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A Professional Learning Community for Novice Teachers at a Title I Elementary School: An Action Research Study

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to,

The family I was born into,

The family I married into, and

The family Drew and I have made together.

Reagan Mary, thank you for reminding me of a world outside of graduate school.

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ABSTRACT

The present study describes the effect of a professional learning community (PLC) for novice teachers at Greenville Elementary, a Title I elementary school in the southern United States. The identified problem of practice at this school involves novice teachers who are required to participate in a district-approved Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teachers (ADEPT) model as the teacher evaluation program in addition to maintaining a portfolio of their work experiences. The participant-researcher wondered if this affected novice teacher's self-efficacy in the classroom with children of working-class poor, and if a PLC aimed at increasing their feelings of self-efficacy would be useful. Therefore, the research question, "What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) and novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school?" structured the purposes of the present study that involved support for novice teachers to build their self-efficacy in the classroom with elementary children through a PLC. Data for this action research were comprised of questionnaires, semistructured interviews, and classroom observations. The Teacher Self-Efficacy Survey measured pre-PLC and post-PLC self-efficacy. This instrument was composed of 24 short answers with a Likert scale ranging from a response score of 1-9. Albert Bandura's four sources of efficacy beliefs: (a) performance or mastery experiences; (b) vicarious experiences; (c) verbal or social persuasion; and (d) physiological and/or emotional states, served as the guide for the participant-researcher and her teacher-participants to describe the effect of the PLC on self-efficacy levels of six novice

teachers. The analysis of quantitative data were conducted throughout the action research study, and qualitative data from semistructured and informal interviews, as well as observations, at the PLC revealed four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness. An action plan at the school was designed based on these findings by the teacher-participants and participant-researcher. The first action plan step was to make changes to the institutionalized mentoring program by having teacher-participants become mentors to the novice teachers who would follow behind them. The second action plan step was to address the gap that exists between the privileged, teacher-participants and the Title I students living in poverty in which they teach.

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Chapter 1

Research Overview

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to describe the action research study involving a southern, Title I school and a participant-researcher's goal of improving the professional learning community structure to support novice teachers who teach children of the working-class poor. Research conducted by Stuart and Thurlow (2000) recognized the need to better prepare new teachers for the challenges they will face as they soon begin their teaching career. Beginning teachers report they are underprepared by their university program to deal with children who do not speak English, have disabilities, and come from families who are unable to provide support for learning. More specifically, there is a cultural divide between teachers and their students in upstate South Carolina. Teachers in Greenville Elementary School who serve high poverty students are predominately-white females from a middle class upbringing, who have been raised in very homogeneous suburban areas in SC and who, rarely interacted with other cultures and people of different lifestyles before coming to Greenville Elementary School.

Specifically, the action plan aims to facilitate a new professional learning community (PLC), located in Greenville Elementary School (GES; a pseudonym) a Title I school in the State of South Carolina. The purpose of the PLC was to enhance the professional lives of the novice teachers required to complete a district-approved Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teachers (ADEPT) program. These six novice teacher-participants' work with low socioeconomic status youth in order to

create a learning environment of scholarly practitioners and a culture conducive to a cultural change where novice teachers are supported in their efforts to teach low SES students.

Action Research Overview

The present study determined the effect of a PLC designed to mentor novice teachers at a southern, Title I elementary school. The student population consisted of the following: 48% African-American, 35% Hispanic, 12% White, and 4% other. The researcher identified 245 students through language screenings conducted at the district level to be sufficiently limited in English proficiency. Of the screened students, 100% qualified for free or reduced lunch. GES was located in the southwest area of South Carolina known as the "White Horse Corridor". In this area, 32% of households live in poverty; 66% have only a high school diploma or less and unemployment is greater than 25% in some sections (Cocklin, 2017). the student population of GES is transient. The mobility rate of 30% affects the stability of the student population, and ultimately cohesive instruction. Many of the homes in the GES attendance area are rental properties.

For the present action research study, the identified problem of practice involved GES and the novice teachers who were required to participate in a district-approved Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teachers (ADEPT) program and maintain a portfolio of their work experiences. This program created by Greenville County Schools did not target new teachers' self-efficacy working with low SES students as evidenced by semistructured interviews conducted by the participant-researcher with the six novice teacher-participants.

The specific aims of this study were to (a) collect efficacy data on six novice teacher participants using the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) (b) document PLC meetings and semistructured interviews to explain the TSES findings; and (c) explore Albert Bandura's (1997) four sources of efficacy beliefs, including performance or mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion and physiological, and/or emotional states. The participant-researcher and the teacher-participants used Bandura's four sources of efficacy beliefs as a guide to describe how the PLC affected six novice teachers' TESE scores. The action research study was conducted using a quantitative action research design. The Teacher Self-Efficacy survey instrument developed by Hoy and Woolfork (1993) measured pre-PLC and post-PLC self-efficacy. This choice was made by the participant-researcher as the ADEPT program focused on eight performance standards: (1) knowledge of curriculum; (2) instructional planning; (3) instructional delivery; (4) assessment; (5) learning environment; (6) communication; (7) professionalism; and (8) student achievement. The participant-researcher chose Bandura's theory to effect self-efficacy and analyzed data to implement an action-oriented plan working towards a specific solution. This analysis helped identify the improved self-efficacy in a PLC for novice teachers who worked with low socioeconomic students.

Problem of Practice Statement

The identified problem of practice for the present action research study involved Greenville Elementary, a southern, Title I school and six novice teachers who were required to participate in a district-approved ADEPT program and maintain a portfolio of their work experiences. The participant-researcher believed participation in the ADEPT

program affected novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. This decision was made by the participant-researcher as qualitative data from the six teacher-participants were collected through semi structured interviews. Therefore, the participant-researcher developed a PLC to increase novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. The purpose of using a PLC to support novice teachers and increase understanding of their levels of self-efficacy was to give voices to six novice teachers at GES to further their professional development.

Research Question and Objectives

The research question that guided this scholarly inquiry was as follows: What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) on novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school? To answer this question, the participant-researcher used a quantitative action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014). The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey.

Following Mertler (2014), the participant-researcher used a quantitative action research methodology to answer the research question. Hine (2013) explained that action research methods within the real world of GES and a professional development community would allow ordinary researchers to develop the powers of reflective thought, discussion, and decision to take action to solve individual problems stemming from the ADEPT program. The participant-researcher focused on an identified problem of practice specific to GES. This included the exploration of novice teachers' feeling of self-efficacy as related to their participation in a district-approved ADEPT program, the need for them to maintain a portfolio of their work experiences, and their participation in a PLC. The

participant-researcher determined the ADEPT program was not adequate for the six teacher-participants who teach at a Title I school with low SES students. This was determined through semi structured interviews as four emergent themes were discovered: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness.

The participant-researcher analyzed the data to implement an action-oriented plan working towards a specific solution to improve self-efficacy in a PLC for novice teachers who worked with low socioeconomic students in this Title I school. Nugent, Malik, and Hollingsworth (2012) explained that this level of action research requires a systematic approach to classroom level problems in which change quickly occurs to affect positively the identified issues.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the present action research study was to implement a PLC design for novice teachers who worked at GES, a Title I, southern school as the ADEPT program was not adequate. The secondary purpose of the study was to describe the effect of the PLC on novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and to give them voices in their professional development and practice. The tertiary purpose of the study was to develop an action plan with the teacher-participants, to improve the site approved teacher induction process. The teacher-participants spoke openly in semistructured interviews to the participant-researcher about the formal observation process known as ADEPT and their fears associated with this process. As a group, the ADEPT process was viewed as a "gotcha," as they felt a misbehavior from a student would cause them to not receive a positive evaluation.

Theoretical Base

Teacher self-efficacy is used within this study as the primary lens to determine novice teachers' personal beliefs in their own abilities to work with low SES students. This belief affects the strength of their own convictions in their own effectiveness that determines if they will try to cope with the local and particular situation of low SES students at this school. Specifically the student population of GES is transient. The mobility rate of 30% affects the stability of the student population, and ultimately cohesive instruction. Many of the homes in the GES attendance area are rental properties.

Self-Efficacy

The theoretical foundation for self-efficacy is rooted in social cognitive theory. At the center of the framework developed by Bandura, is the belief that our abilities affect our behaviors, motivation, and success. These beliefs are related to academic performance and self-regulated learning (Henson, 2001).

Teachers with a higher level of self-efficacy tend to be more open to new ideas and are willing to experiment with teaching practices in an effort to reach the needs of their students. They are also less critical of students who make mistakes, and less likely to refer students to special education (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Bandura (1997) described self-efficacy as being shaped through four informational sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences or witnessing others' experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Mastery experiences are the most effective way to boost self-efficacy, as people are more likely to believe they can do something new if it is similar to something they have already done well. Providing opportunities to gain mastery is the reason experiences such as workshops and training programs are offered. Through this level of support, people become more proficient in

skills and increase self-efficacy. This does not mean that new tasks should always be easy and similar to mastered skills. For a strong sense of self-efficacy to exist, a person must attempt a difficult task and work through it.

Vicarious experiences, observations of the successes of others who are similar to one's self, increase self-efficacy. This is linked directly to how much one can relate to the model being observed. Central to coach/trainer-student/client interactions in which the coach demonstrates a skill and the student replicates is the idea that the more similar the watched person believes they are, the greater the influence on the belief the observed behavior can be accomplished (Hayden, 2009).

Within the ADEPT program, novice teachers are observed and evaluated by a three person team which is made up of a building level administrator, an ADEPT team leader, and a peer teacher from another school assigned to the novice teacher by the ADEPT program coordinator. Based on the observations by the ADEPT team, a consensus meeting is held and the teacher's performance is discussed. The team comes to a consensus about this performance and assigns a rating and the teacher is notified by the principal of the result.

Keywords/Glossary

ADEPT

Greenville County Schools uses the Performance Assessment for Teachers as the model for teacher evaluation. This is a South Carolina model approved by the State Department of South Carolina. The modified form is ADAEPT which is the program Greenville County uses which offers support and evaluation based on the contract the teacher holds (Teacher Evaluation, 2015).

Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs have become the primary source of induction support for novice teachers since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A hallmark of this relationship is the assignment of a mentor who is a veteran teacher sometimes referred to as a *buddy* to a new teacher. The mentor in this arrangement is likely to function more as a cheerleader whose sole purpose is to provide emotional support or to provide assistance, for example, how to take lunch count or student attendance. In which case, school officials encourage the new teacher to contact their mentor whenever problems arise. However, some are hesitant to bring up such issues for fear of judgment or being viewed as a burden (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Novice Teacher

This group includes teachers who are either fresh out of a teacher preparation program or who have been teaching one or two years (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000).

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Comprised of teams, educators committed to focusing on improvement meet to learn collaboratively by drawing attention to how effective teaching strategies are meeting the needs of all learners (Stegall, 2011). A PLC model builds on the strengths of a one-on-one mentoring model in its highest achieving form. Hord (1997) explained the results of a professional learning community reduce teacher isolation and create powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be viewed as the belief one has in their capabilities to affect learning outcomes in students with low motivation and low ability to learn. Individuals develop coping methods based on their beliefs in their own abilities. This determines if

they will try to cope with a given situation. When a teacher does not believe he or she can become successful, avoidance coping methods can affect effort levels and persistence when obstacles are faced (Bandura, 1997).

Socioeconomic Class Status (SES)

The social standing or class of a group or individual. It is measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. This measure shows inequities in access to resources. Early academic skills are correlated with home environment, with low literacy environments and chronic stress negatively affect a child's preacademic skills (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009).

Social Cognitive Theory

Initially, theories attempted to explain that behavior had a psychodynamic basis and shared three characteristics: behavior as regulated at a subconscious level, behaviors away from the norm considered as a symptom of a disease or disorder, and that behavior changes because of self-insight through analysis with a therapist. This formed the idea that laying on a couch with a therapist would be the magic bullet for behavioral change, also known as talk therapy. This therapy did gain insight into the client's behavior, but rarely made changes to this behavior (Hayden, 2009).

Title I

Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provides financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure all children meet challenging state academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Potential Weaknesses

The participant-researcher spent time working with the teacher-participants at GES over the course of one semester. At the conclusion of the action research study, teacher-participants had one semester of ADEPT remaining. The final semester consisted of three formal observations and a final consensus meeting. The action research study was limited in time spent with the teacher-participants in terms of the ADEPT time frame. Participant selection was limited to first and second year teachers at GES. The district approved ADEPT program was designed to evaluate this group. Although teacher-participants provided feedback, four of the teacher-participants completed their student teaching at GES. These novice teachers had experience within the research site. However, one teacher-participant, Kayla, did not complete her student teaching at a Title I school. This was her first experience with Title I. Her specific scores on the TSES are shared in Chapter 5.

