshop approach. These students, called Workshop Wednesday Leaders (WWL), selected specific research interests and created a schedule to explore literature related to teaching reading. During weekly meetings, WWL took turns presenting a summary of the topic's literature and practical lesson plans to bridge theory into practice. In addition to reporting research findings, WWL learned to pose pointed questions to their peers, direct conversations for active listening, and use purposeful praise to affirm perceptions. This highly organized group of WWL, maintained minutes of the conversations, created a wiki to share documents, and collected resources.

At the conclusion of the spring semester, WWL wrote open-ended reflections responding to the prompt: What did you learn from participating in a PLC? a WWL, wrote in her spring 2012 reflection: "Our PLC has helped me to not only grow as a student and future teacher, but as a person as well." Reflections revealed perceptions of pedagogical, professional and personal growth. A sense of leadership among the WWLs was a shared theme expressed in their reflection statements. They expressed an aspiration to share their knowledge and growth in an effort to increase their peers' perceptions of teaching and learning. As a result, the WWL designed a survey to poll the sophomore level pk-4 pre-service teachers to ascertain their professional interests and needs. This research project represents an effort to extend professional learning communities in the 2012-13 academic year with a new group of participants.

Description of the Project:

During the spring of 2012, WWL sent the survey via e-mail, through the Teacher Education Department to collect information regarding pre-service teachers professional interest areas. The data from this project is the basis for this grant request and the

continuation of the PLC. Results from the survey will be analyzed and used to generate 2012-13 PLCs. Sophomore and junior level PK4 pre-service teachers will be invited to voluntarily attend free, one three-hour workshop during fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters, with a total of six topics presented over the six hours. These workshops will be lead by the WWL who will present relevant research and literature, as well as profile effective literacy lessons for use in elementary classrooms. WWL will prepare a handout outlining research and instruction to guide the sessions. An open-ended reflection with the prompt: What did you learn from participating in a PLC? This will be used to collect data indicating perceptions of professional growth.

Potential for Learning:

The goal of the study is to examine sophomore and junior level PK4 pre-service teachers' perceptions of growth as a result of participation in a professional learning community. Throughout the workshops, participants will engage in active discussions, learn to use purposeful praise to affirm perceptions, and blend theory into practice. Results from the 2012 WWL reflections and the 2012-13 presenters reflections will be compared to determine if there are similar themes of perceptions of academic and pedagogical growth. Analyzing growth among participants and WWL may reveal a double benefit for using PLC with pre-service teachers, specifically examining grow among leaders and participants. . . . a WWL, wrote in her spring 2012 reflection, "I've become more confident in my ability to discuss educational topics by using explicit teacher prompts to ensure peer understanding and participation." Examining reflection results among PLC participants may also reveal similar themes.

In order to analyze the effectiveness of PLCs with pre-service teachers, open-ended reflections will be collected and analyzed for themes indicating shared growth. A qualitative design using Grounded Theory will structure the data collection and analysis. In Grounded Theory, a central question, is used toward the conclusion of the experience, is used to collect data. Journals or written responses to the central question document participants' perceptions and understanding of a shared experience (Creswell, 1998).

Teachers across the country, and particularly in South Central Pennsylvania, participate in PLC on a yearly basis. Using the PLC structure with pre-service teachers will provide opportunities to learn about and discuss pedagogical practices within a workshop approach. Potential growth may result for both the WWL and the participants. WWL will continue to explore research and practices, as well as scaffold their peers in developing a deeper understanding of theory and best practice. Participants will enhance their understanding in a shared experience similar to a structure used by teachers in American schools. Overall, the goal of the PLCs is to increase pedagogical knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Roles:

Three groups structure this research initiative. . . . will be responsible for reviewing survey data from spring 2012, determining PLC topics, organizing PLC events (one three-hour session each semester), collecting reflections as data, and analyzing and summarizing the data. . . . will serve as the Grant Coordinator and Researcher for both Pedagogy and Practice. . . . will serve as the PLC Organizer and Data Manager. In addition, 2011-12 WW participants (

will also help with the organizing and analysis of the PLCs.

PLC Participants will voluntarily attend free, one or two three-hour sessions during the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters. They will sign informed consent forms. They will actively engage in discussions, respond to comments, and learn to use purposeful and active listening, and praise to affirm perceptions. They will write at least two reflections using the prompt: What did you learn from participating in a PLC?