A PLC model was not in place for novice teachers at GES prior to the present action research study. As such, this was a new approach to collaboration and practice for teacher-participants. During the planning phase, which occurred over the summer of 2016, a PLC model was selected to provide novice teachers with the resources to define their professional practice. Based on research presented in Chapter 2, the participant-researcher determined that this model would allow teacher-participants to establish a routine for constructive conversations through a PLC model outlined by Meyer (2002). However, this particular PLC format was only followed once.

During the first PLC meeting August 29th, Kayla presented grading concerns and asked the other teacher-participants about their personal organizational systems. The conversation immediately turned to the ADEPT portfolio expectations for showing

student grades. The PLC meetings, which occurred after, focused on the ADEPT process based on teacher-participant feedback. They felt it would be more beneficial to discuss the ADEPT process, as it was a collective concern. Therefore, the PLC model used within this action research study began with professional issues and doubts being shared, followed by teacher-participants discussing their concerns specific to the ADEPT process. The ADEPT portfolio that each teacher-participant maintained served as the artifact the PLC meetings focused on. The original PLC format outlined by Meyer (2002) was altered to better meet the needs of the teacher-participants.

Significance of the Study

Among the schools that experience the highest levels of turnover rates, a trend begins to emerge. Schools that report a high concentration of low-income, low achieving, students of color, have teachers who are more likely to either transfer to serve a whiter, wealthier school or leave the profession. In 2004, Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004) inferred this to mean that, "teachers systematically favor higher-achieving, non-minority, non-low-income students" (p.12). Schools that serve a higher minority population are more likely to have staffing that is inconsistent with students being taught by a higher percentage of inexperienced teachers in comparison to predominately-white schools (Hanushek et al., 2004).

For students living in low-income communities, teachers make a profound difference in the lives of the students they teach. Research by Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, and Donaldson (2004) found that new teachers in low-income schools fail to receive the support they need in order to do well. They suggested that new teachers at these schools receive significantly less support in the areas of hiring, mentoring, and curriculum as compared to new teachers in high-income schools. A major responsibility

is placed on the schools who hire new teachers to offer a deeper level of ongoing support. New teachers need opportunities to formulate teams to learn together just as veteran teachers do. They need time to have conversations about their craft and work through challenges in a supportive group with peers who are sharing a similar experience.

Dissertation Overview

The purpose of this action research study was to determine the impact of a PLC on self-efficacy on novice teachers at Greenville Elementary. Chapter 1 provides an introductory section that framed the research question and research problem and describes the identified problem of practice as well as the purpose statement and a summary of the findings. The methodology section includes an overview of the Action Research. Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review of the literature in relation to professional learning communities and self-efficacy. An overview of the literature addresses how the related review of research and literature are related to the identified problem of practice statement as expressed in the research question and purpose statement. In Chapter 3, the action research methodology provides an overview of the specific action research design employed in the study for the process of data collection and analysis for development of the action plan. The research question and design are presented. A description of the research is also included in this chapter. Research findings are shared in Chapter 4 as verbatim quotes collected in response to semistructured interview questions and follow-up questions used to discuss the research question. Chapter 5 shares a summary, discussion, limitation, suggestions for further research, and an action plan

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the scholarly literature involving self-efficacy and professional development communities. The literature reviewed addresses several topics such as social cognitive theory, development of self-efficacy, professional learning communities, and historical contexts. In looking at the literature, PLCs provided an environment than the ADEPT program lacked. Specifically, collaboration among teachers in solving problems related to teaching children of the working-class poor in which the six novice teacher-participants were unprepared for. Therefore, my strategy to search the literature consisted of outlining and focusing on important research trends that related to the problem of practice, research question and purpose of the study.

Theoretical Base

Development of Self-Efficacy

The theoretical foundation for self-efficacy is rooted in social cognitive theory. Social cognitive theory is based on learning that occurs by observing others, with the influence of the environment and behaviors. Specific to teaching, this theory explains the role of an individual interpreting events and behaviors he or she has experienced or observed (Mongillo, 2011). This affects and determines what we come to believe about ourselves, affecting the actions we take and the choices we make. At the center of the framework developed by Bandura is the belief that our abilities affect our behaviors, motivation, and success. These beliefs are related to academic performance and self-

regulated learning (Henson, 2001). Teachers with a higher level of self-efficacy exhibit higher levels of planning and organizing. They also tend to be more open to new ideas and are willing to experiment with teaching practices in an effort to reach the needs of their students. They are also even less critical of students as they make mistakes, and are less likely to refer students to special education (Tschannen- Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). When examining this personal belief with novice teachers, increasing self-efficacy could affect student learning especially in a Title I school.

Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as being shaped through four informational sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences or witnessing others' experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Mastery experiences are the most effective way to boost self-efficacy, as people are more likely to believe they can do something new if it is similar to something they have already done well. Providing opportunities to gain mastery is the reason experiences such as workshops and training programs are offered. Through this level of support, people become more proficient in skills and increase self-efficacy. This does not mean that new tasks should always be easy and similar to mastered skills. For a strong sense of self-efficacy, a difficult skill must be attempted and worked through.

Vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences, observations of the successes of others who are similar to one's self, increase self-efficacy. This is directly linked to how much one can relate to the observed model. Central to coach/trainer-student/client interactions in which the coach demonstrates a skill and the student replicates is the idea that the more similar the person being watched believes they are, the greater the influence on the belief the observed behavior can be accomplished (Hayden, 2009).

Physiological and affective states. Physiological and affective states occur through receiving verbal support that can persuade others to believe they can achieve or master a task, affecting a person's belief in themselves. For example, coaches before games typically encourage players verbally by telling them they are going to win. The same is true when people are told they do not have the skill to do something. They give up quickly (Bandura, 1994).

Somatic and emotional states. Somatic and emotional states describe the physical and emotional states that occur when someone begins to consider doing something that give clues to the likelihood of success and failure. Stressful situations create emotional arousal. Stress and fear can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to the feared task. Emotional arousal affects self-efficacy, which affects the decisions a person makes. If the stress is reduced, self-efficacy can be expected to change. This affects our behaviors and self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1997).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teachers who exhibit a high self-efficacy have a greater commitment to teaching and are more likely to stay in teaching (Tschannen- Moran, & Hoy, 2001). A teacher's view of herself and her ability to influence her environment is important, as a teacher will not pursue an activity if there is no belief in her own ability to achieve a desired outcome. These beliefs can change and vary based upon level, generality, and strength. As tasks become more difficult, this level may decrease. Fortunately, this belief can change and become stronger with time, feedback, and experience (Mongillo, 2011).

Novice Teachers

While self-efficacy is important for all teachers, it is especially important for beginning teachers. Hoy (2000) explained that the profession often overwhelms beginning teachers, and positive beliefs regarding their own capabilities to deal with their current realities become extinguished as they become aware of the responsibilities within the school. In fact, self-efficacy may be the most malleable in novice teachers' early years in which the first years of teaching could be critical to the long-term development. Self-efficacy begins during teacher preparation as teachers are exposed to situations such as their student teaching placement. This continues as they enter the classroom and experience students, colleagues, administration, and parents. The first years of teaching are the most important in shaping teacher self-efficacy. As these beliefs are formed and established, it becomes increasingly difficult to change, as teachers may become resistant (Bandura, 1997).

Researchers who developed two questions to assess teachers' beliefs on student motivation evaluated the effect of teacher self-efficacy, and whether learning was something the teacher could control. The first question explored the teacher's viewpoint on students who were motivated, and whether or not they believed this performance depended on their home environment. The second question assessed how effective teachers felt when they were able to get through to the most difficult students (Armor et al., 1976). The responses of these two questions were used to measure and level the effect teachers felt they could have on the students they were instructing. This research was grounded in social cognitive theory. Based on these two questions, the researchers were able to determine that high teacher efficacy was a predictor of success of teaching reading

to minority students. They also determined a high teacher self-efficacy was a predictor of the initiatives funded federally that had a positive effect on student achievement (Stegall, 2011). As self-efficacy is the personal belief one has in his abilities, finding ways to increase efficacy levels could have a major impact on student learning especially for schools of high-minority, high-poverty students.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Traditional Professional Development to Professional Learning

In terms of how to best deliver professional development, there has been a shift in the way teachers engage, and the assistance that is provided to fit their needs. The traditional and most common type of professional development and the most criticized model within the literature describing best practices on professional development, teacher learning, and teacher change is the workshop model. A workshop is a structured approach to professional development that takes place outside the teacher's own classroom through a lecture-style environment. Typically, this model involves participants who attend a scheduled session led by a leader or expert. Examples of this approach are institutes, courses, and conferences that are traditional forms of professional development and share the features of a workshop approach (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2009).Within the context of the research site, the six novice teacher-participants participated in an ineffective program in terms of providing sufficient time, activities, and content necessary for increasing teacher knowledge and changes within the classroom.

Limitations of the traditional staff development model grow out of the following: teachers not being honored in ways that they construct understanding, professional development opportunities designed outside of the school context, educators' concerns

and issues being ignored, and an inappropriate staff development approach used to influence change in schools. The PLCs offer an opportunity to enhance student and teacher learning while cultivating leadership amongst teachers (Harris, 2010). This provides the best environment for powerful professional development to build staff capacity to function as members of a high performing PLC (DuFour, 2014). Through teams comprised of educators committed to focusing on improvement, a collaborative approach is taken by drawing attention to effective teaching strategies that benefit the needs of all learners (Stegall, 2011). A PLC model builds on the strengths of a one-on-one mentoring model in its highest achieving form. Hord (1997) explained PLCs reduce teacher isolation and creates powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice. This could assist with providing opportunities for teachers to feel successful through positive collegial interactions, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources, and school wide structures for supporting students.

Ross and Bruce (2007) correlated specific professional development activities to an increase in teacher self-efficacy. When the four limitations of traditional staff development mentioned above are honored, improvements occur in teacher and staff outcomes. Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, and Hannay (2001) found that teacher efficacy is stronger when professional development is differentiated for individuals, distributed through the implementation period, established in school networks, and complemented by support focused on instructional issues. Lieberman (1995) states that in order for teachers to engage in meaningful learning with lasting impacts for the classroom, they must engage in ongoing support that bolsters their expertise and is embedded in their everyday work as opposed to traditional workshops or isolated training.

History of PLCs

The idea behind PLCs has connections to reflection, self-evaluating, and ideas of inquiry, and it is not new when viewed through the lens of these sources. Hord (2004) dated the origin of PLCs to *A Nation at Risk* (*ANAR)* published in 1983. This document reflected an essentialist view on education, calling for higher standards and improved content, reporting the findings from a two-year study on the current state of American education. Within this document, President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education expressed deep concern regarding content, expectations, time, and teaching, claiming American schools were failing academically and teachers were not prepared. This linked the country's economic troubles of the time to the conditions of public schools (Ansary, 2007). Mainly, the document called for more homework, school days, higher-order thinking, basics, math, science, humanities, and creativity.

The ANAR envisioned a public school system that offered a rich, well-balanced, and coherent curriculum, which became a precursor to the standards movement. Emphasizing student learning should not be left to chance. After the standards movement collapsed because of the national history standards, ANAR was left without a strategy. The test based accountability movement came along which made testing the national educational strategy. The goal became high test scores regardless of whether the learner gained knowledge. As a result, mountains of data were created that were treated as evidence of a successful movement (Ravitch, 2010).

According to Roberts (2010), after ANAR social science researchers began to analyze the culture of work environments in both education and the public. Peter Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline* used the term "learning organization" to relate the idea of

ownership to improved performance. According to Roberts (2010), Senge argued the most successful organizations of the future would be learning organizations. This terminology made its way into education and became attached to learning communities, which are now more commonly known as PLCs (Roberts, 2010).

Characteristics of PLCs

In *Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Many (2006) argued a PLC is "an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the student they serve" (p.11). In short, PLCs are not programs and cannot be implemented by anyone other than the staff within a building. Rather they are ongoing and involve more than a meeting or workshop requiring participants to learn about or act on new information. Porter (2014) explained, professional learning should provide teachers both time and space to collaborate to improve all aspects of their professional knowledge. With this view, PLCs are tied to the idea that their organization exists to ensure all students learn. For the purpose of the present action research study, the following definition of PLCs developed by Brookhart (2009) will provide guidelines and a systematic approach:

A professional learning community is a group of teacher or administrators who meet regularly, work on shared goals and related tasks between meetings and accomplish shared goals.

Successful PLCs evolve over time across contexts, building on two major assumptions. The situated nature of knowledge is the first assumption in the daily experience of teachers, best understood through critical reflection with others who share

the same experiences. The second assumption is professional knowledge and skill will develop by actively engaging teachers in learning communities and will improve student learning as a result. The following components are considered foundational and essential for PLCs to be effective: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and the application of that learning, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. Below is a summary of each of the key components (Hord, 2009).

Shared and supportive leadership. PLCs shift leadership responsibilities from a traditional top down approach to decision making that empowers staff members. In a typical school setting, principals hold the authority and power positions, and they are viewed as all knowing, with the staff members beneath them. In this arrangement, it is difficult for staff members to offer differing viewpoints about the school's effectiveness. Through a PLC, the school is able to grow professionally and view themselves as working for the same goal. When principals work with teachers as peers and colleagues, authority is shared in terms of work, and a collaborative relationship is established (Hord, 1997). This fosters learning not only across teams, but also across the entire school (DuFour, 2014).

Shared values and vision. Necessary for PLCs is the adoption of a common mission, vision, values, and goals that guide and direct the work of PLCs. This approach allows PLCs to evaluate ways in which teachers' instructional practices align with the school goals (Stegall, 2011). DuFour and Eaker (1998) believe teachers who collaborate in building the vision for the school feel more connected and are willing to work towards accomplishing them. Therefore, decisions about teaching and learning are guided by the school's shared values and vision. The mission, which provides a guide for all activity

within the school, becomes the school's focus. The vision is a goal of what the school should look like in the future with values reflecting the daily actions and norms of the staff. Pirtle & Tobia (2014) explaind the effectiveness of PLCs depends on conversations about teaching and learning that are tied to their daily work with students. For this to happen, schools must provide an atmosphere of trust and conditions in which PLCs can thrive.

Collective learning and the application of that learning. Changes connected to student outcomes are supported through conversations in PLCs. This occurs through reflective dialogue between colleagues that connects research to teaching practices. John Dewey (1933) emphasized the importance of reflecting as "the kind of thinking that consists of turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration" (p. 3). In applying the idea of reflective practices to PLCs, teachers need time to compare them to what they know about teaching and learning, and to adjust their own practices.

Shared personal practice. Research conducted by Kraft et al. (2012) explained that teachers who felt successful with students and schools provided them with collegial interactions, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources, and school wide structures for supporting students were more likely to stay at their schools and in teaching. Several teachers reported their jobs became more manageable when they worked with peers who shared a commitment to students and colleagues. In fact, teachers who felt most positively about their students were those who received support from their administrators and colleagues.

Supportive conditions. When, where, and how the staff comes together to learn, make decisions, problem solve and work are determined through supportive conditions. In order for this to become common practice, two forms of supportive conditions are necessary: structural conditions and collegial conditions. Structural conditions include time to meet and talk, small size of the school and physical proximity of the staff to one another, teaching roles that are interdependent, communication structures, school structures, school autonomy, and teacher empowerment (Hord, 1997). Collegial conditions pertain to people capacities, the willingness to accept feedback and work towards improvement. For a PLC to be successful, respect and trust amongst colleagues is necessary in which norms of behaviors are agreed upon and there exists positive attitudes.

Title I

Johnson et al. (2004) found that new teachers in low-income schools fail to receive the support they need in order to do well. New teachers at these schools receive significantly less support in the areas of hiring, mentoring, and curriculum when compared to new teachers of high-income schools. They are less likely to have a good match with their mentor, receive less contact with their assigned mentor, and are less likely to feel supported with curriculum. This gap is alarming since research suggests that when new teachers receive support and feel successful within the first years of teaching, retention is positively affected. These findings underscore the need for an early support system especially for teachers of Title I schools. More specifically, Title I provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with a high percentage of children from low-income families through the Elementary and Secondary

Educational Act (ESEA). Schools enrolling at least 40% of children from low-income families are eligible for funding though Title I for school wide funding designed to improve the achievement of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Conclusion

Just as students require dialogue to become critical thinkers, novice teachers require time to engage in meaningful dialogue in order to gain meaning and action. The critical goal is not only that beginning teachers profit by solving problems, but overall they profit by knowing how to think constructively about any problem (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2012). The analysis of literature presented within this chapter identifies the ability PLCs have to increase novice teacher self-efficacy through growth, inquiry, collaboration, and reflection. As stated previously, a major responsibility is placed on the schools who hire new teachers to offer a deeper level of ongoing support. Novice teachers need opportunities to formulate teams to learn together just as veteran teachers do. Time is needed to have conversations about their craft and work through challenges in a supportive group with peers who are sharing a similar experience.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The research question that guided this scholarly inquiry was as follows: What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) on novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school? To answer this question, the participant-researcher used a quantitative action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014). The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. This chapter looks at several different aspects of this action research study: the research site, the participants, research design, instrumentation, data collection and analysis procedures and the role of the researcher.

Action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014) was chosen for this study due to its association with knowledge being created from problem solving in the real world. Hine (2013) explained that action research has the ability to allow ordinary people in research to develop the powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision, and action on individual problems. In this sense, action research allowed me to focus on the problem of practice specific to Greenville Elementary. TSES were analyzed by the participant-researcher to implement an action-oriented plan for the 2017-2018 school year involving a Southern, Title I school. Nugent et al. (2012) explain that this level of

research requires a systematic approach to classroom level problems in which change must take place quickly in order to positively affect identified issues.

Researcher

The action research took place within the participant-researcher's worksite of GES, which allowed the participant-researcher to take an active role in the research as an insider. The participant-researcher worked at GES for 3 years as a classroom teacher and 6 years as an instructional coach. As a faculty member of GES, the participant-researcher did not have an administration role and did not have power and authority over teacher-participants, which could have negatively affected the data collection.

Advantages to the participant-researcher position came in the form of being an insider to GES. This allowed the participant-researcher to be accepted easily. Professional and social contact was maintained with the teacher-participants throughout the research, which allowed for informal conversations throughout the day. Knowing the personality of the teacher-participants prior to the start of the action research study allowed interactions to occur easily. Arranging semi-formal interviews was easily accomplished, as all teacher-participants shared their time and knowledge on a voluntary basis. The teacher-participants had access to the participant-researcher throughout the study for additional support with ADEPT. This level of access provided significant advantages for this kind of study.

> Speaking the same insider language, understanding the local values, knowledge and taboos, knowing the formal and informal power structure, and obtaining permission to conduct the research, to interview, and to get access to records, and documents easily facilitate the research process. (Unluer, 2012, p. 5)

During the data collection phase of the action research study, there were disadvantages that came from an insider position. The participant-researcher's role of an instructional coach and researcher allowed overlooking of certain routine behaviors. This required the participant-researcher to intentionally confront blind spots such as the ADEPT program. Having participated in the ADEPT program 7 years ago, the fears and anxieties associated with the process were overlooked initially, as the participant-researcher assumed a lack of mentoring solely affected teacher-participant self-efficacy. Although the participant-researcher had experience with this program, information was needed to obtain the whole picture to understand fully how this process was affecting self-efficacy. While conducting semi-formal interviews, this required the participant-researcher to frequently ask, "Can you tell me more about that?" to gain insight into areas the teacher-participants assumed the participant-researcher knew.

Sample

Participant selection was limited to first and second year teachers at GES as the district approved ADEPT program was designed to evaluate this group. On August 14th, participants were presented with a brief description of the research plan. The description emphasized anonymity of the participants. To protect teacher-participants, all responses and interviews were documented, but remained anonymous when reported to protect the identity of all involved. This acted as a measure to ensure colleagues would not have access to information collected or to embarrass teacher-participants.

Teacher-Participants

Kayla (pseudonym). The first participant is a tall woman in her mid-twenties. She comes from a middle class background and attended a teacher education program at

Winthrop University, a small private institution in South Carolina. This was her second year teaching second grade. The location of her classroom was on the first floor of the building with Amy, a second year teacher, across the hall from her. The remainder of the second grade team was on the second floor of the building.

Sarah (pseudonym). Participant two is an Asian American first year teacher in her early twenties. She has a middle class background. After completing her student teaching at GES and graduating from a teacher education program at Furman University, a small, private school in SC, she accepted a long-term substitute teaching position at GES. At the completion of the spring semester, she accepted a full time teaching position in second grade.

Caroline (pseudonym). In her early twenties, Caroline is a second year kindergarten teacher. She is white, middle class and attended a teacher education program at Clemson University, a medium-sized, land-grant institution in SC. She completed her student teaching at GES in a kindergarten classroom. Her host teacher, Allison (pseudonym), was a member of her grade level team as a first year teacher. Yet, when describing support systems within the building, she did not mention Allison. She described peers with whom she made connections from surrounding grade levels.

Amy (pseudonym). Amy is a second year teacher in her mid-twenties. She is white, from a middle class background and attended a teacher education program at Anderson University, a small, private institution in SC. She completed her student teaching at GES in a fifth grade classroom. After graduating, she accepted a long-term substitute position in a fourth grade classroom at GES. At the end of the school year, she accepted a teaching position in second grade. The location of her classroom was on the

first floor of the building that was isolated from the remainder of her team with the exception of Kayla who was across the hall.

Ella (pseudonym). She is a second year teacher in her mid-twenties. She is white, from a middle class background and, like Sarah, she too graduated from Furman University in the teacher education program. She completed her student teaching at GES in a fourth grade classroom. At the end of the year, she accepted a teaching position teaching fourth grade. Her classroom was isolated from the remainder of the fourth grade team, as it was located by the second floor stairwell. The classroom located next to hers was an intervention classroom that provided services for primary grade level students and was often empty throughout the day.

Emma (pseudonym). She is a second year teacher in her late-twenties. She is white, from a middle class background and graduated from University of North Carolina at Charlotte. After graduation, she accepted a teaching position at an elementary school in North Carolina. After several life events, she resigned mid-year and moved to be close to family. She completed a long-term substitute position at GES in a second grade classroom once she moved. At the completion of the year, she accepted a teaching position at GES in a fifth grade classroom. Her classroom was located on the fourth and fifth grade hallway with her team members across the hallway.

Setting

The Title I elementary school is located in the southwest area of South Carolina. The student population consisted of the following: 48% African-American, 35% Hispanic, 12% White, and 4% other. Two hundred forty-five (245) students were identified through language screenings conducted at the district level to be sufficiently

limited in English proficiency. One hundred percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The research site was located in the southwest area of South Carolina known as the "White Horse Corridor". In this area, 32% of households live in poverty, 66% have only a high school diploma or less and unemployment is greater than 25% in some sections (Cocklin, 2017).

ADEPT Model

The GES used the district approved mentoring model for teachers based on a South Carolina State Department model of teacher evaluation. This is a required program for teachers to obtain licensure. The model is ADEPT, meaning assisting, developing, and evaluating professional teachers. This model offers differing levels of support and evaluation based on the contract held by the teacher. Teachers who are considered induction (first year) and annual contract teachers (second year) are assigned a trained mentor within the same building to assist as needed. This mentor received training through the school district over the course of a 3-day workshop. Induction and annual contract teacher receive written feedback based on mentor observations and administrator observations within their classroom. A portfolio is also maintained that is submitted to the principal at the end of the school year as determined by the ADEPT program ("Teacher Evaluation," 2015).

Annual contract teachers are formally evaluated. They continue to receive the support of a trained mentor, but are observed by a three-person team that is comprised of the building administrator and an ADEPT lead teacher and a peer teacher from another school. The team then meets to arrive at a consensus about the teacher's performance and assign a score based on their performance. This process occurs in the fall with written

feedback provided to the evaluated teacher midway through the year and at the end of the year.

Data Collection

Observational and interview data were collected to polyangulate (Mertler, 2014) The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (2001) data. The objective was to determine the relationship between learning communities and novice teacher's self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school. To maintain confidentiality, all interview data collected were maintained on a password protected iPad and stored in a locked file cabinet. Participants were assigned a code that connected them to the data, stored in a locked file cabinet separate from the data.

The action research study was conducted using a quantitative action research design. The Teacher Self-Efficacy survey instrument developed by Hoy and Woolfork (1993) measured pre-PLC and post-PLC self-efficacy. This instrument was composed of 24 short answers with a Likert scale ranging from a response score of 1-9 (Appendix A). This survey was distributed to the teacher-participants by the participant-researcher. Data were reported with the higher score indicating the teacher-participant believed that factor influenced teaching. Completed surveys were stored in a locked file cabinet located in the researcher's office. This survey was administered at the beginning and end of the research following the same format.

Polyangulation

In order to provide a broad, informative, complete, and balanced understanding of the Teacher Self-Efficacy survey was viewed as the primary data set as it was developed using Bandura's (1997) four sources of efficacy beliefs, data polyangulation was utilized

by including multiple data sources to guard against viewing data in a simplistic way based on the case studies of the four teachers. To protect against presenting data in a self-serving way, a variety of data sources were used, including a self-efficacy survey, interviews, and observations.