As the Faculty Mentor, Dr. Baynum will regularly meet with the Grant Coordinator and WWLs to help plan, present, and analyze the effectiveness of PLCs for pre-service teachers. On October 29, 2012, members from the 2011-12 WW group will present a one-hour conference session at the Keystone State Reading Association's annual conference. This session will outline using technology to support PLCs and is based on the 2011-12 workshops. Since the SU Undergraduate Research Grant does not allow for a conference presentation outside the award date, no conference funds will be requested.

Budget Justification and Appropriateness:

Many SU alumni and local teachers have shared their professional reading selections with faculty, specifically Dr. Baynum. Their recommendations have focused the professional readings, specifically the books. The WWLs will use the resources to outline the workshop discussions. The WWL have copies of some of the materials, but they will need copies of resources; hence the need to order two or three copies of books and memberships. Copies of the professional reading materials will be purchased and made available to participants via the reserve desk in the Lehman Library. At the conclusion of the study, all teacher education students will have access to these materials via library circulation.

To structure the discussion to be both theoretical and pedagogical, professional readings will include books, electronic articles and children's books. In addition, websites, like www.readinga-z.com (fee based) and www.readwritethink.org (free) specifically designed for teachers will be used to showcase pedagogical practices for elementary classrooms. Membership to these sites allows teachers, and in this case, the trainers to research lessons and instructional materials and use those as examples in the training. Copies of lessons and materials will be organized in a binder and available to participants. Children's literature will be used to apply lessons into practice and used at all PLCs. Professional articles (free access) will be available for both planning and presentations purposes from www.reading.org and other professional sites, including free articles from the SU databases.

References:

- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dees, D., Mayer, A., Morin, H. & Willis, E. (2010). Librarians as leaders in professional learning communities through technology, literacy and collaboration. *Library Media Connection* 29(2). p. 10-13.

2012-13 UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM

1-4-13 1/14

Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania: This worksheet is designed to assist you in preparing your proposal budget. Work with your faculty mentor to identify reasonable costs. Enter your information in the "pink" shaded areas. If you prefer, you may create your own worksheet. If you do so, you are expected to use the same budget categories and to use the same layout as provided on this template. Call IPSSP for questions and/or technical assistance: 717-477-1251.

Project Title:		Pre-Service Teacher Leaders Directing Professional Learning Communities to Enhance their Peers' Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions				
Lead Student Name:						
Lead Student ID #:						
UGR Grant - Proposed Budget						
			\$/unit	#	\$	
Supplies Use these lines for consumable supplies and materials you will need for your project. Do not request funding for electronic equipment and/or digital devices already available through the University.	Item	Example	25	3	75	
	website membership	www.readinga-z.com , consumable	89.95	2	179.90	
	Professional book	<i>Spaces and Places, durable</i>	22.50	2	45.00	
	Professional book	<i>Smart Answers, durable</i>	13.89	2	27.78	
	Professional book	<i>Teach Like Your Hair's On Fire, durable</i>	10.20	3	30.60	
	Professional book	<i>Teaching with Love and Logic, durable</i>	13.06	3	39.18	
	Professional book	<i>Daily Five, durable</i>	19.50	3	58.50	
	Professional book	<i>First Days of School, durable</i>	20.86	3	62.58	
	Children's book	<i>Grandma Torrelli Makes Soup, durable</i>	5.99	4	23.96	
	Children's book	<i>Llama Llama Time to Share, durable</i>	10.97	4	43.16	
	Children's book	<i>Trouble According to Humphrey, durable</i>	5.99	4	23.96	
	Shipping	<i>From Amazon or other sites, consumable</i>			60.00	
	TOTAL SUPPLIES					594.62
						\$
Printing/Posters	Handout for PLC	<i>Summary of Pedagogy and Professional Reading, consumable</i>	120 pages	30	12.00	
	Copies of readinga-z	<i>Copies of Lessons for use during PLC, durable</i>	100 pages	1	10.00	
	Flyers	<i>Advertising PLCs, consumable</i>	20 pages	20	2.00	
	TOTAL PRINTING					24.00
					\$	
TOTAL STUDENT REQUEST					618.62	
TOTAL FACULTY REQUEST (\$400 max)					0.0	

Shippensburg



September 24, 2012

Dear Dr. Baynum,

Your application to use human subjects in your research "Professional Learning Communities" (R# 04-03-12-EHS) has been reviewed using the expedited review process as outlined in Health and Human Services *45 CFR Part 46.110*.

Your application:

☒ Has been approved for implementation for a period of 12 months.

☐ Will require additional time for review by the Institutional Review Board.

If your research takes more than 12 months to complete, approval beyond 12 months is required. To avoid interruption in your research, this approval should be granted on or before the anniversary date of this document.

Wishing you every success in your research endeavors.

Kathryn Potoczak, Ph.D., BCBA-D
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