PLC observations were made at five PLC meetings (one hour each meeting) held after school. When analyzing the field notes, a holistic approach was taken. The main purpose of the PLC observations were to contextualize the TSES survey data. During the observations, notes were recorded in the participant-researcher's journal. These observations occurred in the fall 2016 semester on August 29, September 19, October 10, November 14, and December 5, specifically. Meetings were held in the media center, a common meeting area normally utilized for faculty, committee, and team meetings. The GES did not have a PLC model in place for novice teachers prior to this action research Study although the ADEPT program was in place.

After the analysis of the self-efficacy surveys, interviews were conducted independently with participants. This process consisted of three interview sessions (Appendix B). A semistructured interview guide provided the focus for the interview, but teacher-participants were able to expand and discuss topics not prompted in the question. An audio recording of each interview was made and transcribed by the participant-researcher. The length of interviews averaged thirty minutes each. The use of base questions with the option to follow up a given response with alternative, optional questions better allowed responses to be compared to the answers of participants. An audio recording was made of each interview using an iPad assigned through the school

district. This iPad was password protected and could not be accessed by anyone else. Interviews were transcribed using a word processing document.

The action research took place within the participant-researchers worksite of GES, which allowed the participant-researcher to take an active role in the research as an insider. The participant-researcher worked at GES for 3 years as a classroom teacher and 6 years as an instructional coach. As a faculty member of GES, the participant-researcher did not have an administration role and did not have power and authority over teacher-participants, which could have negatively affected the data collection.

Advantages to the participant-researcher position came in the form of being an insider to GES. This allowed the participant-researcher to be accepted easily. Professional and social contact was maintained with the teacher-participants throughout the research, which allowed for informal conversations throughout the day. Knowing the personality of the teacher-participants prior to the start of the action research study allowed interactions to take place easily. Arranging semi-formal interviews was easily accomplished, as all teacher-participants shared their time and knowledge on a voluntary basis. The teacher-participants had access to the participant-researcher throughout the study for additional support with ADEPT.

In addition, observations were conducted during this group's regularly scheduled monthly PLC meetings. The participant-researcher's role was of a participant-observer, as this group of teacher-participants had not participated in a PLC model previously. To establish a routine for constructive conversations, routines of the PLC using the model outlined by Meyer (2002) was used as the framework. The conversational routines for each professional learning community meeting were as follows:

1. Approval: The Internal Ethics Review Board and Greenville County's research office approved all procedures.
2. Check-In: Participants spent 1-2 minutes to reporting personal and professional information to the group. This allowed time to develop sympathetic relationships and to share successes. Professional issues and doubts were also be shared at this time that the participant may not feel is appropriate to disclose in another professional setting.
3. Charrette: This portion was a formal and focused conversation. Teacher - participant presented an artifact from their ADEPT portfolio. After presenting to the group, a conversation immediately took place. Through this model, the group became the collective authority in which they directly had ownership of the professional conversation and the pace of the meetings. Participation in the ADEPT program is mandatory as it is a component of the formal evaluation process within Greenville County.

The Six Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Measured on a Scale

The survey utilized was the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Appendix A). The scale developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) was chosen because it built upon the theoretical framework of Bandura. The long form of this survey consisted of 24 items that asked participants to choose a response along a nine point Likert scale. The following items were used to determine efficacy in student engagement: 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, and 22; Efficacy in Instructional Strategies: items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24; and Efficacy in Classroom Management: items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21 (Appendix B).

Data Analysis and Reflection

A quantitative data analysis of the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Tchannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) were conducted. The following descriptive statistics were performed: mean, standard deviation, and median. Rather than making inferences and drawing conclusions from the six teacher-participants quantitative data, qualitative data collected through interviews and observations from PLC meetings were also analyzed for patterns, relationships, and common themes.

After all information was transcribed, the data were read several times. Each interview was first viewed separately, and then combined with like answers and responses from other interviews. As categories began to emerge, comments were categorized based on concepts and ideas. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe this process as coding that allows the researcher to interact with the data in order to make comparisons and discover concepts within. Throughout the coding process, categories were changed, merged, or omitted, while new categories were generated, with new relationships discovered. Through the collection of data, the participant-researcher learned teacher-participant self-efficacy was impacted by four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness, which emerged through coding analysis.

Reflection was a continuous process throughout the action research Study in the form of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting stages. Teacher-participants reflected the action research process as outlined by Mertler (2014). Action research was appropriate as it is cyclical and assumes the reflection and action one takes will inform

the next cycle of one's action and reflection. This approach allowed for learning in real-time collaboration with participants to occur. To begin this process, the participant-researcher invited teacher-participants to a meeting that allowed for a transparent explanation of the study in terms of improving the practice at GES.

As interview, along with PLC observation, data were collected and coded, a more open-ended approach was necessary as the scope of the data collected and analysis required a new perspective which pointed to a differing conclusion. Throughout the study, teacher-participants were invited to reflect on the process and share the authority of interpretation. This reflection on the part of the participant-researcher led to collaborative inquiry, which provided a professional voice for the six novice teacher-participants and allowed for a deeper understanding of the research question.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided information regarding the action research design of the present study, as well as the process used to conduct it. The ADEPT program lacked collaboration among teachers in solving problems related to teaching children of the working-class poor in which the six novice teacher-participants are unprepared for. The framework of professional learning communities (PLC) promotes shared decision making and collaboration in a safe environment by trust and encouragement which is redetected in the culture. These practices promote organizational improvement and student achievement. This chapter also includes information about the collection and analysis of data, descriptions of the population, teacher-participants serving low SES students, and the instruments used to gather data about the novice teacher's feelings of self-efficacy after experiencing a professional learning community (PLC) aimed at mentoring.

Chapter 4

Findings & Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a professional learning community (PLC) designed to support novice teachers completing the ADEPT program at a southern, Title I elementary school. Greenville Elementary School (GES) the research site was located is in the southwest area of South Carolina known as the "White Horse Corridor". Within this area 32% of households live in poverty; 66% have only a high school diploma or less and unemployment is greater than 25% in some sections (Cocklin, 2017). The student population consisted of the following: 48% African-American, 35% Hispanic, 12% White and 4% other. Two hundred forty-five (245) students were identified through language screenings conducted at the district level to be sufficiently limited in English proficiency. One hundred percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.

The identified problem of practice for the present action research study involved GES and the novice teachers who were required to participate in a district-approved ADEPT program and maintain a portfolio of their work experiences at a Title I school. The participant-researcher believed that this affected novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. Within this arrangement, the participant-researcher took an active role in the action research in addition to the role of GES's instructional coach. Therefore, in the summer of 2016, a PLC was developed for this research study to explore novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. Using the PLC to support these novice teachers understanding of

their levels of self-efficacy, enabled the researcher to employ action research to collect data in order to give voice to these six novice teachers at GES in order to increase their feelings of self-efficacy. This PLC was held in conjunction with the ADEPT program to offer another layer of support not provided to Title I teachers. The specific aims of this study were to provide professional development and to (a) collect efficacy data on six novice teacher participants using the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES); (b) document PLC meetings and semistructured interviews, to explain the TSES findings; and (c) explore Albert Bandura's (1997) four sources of efficacy beliefs, including performance or mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and/or emotional states.

The following research question guided this scholarly inquiry: What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) on novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school? To answer this question, the participant-researcher used a quantitative action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014). The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. Hine (2013) explained that action research methods within the real world of GES and a professional development community would allow ordinary researchers to develop the powers of reflective thought, discussion, and decision to take action to solve individual problems.

The participant-researcher focused on an identified problem of practice specific to GES. This included the exploration of novice teachers' feeling of self-efficacy as related

to their participation in a district-approved ADEPT program, the need for them to maintain a portfolio of their work experiences, and their participation in a PLC.

This chapter describes the results gathered in the quantitative action research study. The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. The outcomes of the interviews supported the triangulation of data (Mertler, 2017) in response to the research question. Three face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant. Specific results to the TSES (Bandura, 1997) are reported in tables 4.1-4.2. As for interviews, along with PLC observation, data were collected and coded; the information began to contradict the participant-researchers premature judgement, which assumed a lack of mentoring support affected novice teacher self-efficacy. The quantitative data analysis was conducted throughout the action research study, and qualitative data from semistructured and informal interviews, as well as observations, at the PLC revealed four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness.

Data Collection Strategy

Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. The Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy survey instrument developed by Hoy and Woolfork (1993) measured pre-PLC and post-PLC self-efficacy. This instrument was composed of 24 short answers with a Likert scale ranging from a response score of 1-9

(Appendix A). This survey was distributed to the teacher-participants by the participant-researcher. Data were reported with the higher score meaning the teacher-participant believed that factor influenced teaching. Completed surveys were stored in a locked file cabinet located in the participant-researcher's office. This survey was administered on August 29, 2016 at the beginning of the data collection process and December 14, 2016 at the end of the data collection process.

Qualitative Data

PLC observations were made at five PLC meetings (one hour each meeting) held after school. When analyzing the field notes, a holistic approach was taken. The main purpose of the PLC observations were to contextualize the TSES survey data. During the observations, notes were recorded in the participant-researcher's journal. These observations occurred in the fall 2016 semester on August 29, September 19, October 10, November 14, and December 5, specifically. Meetings were held in the media center, a common meeting area normally utilized for faculty, committee, and team meetings. The GES did not have a PLC model in place for novice teachers prior to this action research Study.

Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. The outcomes of the interviews supported the triangulation of data (Mertler, 2017) in response to the research question. Three face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant. The 18 total interviews took place in the participants' rooms in an effort to make them more comfortable. All interviews were recorded using a school issued, password protected iPad. The participant-researcher transcribed the audio recordings

verbatim. The data were analyzed according to emergent themes. The teacher-participants consisted of one first-year teacher and five second-year teachers, all of whom were female. The outcomes of the interviews provided qualitative insight into the TSES.

Data Interpretation

Based on pre-PLC TSES results, teacher-participants rated themselves highest on average for efficacy in classroom management (6.97 out of 9; see Table 4.1). The teacher-participants rated themselves on average lowest for efficacy in instructional strategies (6.45 out of 9). Efficacy in student engagement had an average rating of 6.85 out of 9. There was no statistically significant difference between the two conditions.

Table 4.1

Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale Mean and Standard Deviation

Pre-PLC Subscales	Mean	Standard Deviation
Efficacy in Student Engagement	6.85	1.031
Efficacy in Instructional Strategies	6.45	1.009
Efficacy in Classroom Management	6.97	1.175

After participation in the PLC (see Table 4.2) teacher-participants reported their efficacy beliefs increased in the following areas, efficacy in student engagement (from mean = 6.85 to 7.0), efficacy in instructional strategies (from mean = 6.45 to 6.54), and efficacy in classroom management remained the same (mean = 6.97 to 6.97). Novice teachers' efficacy ratings of their classroom management received the highest mean score on the pre-PLC TSES. On the post-PLC TSES, efficacy in student engagement received the highest mean score. Within the PLC structure, teacher-participants were able to meaningfully engage in conversation about their everyday work. Positive collegial

interactions were fostered, which assisted with reducing isolation and providing opportunities for novice teachers to feel successful (Hord, 1997).

Table 4.2

Results from the Post-PLC analysis

Post-PLC Subscales	Mean	Standard Deviation
Efficacy in Student Engagement	7.0	1.129
Efficacy in Instructional Strategies	6.54	1.129
Efficacy in Classroom Management	6.97	1.406

Table 4.3

Correlated Sample t-test

	Pre-PLC		Post-PLC		
	M	SD	M	SD	*t*-test
St. Engagement	6.8	1.031	7.0	1.129	0.5
Inst. Strategies	6.45	1.009	6.54	1.129	0.38
Cl. Management	6.97	1.175	6.97	1.406	0.5

To triangulate the quantitative data, qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and informal interviews during PLC meetings. Moreover, observations at PLCs were documented in a journal by the participant-researcher. Qualitative data obtained through semistructured and informal interviews, and PLC observations were analyzed for the purpose of explaining and elaborating on the TSES findings.

Participants and Preliminary Ratings on Bandura's Scale

Kayla. The first participant is a tall woman in her mid-twenties. She comes from a middle class background and attended at teacher education program at Winthrop University, a small private institution in South Carolina. This was her second year

teaching second grade. The location of her classroom was on the first floor of the building with Amy, a second year teacher, across the hall from her. The remainder of the second grade team is on the second floor of the building. Kayla's lowest scoring subscale score on the TSES was in Efficacy in Instructional Strategies and her highest scoring subscale was Efficacy in Student Engagement.

Sarah. The second participant is an Asian American first year teacher in her early twenties. She has a middle class background. After completing her student teaching at GES and graduating from a teacher education program at Furman University, a small, private school in SC, she accepted a long-term substitute teaching position at GES. At the completion of the spring semester, she accepted a full time teaching position in second grade. Her scores on the TSES determined Efficacy in Classroom Management was her lowest scoring area.

Caroline. In her early twenties, Caroline is a second year kindergarten teacher. She is white, middle class and attended a teacher education program at Clemson University, a medium-sized, land-grant institution in SC. She completed her student teaching at GES in a kindergarten classroom. Her host teacher, Heather, was a member of her grade level team as a first year teacher. Yet, when describing support systems within the building, she did not mention a name. She described peers with whom she made connections from surrounding grade levels. Her lowest scoring subscale on the TSES was Efficacy in Student Engagement.

Amy. Amy is a second year teacher in her mid-twenties. She is white, from a middle class background and attended a teacher education program at Anderson University, a small, private institution in South Carolina. She completed her student

teaching at GES in a fifth grade classroom. After graduating, she accepted a long-term substitute position in a fourth grade classroom at GES. At the end of the school year, she accepted a teaching position in second grade. The location of her classroom was on the first floor of the building that was isolated from the remainder of her team with the exception of Kayla, who was across the hall. Her lowest subscale score on the TSES was Efficacy in Instructional Strategies.

Ella. She is a second year teacher in her mid-twenties. She is white, from a middle class background and like Sarah, she too graduated from Furman University in the teacher education program. She completed her student teaching at GES in a fourth grade classroom. At the end of the year, she accepted a teaching position teaching fourth grade. Her classroom was isolated from the remainder of the fourth grade team, as it was located by the second floor stairwell. The classroom located next to hers was an intervention classroom that provided services for primary grade level students and was often empty throughout the day. Her lowest scoring subscale on the TSES was Efficacy in Student Engagement.

Emma. She is a second year teacher in her late-twenties. She is white, from a middle class background and graduated from University of North Carolina at Charlotte. After graduation, she accepted a teaching position at an elementary school in North Carolina. After several life events, she resigned mid-year and moved to be close to family. She completed a long-term substitute position at GES in a second grade classroom once she moved. At the completion of the year, she accepted a teaching position at GES in a fifth grade classroom. Her classroom was located on the fourth and

fifth grade hallway with her team members across the hallway. Her lowest scoring subscale on the TESE was Efficacy in Instructional Strategies.

Data Analysis and Reflection

Coding

The analysis of quantitative data were conducted throughout the action research study and qualitative data from semistructured and informal interviews, as well as observations, at the PLC revealed four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness.

Table 4.4

Themes

Interview and PLC Themes	Subordinate Theme
Formal Observations	• Changing the way they taught, • Fear, and • Confusion with the process.
Support Systems	• Relying on Neighboring Teacher, • Assigned mentor, • Team members having other responsibilities, Having to reach out to another teacher off grade level, and • School Support.
Confidence in Teaching	• Feels comfortable in the area they view themselves as strongest in.
Unprepared to teach in a Title I school	• Parents, • Students, • Collecting advice from veteran teachers, and • Feeling overwhelmed.

Theme 1: Formal Evaluation

The teacher-participants spoke openly in semistructured interviews to the participant-researcher about the formal observation process known as ADEPT and their fears associated with this process. The GES used the district approved mentoring model for teachers based on a South Carolina State Department model of teacher evaluation. The model is ADEPT, meaning Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teachers. This model offers differing levels of support and evaluation based on the contract held by each teacher. Teachers who are considered induction (first year) and annual contract teachers (second year) are assigned a trained mentor within the same building to assist as needed. They received training through the school district over the course of a 3-day workshop. Induction and annual contract teacher receive written feedback based on mentor observations and administrator observations within their classroom. A portfolio is also maintained that is submitted to the principal who is a member of the ADEPT team at the end of the school year as determined by the ADEPT program ("Teacher Evaluation," 2015).

The following is a discussion of each of the teacher-participants' feelings about ADEPT and the ways in which their scores on the TSES were triangulated to determine their feelings of self-efficacy for teaching children of working-class poor people in the south at a Title I school. The fall semester was the start of this process for five of the teacher-participants, as they were second year teachers. Sarah, the only first year teacher participant was not required to complete the formal ADEPT process at that time. She will begin that process during the 2017-2018 school year. As a group, the ADEPT process was viewed as a "gotcha," as they felt a misbehavior from a student would cause them to

not receive a positive evaluation. Amy shared, to be better prepared for observations, "I was told to look at the observation form as soon as it was posted and to make sure I knew what observers were looking for when they came into my room" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). Kayla explained, "I feel like the first year of teaching is the only year you can make a mistake as the second year is the formal observation process. I'm so afraid to make a mistake. I'm afraid to not have a job" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). Caroline echoed Kayla's statement by stating, "I'm so glad I'm not the only one" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). Collectively they shared fears of what could prevent them from successfully passing due to circumstances out of their control in which the ADEPT program. The ADEPT model failed to meet the needs of the teacher-participants within the action research study. Bandura and Adams (1997) explain stress and fear can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to the feared task.

When describing the formal observation process and their experience with it, Kayla described an observation in which her Promethean Board was not working, and she felt unprepared, realizing she did not have a backup plan. At which point, the assistant principal came into her classroom. After explaining to him what was going on, he looked at her and said, "Make some magic happen". She explained that she had to pull something out of her hat. She went on to describe how she recovered and managed to make it through the lesson (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016). Yet, this experience has left her fearful of the ADEPT process, as she recognized being unprepared could happen again and felt the consequences would be more severe.

Amy elaborated on a formal observation experience from her first year of teaching which happened during a day she describes as chaotic. She explained,

> It was a horrible lesson and I went on a tangent about something else. The lesson was all over the place. I got raked over the coals for that, understandably. The principal asked me what I thought about the lesson. I said it was horrible. It was a last minute thing that I threw together. It didn't work and it was my fault. I tried to pull things from my hat. I learned that I have to have think out my lesson plans and to not stray. This observation got me to stop and think. It's really important that I do this job correctly and always be prepared. (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016)

Participants focused on concerns regarding the written feedback component of the observation process. Caroline shared with the group the feedback she received from a recent formal observation. She believed it was unclear. She shared with the group, "If it's not evident, I have to read between the lines" (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016). The participants felt this was an accurate description of their observations as well. Caroline admitted to having asked peers to read her observation to help her interpret the meaning. She felt the observer dictated what was said during the observation, but neglected to offer suggestions or positive feedback. She said, "As I was reading it, I thought that it was just a long list of everything I said and did while they were in the room." Ella added, "I'd like to know how to read my observation" (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

In the planning phase, the PLC was envisioned to act as a vehicle in which novice teachers would be able to report personal and professional information to the group. This

would allow time to develop sympathetic relationships and to share successes. Professional issues and doubts would also be shared which the participant may not feel is appropriate to disclose in another professional setting. This was followed by one participant presenting a classroom artifact to the group while sharing background information necessary to understand. After presenting to the group, a conservation would immediately take place. Through this model, the group would become the collective authority in which they directly had ownership of the professional conversation and the pace of the meetings. However, this never occurred. During the first PLC meeting, Kayla presented to the group her concerns about grading, including how others tracked it. The conversation immediately turned to ADEPT, and how they would be assessed on their portfolio. Participants were more willing to talk about grading but only in terms of their final evaluation. PLC meetings, which occurred after, focused on the ADEPT process out of concern from participants. The ADEPT model as designed by Greenville County failed to meet the needs of the six teacher-participants within the action research study as it lacked the ability to support the Title I teachers of GES and the low SES students in which they teach.

Theme 2: Support Systems

A shared frustration among participants was the institutionalized mentoring support program in place at GES. Emma shared,

> My assigned mentor didn't help me. She asked me on the fly if I needed anything. She didn't have the time to help me so she would listen to me and never follow up. One day she came to my door while I was teaching and asked if there was

anything I needed help with. I told her about a Social Studies test and she never came back to help. (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016)

Kayla explained, "I saw my mentor twice. She was always helping other people" (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Yet, participants shared stories of team members who became their informal mentor through a natural coming together based on shared interests and proximity to their own classroom. For example, Amy discussed relying on grade level members for support instead of her assigned mentor, as they understood what was needed and had previously taught the unit but the mentor did not, as she had no experience with the second grade curriculum. Kayla explained she needed help the most in the afternoon when her assigned mentor had left and her grade level had gone home, as they had to be with family. She found a teacher on the same hall, a veteran who also stayed late, and over time this relationship developed into a mentoring relationship where she relied on this person instead of the school level assigned mentor " (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

Although the institutionalized structure was not described as successful by teacher-participants, informal mentoring relationships were taking place adjunct to the formal mentoring structure in place. Participants shared stories of teachers within the building who supported them and how this affected them. All participants conveyed an understanding of how important this act was for their feelings of success. Amy reported,

> Marilyn (pseudonym) was my neighbor, but she was also one of my best friends because she was there for me. She encouraged me when I felt like I couldn't do anything. She said, you can do this. You've never done anything like this before,

this is your first time. She was just very encouraging and she still is. (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016)

Sarah explained,

I just seemed to continue to run to Patricia (pseudonym) next door. I'm continuing to do that with the teacher who is next door to me now. I would always go to her and ask her about curriculum, behavior problems or anything that had to do with teaching. She showed me what she never said you need to do this. Instead, she explained what she did. She always told me to take it and make it my own. So, I had the basics of it and I got to adapt it and make it my own and to do what fit with me. (Int #1, personal communication, August 22, 2016)

Kayla shared how colleagues changed the way she viewed teaching writing, "Last year, I learned from coworkers that writing is a strong suit for me. I never knew that until last year. I am a little more confident going into this year teaching writing" (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016).

Theme 3: Confidence in Teaching

Participants attributed their confidence and level of preparedness to strength in a content area. Ella admitted to being a "science person," as she is most comfortable teaching this content area. She explained, "I am more comfortable in science than in others" (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016). Kayla echoed this statement by also sharing that she was very confident in her ability to teach science. She went on to explain her favorite was science because she was allowed to make messes with her students. She felt that her excitement for this subject allowed for her students to become excited prior to the lesson beginning (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016).

Caroline shared feelings of confidence when teaching math. She felt this subject area lent itself more to real life conversations, which benefits her students,

> I know they want to talk to me. I know that maybe they don't get a lot of real conversations and people listening to them. I feel confident because I know they want to talk instead of silencing them through the day. I like to listen to them. (Int #1, personal communication, August 22, 2016)

Ella described herself as not being a very confident person, but shared a lesson that was fun for her students. After reading *Harry Potter*, she planned activities based on the book for the last day of school. She described staying late to prepare, but felt that it really paid off as she was prepared, as they were very excited to participate. Based on this experience, she said, "It was so great that I definitely marked it on my calendar for this year. Harry Potter day is May 26th this year. It's going to be something I do every year" (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016).

Theme 4: Feelings of Unpreparedness

Each teacher-participant described feelings of panic, confusion, and feeling terrified. Although teacher-participants felt more confident at the beginning of their second year, in comparison Ella shared the following:

> Last year, my first year of teaching, I was terrified. I distinctly remember having to stare out the window to calm myself down once all of the kids were in here. This year, it was much easier in my second year because I had that background knowledge of what to expect, but there are still moments where I wish I could hit a pause button and regroup myself and then keep going. You definitely find out

really quickly if you're meant to be a teacher or not based on the first two or three weeks. (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016)

Kayla shared,

Last year was like a tornado of confusion and new things. This year is so much better because I know how to go through a lunch line by myself. It's easier to teach my students the expectations because I am more prepared with that this year. I love the first couple weeks of school because building the community in my classroom is one of my favorite things to do. You kind of start to see the kids come out of their shell and kind of start to get to know each other and start being themselves. That is always really fun. This year, I am going to be more organized than I was last year. It's kind of helping me also not be as confused and less tornado like because I am more organized and what worked last year what didn't work last year. (Int. #1, personal communication, August 14, 2016)

Caroline explained going into her first year of teaching, she did not realize how organized she would need to be in order for the day to run smoothly. She explained,

I didn't realize every single thing I needed to have done even if I thought it was silly. For example, having my cards stacked in order to put on an anchor chart. I think that kind of turned a light bulb on. Just knowing even though I felt like I was over preparing I was really just doing everything I needed to be doing. I guess I've always been a fly by the seat of your pants person which isn't a great thing when you're teaching. I always work better under pressure. Pressure when you know you have it to get it done, but this was like a lot better when I over prepared, but really to just have every single tiny little thing ready to go. I think I

changed not what I was doing, but things started running more smoothly as a result of planning way ahead and having everything down to the last minute. (Int #1, personal communication, August 22, 2016)

Being unfamiliar with the background of the students they were teaching was a subordinate theme, which participants felt contributed to their feelings of being underprepared. Amy explained a veteran teacher helped her to adjust, "Mrs. Dodge (pseudonym) taught me a lot just by being here and how to treat the children with their backgrounds and where they come from. It was all new to me when I got here. I just learned" (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016). Kayla also shared that a veteran teacher helped her to understand better how to work with students of a different background from her own,

> Mrs. McLane (pseudonym) just helped me out a lot last year seeing her love on her kids. She always has a positive attitude. Even this year, I have some of her kids from last year and every day at lunch they want to get up and hug her and she lets them she doesn't tell them to sit down. She lets them love on her a little bit. (Int #1, personal communication, August 24, 2016)

Kayla explained the difficulties she faced when she first realized the limited background knowledge and experiences her students had. She explained,

> I was unprepared to teach the moments, which are considered teachable. I didn't have an understanding of where the kids were coming from. With this school being a highly diverse school, I wasn't ready to be a mom and nurse. When discussing the beach, I was not prepared to read books about it and talk through it. I didn't know I had to be prepared to stray away based on their interest. You have

> to grab it while it's there. It's not in the lesson plans and I struggled with that last year. What do I do? It's so much more than what is on the lesson plan (Int #3, personal communication, December 6, 2016).

Reflective Stance

Reflection was a continuous process throughout the action research study in the form of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting stages. Teacher-participants reflected the action research process as outlined by Mertler (2014). Action research was appropriate as it is cyclical and assumes the reflection and action one takes will inform the next cycle of one's action and reflection. This approach allowed for learning in real-time collaboration with participants to occur. To begin this process, the participant-researcher invited teacher-participants to a meeting, which allowed for a transparent explanation of the study in terms of improving the practice at Greenville Elementary.

As interview, along with PLC observation, data were collected and coded, information began to contradict the participant-researchers premature judgement, which assumed a lack of mentoring support affected novice teacher self-efficacy. A more open-ended approach was necessary as the scope of the data collected and analysis required a new perspective in which themes began to emerge that pointed to a differing conclusion. Throughout the study, teacher-participants were invited to reflect on the process and share the authority of interpretation throughout the study. This reflection on the part of the participant-researcher led to collaborative inquiry, which provided a professional voice for the six novice teacher-participants and allowed for a deeper understanding of the research question.

Data were shared with participants during afterschool meetings in which the only goal was reflection. Themes were shared that had been collected through interviews and PLC observations. Participants were given the opportunity to share multiple sides by encouraging participation. To ensure the accuracy of information collected, at the midpoint of the study, participants were given the opportunity to determine if they felt the collected data were accurate. At this point, novice teachers wanted to immediately discuss what changes could be made at the school level. Kayla shared, "I think we should have an experienced team leader who can help us and be a support" (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016). They were dissatisfied with the current institutionalized mentoring model in place, which assigns a mentor to a new teacher prior to the school year starting. They felt assistance from a veteran teacher on their grade level was more appropriate. They believed this person could help them adjust to GES and help them as they ran into problems. Amy believed some of the feelings associated with being unprepared could be addressed before the school year starts. She explained that administration meeting with new teachers prior to the beginning of the school year would help. She also felt explaining schoolwide expectations would help clear up general confusion. One example she gave was showing new teachers the expectations of taking a classroom of children through the lunch line. She remembers feeling lost the first day of school as she navigated this process alone (PLC #3, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

Reflecting with teacher-participants occurred throughout the data collection process, and an action plan was created that allowed the teacher-participants to define their practice. Reflections and findings of the study were shared with the administration

team of GES at a scheduled leadership meeting. Members of the administration team were able to ask questions at this time and plan for upcoming changes as needed. This detailed action plan is discussed in Chapter 5.

Interpretation of Results of the Study

Data Interpretation

The data indicated the PLC model had a positive effect on novice teacher self-efficacy. To determine the self-efficacy levels of participants prior to the study, the TSES survey was completed, which measures self-efficacy using a scale from 1-9. Based upon the post-PLC results, participants rated themselves highest on average for efficacy in student engagement (7.0) and lowest on average on efficacy in instructional strategies (6.54). Data collected through interviews and PLC meeting observations allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. The outcomes of the interviews and PLC meetings supported the triangulation of data in response to the research question.

Four emergent themes affected teacher-participants self-efficacy: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness, which emerged through coding analysis. The six teacher-participants were not prepared to teach in a Title I school, and although Greenville County Schools along with GES claimed the ADEPT process would prepare these novice teachers, the data supported a differing reality. When these novice teachers received their classrooms, they were left unprepared even with the institutionalized support systems in place. Instead of the ADEPT process leaving teachers feeling

empowered through the system in place, teacher-participants' self-efficacy was affected by the model used as illustrated by Kayla's statement,

> I feel like the first year of teaching is the only year you can make a mistake as the second year is the formal observation process. I'm so afraid to make a mistake. I'm afraid to not have a job. (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016)

Caroline echoed Kayla's statement by stating, "I'm so glad I'm not the only one" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016).

The ADEPT model failed to meet the needs of the teacher-participants within the action research study. Bandura and Adams (1997) explained stress and fear could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to the feared task. Emotional arousal affects self-efficacy, which affects the decisions a person makes. If the stress is reduced, self-efficacy can be expected to change. Somatic and emotional states describe the physical and emotional states that occur when someone begins to consider doing something which give clues to the likelihood of success and failure. Kayla explained, "I'm so afraid to make a mistake. I'm afraid to not have a job" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). When discussing the ADEPT process, she explained how she felt being unprepared would result in severe consequences.

Data collected underlined Bandura's (1997) theory, physiological factors such as being excessively stressed in a demanding situation may have detrimental effects on self-efficacy and emotional reactions associated with the experience. These feelings have negative consequences for individuals with low-self efficacy, as they are more likely to give up easily in challenging situations. "It is not the sheer intensity of emotional and

physical reactions that is important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted" (Bandura, 1997, p.108). Specifically, the level of self-efficacy the participants had is an important factor in determining how to overcome demanding situations. Participants with a low-self efficacy are more likely to give up as they view this process as an obstacle. "Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of self efficacy is firmly established" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80).

Within this action research study, a PLC offered support as novice teachers defined their professional practice. Hord (1997) explained a professional learning community reduces teacher isolation, creates powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice. Research conducted by Kraft et al. (2012) explained that teachers who felt successful with students and schools provided them with collegial interactions, opportunities for growth, appropriate assignments, adequate resources, and school wide structures for supporting students were more likely to stay at their schools and in teaching. Several teachers reported their jobs became more manageable when they worked with peers who shared a commitment to students and colleagues. In fact, teachers who felt most positively about their students were those who received support from their administrators and colleagues.

Within the PLC structure, teacher-participants were able to meaningfully engage in conversation about their everyday work. Positive collegial interactions were fostered, which assisted with reducing isolation and providing opportunities for novice teachers to feel successful (Hord, 1997). To support this, Kayla expressed to the participant-teachers how overwhelmed she was and began to share her fears of failure. As Kayla expressed these feelings, Caroline said, "I'm so glad I'm not the only one" (PLC #2, personal

communication, September 19, 2016). This statement was empowering for not only the other teacher-participants but for Kayla, who felt she was the only member of the PLC who felt unsuccessful. Throughout the action research study, teacher-participants began sharing openly with one another and providing support, which was lacking from their institutionalized mentor assignment.

Ross et al. (2001) found that teacher efficacy is stronger when professional development is differentiated for individuals, distributed through the implementation period, established in school networks, and complemented by support focused on instructional issues. Lieberman (1995) stated that in order for teachers to engage in meaningful learning with lasting effects for the classroom, they must engage in ongoing support that bolsters their expertise and is embedded in their everyday work, as opposed to traditional workshops or isolated training.

Answering the Research Question

The research question that guided this scholarly inquiry was as follows: What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) on novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school? To answer this question, the participant-researcher used a quantitative action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014). The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey.

Data collected and analyzed indicated the ADEPT model failed to meet the needs of the teacher-participants within the action research study. Bandura and Adams (1997) explained stress and fear could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to the feared task.

Emotional arousal affects self-efficacy, which affects the decisions a person makes. If the stress is reduced, self-efficacy can be expected to change. Somatic and emotional states describe the physical and emotional states, which occur when someone begins to consider doing something which give clues to the likelihood of success and failure. Kayla explained, "I'm so afraid to make a mistake. I'm afraid to not have a job" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). When discussing the ADEPT process, she explained how she felt being unprepared would result in severe consequences.

The following key questions emerged from the findings and implications:

1. How can we make meaningful changes to the institutionalized mentoring program implemented by Greenville County through a vis-à-vis program to support teachers of low SES students?
2. How can we address the gap that exists between the privileged, teacher-participants and the Title I students living in poverty in which they teach?

The key questions were taken into consideration when reflecting with teacher-participants and throughout the development of the action plan in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Interviews, along with PLC observations, were used to triangulate data to explain and refine TSES results. The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question: What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) on novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school? The qualitative results were examined according to themes that were used for explaining the TSES results. Feedback from teacher-participants on surveys and in semistructured interviews as well in informal conversations that took place during PLC meetings, were

also included and analyzed to expand upon the ratings on the TSES. The analysis of quantitative data were conducted throughout the action research study and qualitative data from semistructured and informal interviews, as well as observations, at the PLC revealed four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness, which emerged through coding analysis. The results presented in chapter 4 are used in Chapter 5 for the purpose of discussing the research question and creating an action plan, which addressed the institutionalized mentoring program and was maintained to assist privileged teacher-participants to relate to Title I, students of poverty.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings and conclusions and to articulate the action plan targeted to these findings and conclusions. Specifically, the action plan aims to facilitate a new PLC in Greenville Elementary School (GES), a Title I school in the State of South Carolina. The purpose of the PLC was to enhance the professional lives of the novice teachers who work with these low socioeconomic status youth in order to create a learning environment of scholarly practitioners and a culture conducive to change. The chapter starts with a brief overview of the research and segues into a discussion of the role of the action researchers in the development and implementation of the action plan. Next, the action plan is described in detail and a summary of research findings discusses the major points of the study. The chapter culminates in suggestions for future research.

Overview of the Research

The GES's demographics consisted of the following: 48% African-American, 35% Hispanic, 12% White, and 4% "Other." Two hundred forty-five (245) students were identified through language screenings conducted at the district level to be "sufficiently limited" in English proficiency. Low socioeconomic status (SES) is determined by the 100% of students who qualified for free or reduced meals. The identified problem of practice for the present action research study involved GES and the novice teachers who were required to participate in a district-approved ADEPT program and maintain a

portfolio of their work experiences. Being the instructional coach of GES, the participant-researcher believed that this affected novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. Within this arrangement, the participant-researcher took an active role in the action research. Therefore, in the summer of 2016, a PLC was developed for this research study to explore novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy. Using the PLC to support these novice teachers understanding of their levels of self-efficacy enabled the researcher to employ action research to collect data in order to give voice to these six novice teachers at GES in order to increase their feelings of self-efficacy. The specific aims of this study were to provide professional development and to (a) collect efficacy data on six novice teacher participants using the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES); (b) document PLC meetings and semistructured interviews, to explain the TSES findings; and (c) explore Albert Bandura's (1997) four sources of efficacy beliefs including performance or mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal or social persuasion, and physiological and/or emotional states.

The following research question guided this scholarly inquiry: What is the effect of participation in a professional learning community (PLC) on novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school? To answer this question, the participant-researcher used a quantitative action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014). The quantitative data were considered the main data source to answer the research question. Data collected through semistructured interviews allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. Hine (2013) explained that action research methods within the schoolhouse walls of GES and a professional development community would allow an ordinary researcher to develop the powers of reflective

thought, discussion, and decision to take action to solve local problems about novice teachers' professional preparation, to prepare them to work with low SES students

Key Questions

Through the collection of data, the participant-researcher learned teacher-participant self-efficacy was impacted by four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness, which emerged through coding analysis. The following key questions emerged from the findings and implications:

1. How can we make meaningful changes to the institutionalized mentoring program implemented by Greenville County through a vis-à-vis program to support teachers of low SES students?
2. How can we address the gap that exists between the privileged, teacher-participants and the Title I students living in poverty in which they teach?

The key questions were taken into consideration when reflecting with teacher-participants and throughout the development of the action plan.

Action Researcher

The action research took place within the participant-researchers worksite of GES, which allowed the participant-researcher to take an active role in the research as an insider. The participant-researcher worked at GES for 3 years as a classroom teacher and 6 years as an instructional coach. As a faculty member of GES, the participant-researcher did not have an administration role and did not have power and authority over teacher-participants, which could have negatively affected the data collection.

Advantages to the participant-researcher position came in the form of being an insider to GES. This allowed the participant-researcher to be accepted easily. Professional and social contact was maintained with the teacher-participants throughout the research, which allowed for informal conversations throughout the day. Knowing the personality of the teacher-participants prior to the start of the action research study allowed interactions to take place easily. Arranging semi-formal interviews was easily accomplished, as all teacher-participants shared their time and knowledge on a voluntary basis. The teacher-participants had access to the participant-researcher throughout the study for additional support with ADEPT.

> Speaking the same insider language, understanding the local values, knowledge and taboos, knowing the formal and informal power structure, and obtaining permission to conduct the research, to interview, and to get access to records, and documents easily facilitate the research process. (Unluer, 2012, p. 5)

During the data collection phase of the action research study, there were disadvantages that came from an insider position. The participant-researcher's role of an instructional coach and researcher allowed certain routine behaviors to be overlooked. This required the participant-researcher to intentionally confront blind spots such as the ADEPT program. Having participated in the ADEPT program 7 years ago, the fears and anxieties associated with the process were overlooked initially, as the participant-researcher assumed a lack of mentoring solely affected teacher-participant self-efficacy. Another disadvantage came from teacher-participants assuming the participant-researcher knew how they felt about the ADEPT program. Although the participant-researcher had experience with this program, information was needed to obtain the whole picture to fully

understand how this process was affecting self-efficacy. While conducting semi-formal interviews, this required the participant-researcher to frequently ask, "Can you tell me more about that?" to gain insight into areas the teacher-participants assumed the participant-researcher knew.

Developing an Action Plan

Reflection was a continuous process throughout the action research study in the form of planning, acting, developing, and reflecting stages. Teacher-participants reflected on the action research process as outlined by Mertler (2014). Action research was appropriate as it is cyclical and assumes the reflection and action one takes will inform the next cycle of one's action and reflection. This approach allowed for learning in real-time collaboration with participants to occur. To begin this process, the participant-researcher invited teacher-participants to a meeting, which allowed for a transparent explanation of the study in terms of improving the practice at GES.

As interview, along with PLC observation, data were collected and coded, information began to contradict the participant-researchers premature judgement, which assumed a lack of mentoring support affected novice teacher self-efficacy. A more open-ended approach was necessary, as the scope of the data collected and analysis required a new perspective in which themes began to emerge, which pointed to a differing conclusion. Throughout the study, teacher-participants were invited to reflect on the process and share the authority of interpretation throughout the study. This reflection on the part of the participant-researcher led to collaborative inquiry, which provided a professional voice for the six novice teacher-participants and allowed for a deeper understanding of the research question.

To better explain, data were shared with participants during two afterschool focus groups, which occurred on October 13th and December 14th. Both focus groups began with the participant-researcher sharing themes with Kayla, Sarah, Emma, Amy, Ella, and Caroline. At the October 13th focus group meeting, the participant-researcher shared support systems subordinate themes that emerged from interviews and asked participants to share their thoughts and to explain further what they meant. The following subordinate themes were discussed in further detail: relying on neighboring teacher, assigned mentor, school support, and having to reach out to another teacher not on their grade level.

By providing teacher-participants with the opportunity to reflect on data collected, the participant-researcher ensured the accuracy of information collected. During focus group participation, teacher-participants were given the opportunity to determine if they felt the collected data were accurate. At the October focus group meeting, novice teachers wanted to discuss immediately what changes could be made at the school level. For example, Kayla shared, "I think we should have an experienced team leader who can help us and be a support." She was dissatisfied with the current institutionalized mentoring model in place that assigned a mentor to a new teacher prior to the school year starting. Like others, she felt assistance from a veteran teacher on grade level was more appropriate because she could help as novice teachers ran into "problems" such as

Amy believed some of the feelings associated with being unprepared could be addressed before the school year starts. She explained that administration meeting with new teacher prior to the start of the school year would help. She also felt explaining schoolwide expectations would help clear up general confusion. One example she gave was showing new teachers the expectations of taking a classroom of children through the

lunch line. She remembers feeling lost the first day of school as she navigated this process alone.

There were two action plans that emerged. One is "Support Systems," with four phases, and the second is "Feelings of Preparedness," and three phases. Those Phases are described in detail below. The proposed PLC mentoring model is similar to ADEPT in that a novice teacher will receive support from a teacher from GES and mentors will receive training prior to the experience. Where this mentoring program differs is that the mentors are teachers who were considered novice teachers the year before. Typically, the principal determines who participates as a mentor and completes the letter of recommendation for the district level training. Instead of a 3-day workshop, mentors will revisit the art of mentoring throughout the experience in which support will also be offered to the mentor. The mentor observation model will differ from the ADEPT model in that a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference components have been added to support continued professional growth.

Action Plan: SMPP (Supporting and Mentoring Peer Program)

A frustration shared by Emma was the institutionalized mentoring support program in place at GES. Her statement provided evidence, "My assigned mentor didn't help me. She asked me on the fly if I needed anything. She didn't have the time to help me so she would listen to me and never follow up."

The findings of the present action research study supported research by Johnson, et al. (2004) who found that new teachers in low-income schools fail to receive the support they need in order to do well. Mentoring programs have become the primary source of induction support for novice teachers since the release of *A Nation at Risk* in

1983 (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As a result, most states have adopted some type of mentoring program for new teachers, but new teachers of low-income schools are less likely to have a good match with their mentor and to have less frequent interactions related to the core activities related to teaching (Johnson et al., 2004). "Novice teachers need opportunities to think with others about the teacher they want to be, given the students they teach and the contexts within which they work" (Meyer, 2002, p. 30)

Despite these good intentions and support provided, mentoring programs can be problematic. Assigning a novice teacher a mentor does not ensure quality interactions, deliberate planning, or frequency of meetings. Years of experience alone cannot predict a mentor's ability to work with a novice teacher. What often determines the level of success required to make an impact is the mentors good will, intuition, and commitment (Meyer, 2002). With this focus, the action plan makes the following recommendation to make changes to the institutionalized mentoring program within GES. The data gathered supported this as Kayla explained, "I saw my mentor twice. She was always helping other people." In spite of the institutionalized mentoring program not being very well organized, mentoring was alive and well. This occurred without the institutionalized structure being well organized. As reported by teacher-participants, informal mentoring relationships took place adjunct to the formal institutionalized mentoring structures.

The action plan is intended to build upon this strength of GES. The recommended targeted action is for novice teachers to give back to GES by becoming mentors to the novice teachers who will follow them. The participant-researcher, GES's instructional coach, along with teacher-participants will be responsible for monitoring this new arrangement. The participant-researcher will inform GES administration throughout the

implementation of the success of the program, which will be determined through continued semi-formal interviews. Data collected throughout will be presented to Greenville County School District as an alternative to their current institutionalized mentoring program. The following mentoring action plan is proposed.

Phase I of the Action Plan

Beginning in July 2017, the participant-researcher will meet with teacher-participants to design a clear vision for a mentoring program for GES. The conversation will focus on shortcomings of the ADEPT institutionalized mentoring program. This discussion will be used as an opportunity to discuss what worked and what could have been improved. Expectations for SMPP will be clearly defined, ensuring program expectations and support are balanced. The administration of GES will be consulted as this is a change to the district supported mentoring program. This measure will ensure all parties involved are aware of the changes and can act as a support system throughout the implementation.

Phase II of the Action Plan

July and August 2017 will focus on teacher-participants preparing for the mentoring experience by participating in a PLC focusing on the text, *Mentoring New Teachers Through Collaborative Coaching: Linking Teacher and Student Learning* (Dunne & Villini, 2007), which will be paid for through GES professional development funds. The goal of this professional book study is for mentors to examine mentoring techniques with the goal of implementing what they have learned. This text will be referenced throughout for mentors to create a professional growth environment that will

assist the mentor in becoming a stronger reflective practitioner while helping their mentee.

Phase III of the Action Plan

August 2017 will focus on the participant-researcher and mentors defining mentor selection criteria for GES. At this time, formal and informal mentor matching strategies will be developed with the consultation of administration. The mentoring program will become operational at this point. The goal of the mentor at this point will be to discuss curriculum implementation, available resources for support, pacing schedule for instructional planning (Rubicon Atlas for Greenville County), and discuss professional growth goals. The mentor will assist with the discussion of the professional growth goals to facilitate reflection and models that will support these goals.

Phase IV of the Action Plan

The remainder of the year, September 2017 through May 2018, will provide the opportunity for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating information regarding the effectiveness of the mentoring program. This will happen as mentors, mentees, and administration provide feedback on the effectiveness of the program to the participant-researcher. The TSES will be used to determine the programs effect on teacher self-efficacy. Discussion of professional growth goals will occur quarterly with the mentor initiating that conversation. Mentors will complete a pre-conference, observation, and post-conference with their mentor to aid in the discussion of professional growth. This documentation will be submitted quarterly to the participant-researcher to ensure a quality mentor relationship is taking place. If a conflict occurs at any time, the participant-researcher will work with both parties to resolve the issue. The Greenville

County teacher certification office will be notified of the results at the completion of the year-long GES mentoring program.

Action Plan: Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Being unfamiliar with the background of the students the teacher-participants were teaching was a subordinate theme that participants felt contributed to their feelings of being underprepared. Research conducted by Stuart and Thurlow (2000) recognized the need to better prepare new teachers for the challenges they will soon face as they soon begin their teaching career. Beginning teachers report they are underprepared by their university program to deal with children who do not speak English, have disabilities, and come from families who are unable to provide support for learning. More specifically, there is a cultural divide between teachers and their students. Teachers serving high poverty students are predominately-white females from a middle class upbringing, having been raised in very homogeneous suburban areas, rarely interacting with other cultures and people of different lifestyles.

Similarly, Kayla explained the difficulties she faced when she first realized the limited background knowledge and experiences her students had. She explained,

> I was unprepared to teach the moments, which are considered teachable. I didn't have an understanding of where the kids were coming from. With this school being a highly diverse school, I wasn't ready to be a mom and nurse. When discussing the beach, I was not prepared to read books about it and talk through it. I didn't know I had to be prepared to stray away based on their interest. You have to grab it while it's there. It's not in the plans and I struggled with that last year. What do I do? It's so much more than what is on the lesson plan.

The second action plan recommendation is to address the gap that exists between the privileged, teacher-participants and the Title I students living in poverty in which they teach. The recommended targeted action for these findings is for teacher-participants at GES to receive training on culturally responsive teaching, which emphasizes the importance of teachers' understanding the cultural characteristics and contributions of various groups. For GES classrooms to be effective for all learners, an environment that is responsive and includes a respectful climate is necessary to meet the needs of every student. For the purpose of the action plan, culturally responsive teaching would allow teacher-participants to gain information of the students within their classroom to rethink the curriculum and reshape teaching methods (Banks & Banks, 2001).

Smith (1998) emphasized the importance of showing respect towards students and their culture. The focus is not on the students and their adjustment to teacher-participants' teaching style and attitude regarding historical events, but rather teaching and instructional strategies that takes into account culture, language, social, and economic backgrounds. Teacher-participants need support in order to bridge the gap between school and home, as well as what separates them. Brester and Railsback (2015) explained that teacher-participants must develop mutual trust, consider the cultural attitudes some families have towards schooling, and remain considerate when reaching out. In order for families to trust schools and staff members, they must believe they are fair, dependable and have their child's best interest at heart. This level of trust is built over time based on interactions. Schools that are more aware of different cultures develop programs, policies, and activities that build on the strengths and values of community members. This might involve participating in social activities within the community and visiting families at

home. Involvement efforts need to be more collaborative, inclusive, and culturally relevant.

To address specifically this action plan step, teacher-participants need to acknowledge their own privilege, which places them at an advantage in comparison to their students. Dorhauer (2015) explained that being privileged comes with the ability to lose vision of what makes their students uncomfortable. Coming to terms with their own privilege, which they are unaware of, will be a journey of insight, honesty, and hard truth. The following action plan has been created to address this area.

Phase I of the Action Plan

August, September, and October 2017 will focus on teacher-participants making reflective and practical connections with students within their classroom. Teacher-participants will begin to consider how they might adapt the curriculum to make it more culturally responsive by conducting two family visits with the GES social worker. This will provide an opportunity for the teacher-participant to become familiar with the community in which their students live. During this time, teacher-participants and participant-researcher will also participate in a PLC in which the following book, *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms* (Gonzalez, 2005), will be the focus for discussion and reflective practices. This text will be paid for through GES professional development funds.

Phase II of the Action Plan

The participant-researcher and teacher-participants will focus on developing a deeper understanding of themselves as privileged educators beginning October 2017 and ending January 2018. Teacher-participants will participate in a poverty simulation

provided through United Way, which helps to sensitize and teach participants about the realities of individuals who live in poverty. This will be funding through the GES professional development fund. This experience will be the focus of PLC meetings, with the following text adding to the richness of the discussions, *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015).

Phase III of the Action Plan

January 2018 through May 2018 will focus on teacher-participants increasing their awareness around biases that exist within their classroom. The final phases of the action plan will focus on *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (Howard & Banks, 2007), while teacher-participants reflect on personal and student responses to the culturally responsive changes being made within the classroom. The administration will continue to be consulted throughout this process.

Facilitating Educational Change

The primary purpose of the present action research study was to implement a PLC design for novice teachers who worked at GES, a Title I, southern school. The secondary purpose of the study was to describe the effect of the PLC on novice teachers' feelings of self-efficacy and to give them voices in their professional development and practice. The tertiary purpose of the study was to develop an action plan with the teacher-participants, to improve the site approved teacher induction process.

The GES used the district approved mentoring model for teachers based on a South Carolina State Department model of teacher evaluation. The model used was Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teachers (ADEPT; "Teacher Evaluation," 2015). The ADEPT model offers differing levels of support and evaluation

based on the contract held by the teacher. Teachers considered induction (first year) and annual contract teachers (second year) are assigned a trained mentor within the same building to assist as needed. This mentor received training through the school district over the course of a 3-day summer workshop. Induction and annual contract teacher receive written feedback based on mentor observations and administrator observations within their classroom. A portfolio is also maintained that is submitted to the principal at the end of the school year as determined by the ADEPT program ("Teacher Evaluation," 2015).

Annual contract teachers are formally evaluated. They continue to receive the support of a trained mentor, but are observed by a three-person team that is made up of the building administrator, an ADEPT lead teacher, and a peer teacher from another school. The team then meets to arrive at a consensus about the teacher's performance and assign a score based on their performance. This process occurs in the fall with written feedback provided to the evaluated teacher midway through the year and at the end of the year.

The participant-researcher wondered if the ADEPT program affected novice teacher self-efficacy after data collection began. Action research methodology as outlined by Mertler (2014) was chosen for this study due to its association with knowledge being created from problem solving in the real world. Hine (2013) explained that action research has the ability to allow ordinary people in research to develop the powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision, and action on individual problems. Data were analyzed to implement an action-oriented plan working towards a specific solution. Nugent et al. (2012) explained that this level of research requires a systematic approach

to classroom level problems in which change must take place quickly in order to positively affect identified issues.

During the planning phase, which occurred over the summer of 2016, a PLC model was selected to provide novice teachers with the resources to define their professional practice. Based on research presented in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, the participant-researcher determined that this model would allow teacher-participants to establish a routine for constructive conversations, through a PLC model outlined by Meyer (2002). Through this model, the group would become the collective authority in which they directly had ownership of the professional conversation and the pace of the meetings. This specific model provided time for reporting personal and professional information to the group, followed by a formal and focused conversation on a classroom artifact.

However, this particular PLC format was only followed once. During the first PLC meeting on August 29th, Kayla presented grading concerns and asked the other teacher-participants about their personal organizational systems. The conversation immediately turned to the ADEPT portfolio expectations for showing student grades. PLC meetings that occurred after focused on the ADEPT process based on teacher-participant feedback. They felt it would be more beneficial to discuss the ADEPT process as it was a collective concern. Therefore, the PLC model used within this action research study began with professional issues and doubts being shared, followed by teacher-participants discussing their concerns specific to the ADEPT process. The ADEPT portfolio that each teacher-participant maintained served as the artifact the PLC meetings

focused on. The original PLC format outlined by Meyer (2002) was altered to better meet the needs of the teacher-participants.

Summary of Research Findings

The data indicated the PLC model had a positive effect on novice teacher self-efficacy. To determine the self-efficacy levels of participants prior to the study, the TSES survey was completed which measures self-efficacy using a scale from 1-9. Based upon the post-PLC results, participants rated themselves highest on average for efficacy in student engagement (7.0) and lowest on average on efficacy in instructional strategies (6.54). Data collected through interviews and PLC meeting observations allowed for a deeper insight into understanding the responses of the TSES survey. The outcomes of the interviews and PLC meetings supported the triangulation of data in response to the research question. As interview, along with PLC observation, data were collected and coded, information began to contradict the participant-researchers premature judgement, which assumed a lack of mentoring support affected novice teacher self-efficacy.

Four emergent themes affected teacher-participant self-efficacy: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness, which emerged through coding analysis. The six teacher-participants were not prepared to teach in a Title I school, and although Greenville County Schools along with GES claimed the ADEPT process would prepare these novice teachers, the data supported a differing reality. When these novice teachers arrived in their classrooms, they were left unprepared even with the institutionalized support systems in place. Instead of the ADEPT process leaving teachers feeling empowered through the system in place, teacher-participants self-efficacy was affected

by the model used, as illustrated by Kayla's statement, "I feel like the first year of teaching is the only year you can make a mistake as the second year is the formal observation process. I'm so afraid to make a mistake. I'm afraid to not have a job" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). Caroline echoed Kayla's statement by stating, "I'm so glad I'm not the only one" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016).

The ADEPT model failed to meet the needs of the teacher-participants within the action research study. Bandura and Adams (1997) explain stress and fear can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to the feared task. Emotional arousal affects self-efficacy, which affects the decisions a person makes. If the stress is reduced, self-efficacy can be expected to change. Somatic and emotional states describe the physical and emotional states that occur when someone begins to consider doing something which give clues to the likelihood of success and failure. For example, Kayla explained, "I'm so afraid to make a mistake. I'm afraid to not have a job" (PLC #2, personal communication, September 19, 2016). When discussing the ADEPT process, she explained how she felt being unprepared would result in severe consequences.

Data collected underlined Bandura's (1997) theory. Physiological factors such as being excessively stressed in a demanding situation may have detrimental effects on self-efficacy and emotional reactions associated with the experience. These feelings have negative consequences for individuals with low-self efficacy, as they are more likely to give up easily in challenging situations. "It is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted" (Bandura, 1997, p.108). Specifically, the level of self-efficacy the participants had is an

important factor in determining how to overcome demanding situations. Participants with a low-self efficacy are more likely to give up as they view this process as an obstacle. "Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of self efficacy is firmly established" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80).

Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of this study are addressed as recommendations for future research. These are based upon the findings and conclusions.

1. Within the present action research study, four of the teacher-participants completed their student teaching at GES. These novice teachers had experience within the research site. For example, Kayla did not complete her student teaching at GES or have prior Title I experience. Kayla's Efficacy in Student Engagement decreased over the course of the study (7.625 to 7.5), Instructional Strategies remained the same (6.0), and Management increased (6.0 to 6.125). This is in contrast to Ella who completed her student teaching at GES and whose efficacy scores increased, showing an increase in Efficacy in Student Engagement (6.5 to 7.5), Instructional Strategies (6.375 to 7.75,) and Management (8.5 to 8.625). Further research into the efficacy of teachers without prior Title I experience would provide insight into these findings.
2. Additionally, another extension of the present action research study would be to measure the efficacy levels of future novice teachers mentored by current teacher-participants. The plan for this program is outlined within the action plan.
3. An attempt to follow Hoy's (2002) PLC model was made at the first PLC meeting, but was not followed through with based on teacher-participants'

requests. A second year study would be beneficial as the ADEPT process would be complete and teacher-participants would be better able to focus on their problem of practice.

4. Given that this action research study focused on teachers, further research to determine the role that school leadership plays into teacher-efficacy levels would add another layer to the data collected. This extension is based on teacher-participants reporting their fear of formal evaluations. Kayla explained a formal observation of her first year of teaching in which she was unprepared due to the failure of technology. This experience left her fearful of the ADEPT process as she recognized being unprepared could happen again and felt the consequences would be more severe.

Conclusion

The purpose of the action research study was to determine the relationship between professional learning communities and novice teachers' self-efficacy at a Title I elementary school. The Title I elementary school as the research site is located in the southwest area of South Carolina. The specific aims of this study were to (a) collect efficacy data using The Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) and (b) document PLC meetings and semistructured interviews for the purpose of explaining the TSES findings. This action research study was initiated after the researcher wondered if the district-approved ADEPT program affected novice teacher's self-efficacy. A PLC was then created, aimed at increasing the feelings of self-efficacy amongst novice teachers.

The analysis of quantitative data were conducted throughout the action research study, and qualitative data from semistructured and informal interviews, as well as

observations, at the PLC revealed four emergent themes: (a) formal evaluation anxiety; (b) need for a better support system; (c) novice teacher confidence in teaching; and (d) feelings of unpreparedness. An action plan was designed by the teacher-participants and participant-researcher based on these findings. The first action plan step is to make changes to the institutionalized mentoring program by having teacher-participants become mentors to the novice teachers who will follow behind them. The second action plan step is to address the gap that exists between the privileged, teacher-participants and the Title I students living in poverty in which they teach.

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Appendix A:

Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

Teacher Beliefs - TSES

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create challenges for teachers. Your answers are confidential.

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the questions below by marking any one of the nine responses in the columns on the right side, ranging from (1) "None at all" to (9) "A Great Deal" as each represents a degree on the continuum.

Please respond to each of the questions by considering the combination of your current ability, resources, and opportunity to do each of the following in your present position.

	None at all		Very Little		Some Degree		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
19. How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨

Appendix B:

Scoring Guide

Directions for Scoring the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale[1]

Developers: Megan Tschannen-Moran, College of William and Mary
Anita Woolfolk Hoy, the Ohio State University.

Construct Validity

For information the construct validity of the Teachers' Sense of Teacher efficacy Scale, see:

> Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17,* 783-805.

Factor Analysis

As we have used factor analysis to test this instrument, we have consistently found three moderately correlated factors: *Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management*. At times, however, the make up of the scales may vary slightly. With preservice teachers we recommend that the full scale (either 24-item or 12-item short form) be used, because the factor structure often is less distinct for these respondents.

Subscale Scores

To determine the *Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Practices*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management* subscale scores, we compute unweighted means of the items that load on each factor. Generally these groupings are:

Short Form

Efficacy in Student Engagement:	Items 2, 4, 7, 11
Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:	Items 5, 9, 10, 12
Efficacy in Classroom Management:	Items 1, 3, 6, 8

Long Form

Efficacy in Student Engagement:	Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 22
Efficacy in Instructional Strategies:	Items 7, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24
Efficacy in Classroom Management:	Items 3, 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21

Appendix C:

Open-Ended Response Interview Questions

First Interview

1. Tell me about your first two or three weeks as a "teacher." How were you feeling?
2. What types of thing in your classroom do you feel confident doing? Tell me more about that.
3. Tell me about a memorable time when you prepared (or felt unprepared) for class or a lesson. What changed after that?
4. Tell me about a teacher or two whom you admire. Tell me more about them.

Second Interview

1. In your opinion, what does the school do for teachers to enable them to be effective in the classroom? Tell me more about that.
2. Have you ever heard the term self-efficacy? What do you think it means?
3. Does feeling effective enable you enjoy your chosen profession more? Tell me about.
4. In what ways does your own confidence in your teaching impact your students?
5. Do you feel for example that your self-efficacy in teaching impacts your students' achievement on tests? or projects? or motivation? etc. Tell me more about that
6. Tell me about your personality. Do you tend to have positive or negative self-efficacy in other areas of your professional life?

7. What factors do you identify as influencing your professional self-efficacy? (outside circumstances, number of students, religion, pre-service teaching experiences, etc.)

Third Interview

1. If you had a mentor teacher your first year of teaching tell me about that experience.
2. Tell me how you feel when you see students' grades go up (or down)
3. Tell me about a time when a student came back to see you?
4. What are important personality traits in your opinion that teachers should possess? Tell me more about that.
5. Do you think that you will remain in the teaching profession? Why or why not? Tell me more about that if you don't mind.
6. When did you know that you were impacting students' lives as a teacher? Tell me more about that.
7. Tell me about how a Title I teacher prepares (or should prepare) for her or his lesson.

Appendix D:

Consent Form

August 9, 2016

My name is Marie Havran. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying participation in PLC's and novice teacher's feelings of self-efficacy at a Tile I Elementary School. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete two surveys about teachers' sense of self-efficacy, meet with me for three interviews about your classroom practices, and participate in a PLC. In particular, we will discuss collaborating with others affect your ability to work within your PLC group. The interview will be audio *recorded* so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team who will transcribe and analyze them. They will then be destroyed.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Others in the PLC will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but we will ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 864.355.5906, and mhavran@email.sc.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Susan Shramm-Pate at 803.777.3087, and sschramm@mailbox.sc.edu if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

Marie Havran

Appendix E:

IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

This is to certify that the research proposal: **Pro00052322**

Entitled: *Correlation between Participation in PLC's and the Novice Teacher's Feelings of Self-Efficacy at a Title I Elementary School: A Mixed Methods Action Research Study*

Submitted by:

Principal Investigator:	Marie Havran
College/Department:	Education
	Instruction & Teacher Education/Curriculum & Instruction
	Wardlaw
	Columba, SC 29208

was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(**2**), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **2/3/2016**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Arlene McWhorter at arlenem@sc.edu or (803) 777-7095.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Johnson
IRB Manager